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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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20 February 1995

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 27 APRIL 1992]

FORTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 255**

SIXTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1994–95

House of Commons

Monday 20 February 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

DEATH OF A MEMBER

Madam Speaker: I regret to have to report to the House the death of Sir Nicholas Hardwick Fairbairn, QC, Member for Perth and Kinross. I am sure that hon. Members in all parts of the House will join me in mourning the loss of a colleague and in extending our sympathy to the hon. and learned Member's family and friends.

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Payments

1. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he will take to ensure regular weekly giro payments of benefits during the winter in Yorkshire.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Roger Evans): The Benefits Agency aims to ensure that all customers receive their benefit entitlement on time. If, for whatever reasons, delays are experienced, procedures are in place to ensure that claimants receive their benefit entitlement.

Mr. MacShane: I tabled the question on behalf of my constituent, Philip John Place of Rotherham, an energetic, out-of-work young man who is taking part in a jobseeker's club—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but it is much better to deal with constituency matters in written representations to the relevant Minister. If the hon. Gentleman has a question, perhaps he will ask it immediately so that the Minister may answer.

Mr. MacShane: Will the Minister give my constituents an assurance that when there is bad weather giro payments will be made on the day, and that if there is a delay for any reason a crisis loan will be available at once to save claimants trouble, fear and anxiety? There is such a thing as cold weather in the north of England.

Mr. Evans: I cannot comment on Mr. Place, about whom I have no details, but I am aware that there was exceptionally bad weather in the hon. Gentleman's constituency on 27 January. I am advised that, as a result, the Royal Mail had difficulty making deliveries, which is a matter for regret and we apologise. The limited information available to me is that Rotherham office may have made one crisis loan on 27 January. Perhaps that emphasises more than anything the need for the proposals of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to introduce modern benefit payment methods.

Pensions

2. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to increase choice in pensions.

10. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is planning to increase choice in pensions.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. William Hague): Government policies aim to provide a range of pensions provision from which

individuals can choose with confidence. We propose to strengthen occupational pensions law, introduce age-related rebates for contracted-out personal and occupational money purchase schemes and give personal pension holders more flexibility in the use of their savings on retirement.

Mr. Whittingdale: Does my hon. Friend agree that public confidence in choosing an occupational pension will be considerably increased by the news that the Maxwell scheme trustees have accepted a settlement in principle? Does he agree that much of the credit for that lies with Sir John Cuckney, and will he convey to Sir John the congratulations of the House?

Mr. Hague: Yes, my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the good news of the agreement in principle for Maxwell pensioners, which is welcome. Details remain to be finalised, but Sir John and others involved have done a tremendous job. I hope that they will now be able to bring their work to a successful conclusion.

Mr. David Evans: What plans does my hon. Friend have for pensioners and people on fixed incomes if the lot opposite ever come to power? Is he aware that under the last Labour Government, pensioners and people on fixed incomes had their incomes savaged by 27 per cent. inflation, and that the lot opposite did not even pay a Christmas bonus two years out of the last four when they were in power?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Pensioners on fixed incomes suffered greatly under the previous Labour Government when electricity prices rose by 2 per cent. every six weeks. Under this Government, the proportion of pensioners in the lower income groups of the population has fallen dramatically and that is testimony to the success of our policies.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister confirm that when the previous Labour Government left office, the state pension was about 24 per cent. of average earnings? What is it now? Will he tell us by how much each year he is subsidising the national insurance fund to promote private personal pension schemes at the expense of the state earnings-related pension scheme?

Mr. Hague: That is the sort of hostility to the private provision of pensions that could be deeply damaging to the future of this country. People who have taken out personal pensions are paying, from their own incomes, more than £2.5 billion a year. They are putting that money aside for pension provision in the future under the arrangements that the hon. Gentleman spends his time attacking. It is vital that there is additional provision on top of entitlement to the state pension, with the state pension being indexed in line with prices.

Mr. Enright: Does the Minister agree that many miners who, legally but criminally, were persuaded to change their pensions from the miners' pension scheme to private pension schemes have been done out of huge sums, which they cannot now get back under any of the new mechanisms put in place by the Government? Is not it about time that the Government did something urgently about this because it is at least as scandalous as the Maxwell case?

Mr. Hague: Where there has been mis-selling of personal pensions, the Government are anxious to see that there is a remedy. The Government very much welcome the action that the Securities and Investments Board has now set in train to provide a remedy in precisely the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman describes.

Fraud Prevention

3. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the latest figures for social security fraud prevention.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): In 1993-94, a record £654 million of social security fraud was stopped by the Benefits Agency. In November, I announced an investment of £300 million over the next three years in measures designed to shift dramatically the emphasis of fraud work from detection and investigation towards prevention and deterrence. These measures will include more home visiting, improved information technology and automated payment of benefits at post offices. They are expected to save an additional £2.5 billion over the same period.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Can he confirm that fraud prevention has increased by 17 per cent. this year? Can he give the House an assurance that officers in the Department of Social Security will make a special effort to check on people who have fraudulently claimed that they are asylum seekers and who have claimed many times? Clearly, although people in this country are only too happy to help genuine asylum seekers and their own citizens who have fallen on hard times, they will not stand for people flooding in to defraud our system.

Mr. Lilley: I can confirm, as my hon. Friend asks, the substantial rise in success in stopping fraud and thereby saving money for the taxpayer. We have made abuse of asylum applications much more difficult by introducing arrangements with the Home Office and by ensuring that the benefit is obtainable only from a single post office. Those measures have sharply reduced multiple applications and fraudulent abuse.

Mr. Frank Field: How do the Government answer the charge that they are soft on fraud and soft on causes? Is the Secretary of State aware that it is not just a matter of claimant fraud, with which all of us disagree, but a matter of the Department being open to fraud from gang warfare? Is he aware that there is massive landlord fraud in housing benefit and that the Department is now under attack from some of its own officers who open up bogus claims? Once a claim is opened up in the Department, how often is it audited?

Mr. Lilley: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are not soft on fraud. I welcome the consistent support that he has given us on measures to crack down on fraud. Housing benefit is, of course, handled on behalf of the Government by local authorities. We have given them an increased incentive, both carrot and stick, to ensure that they eliminate wherever possible abuse of the housing benefit bill by landlords and tenants. It is absolutely right that they should do so and I urge every local authority to respond positively to the incentives that we have put in place.

Mr. Butcher: Will my right hon. Friend persist in the examination of housing benefit fraud? He will know that

some time ago I advised his Department of strong evidence showing that housing benefit was being claimed from more than 6,000 empty properties in Birmingham—the so-called giro drop scandal. My fear is that his officials may see the fraud as an affront to their professional competence rather than as something to be vigorously pursued. May I urge him to redouble his efforts with local authorities to investigate that matter?

Mr. Lilley: I will again follow up my hon. Friend's point. I assure him that there is no question of officials taking such fraud as an affront to their personal efficacy, since they are not, as I explained to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), directly responsible for it. They have ensured that incentives are given to local authorities to pursue housing benefit fraud. It is a scandal when local authorities do not pursue it, because they are letting down the taxpayer and the council tax payer.

Child Support Agency

4. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost to the Child Support Agency of implementing an income disregard for parents with care to the value of (a) £5, (b) £8 and (c) £10.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Burt): The estimated long-run costs of a £5, £8 or £10 maintenance disregard for parents with care in receipt of income support are approximately £110 million, £165 million and £205 million.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: I agree with the Minister that, obviously, parents without care should pay for their children, but one of the problems that has arisen in the past year or so is that parents who remarry and have another family are penalised. The father is penalised in the sense that he has to pay for the children from his first family and his second family. [HON. MEMBERS: "Quite right."] No, Conservative Members are wrong. I repeat that the father is being penalised twice. He is being penalised for the children from his first marriage and again for children from his second family, if he has a second family.

Mr. Burt: I am not quite sure how the disregard may affect that situation. Among Conservative Members and, by general agreement, around the country, the idea that a man should remain responsible for his first family, no matter what his subsequent circumstances are, is very important. The point of the disregard is to give some recognition to the parent with care in the maintenance being received. We believe that that point is much better dealt with by the Government's proposed maintenance credit, which will give an incentive to return to work and will certainly ensure that a father in those circumstances fully realises the impact of the money that he is paying in maintenance.

Mrs. Roe: Does my hon. Friend agree that the maintenance disregard proposed by the Labour party would create unfairness and make it less worth while for the lone mother to return to work? Does he also agree that if the Labour party supports a disregard, it should say how it would pay for it?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend is quite right. The figures that I gave showed just how expensive a maintenance disregard would be. We do not believe that it would achieve the object wished for by the Opposition. It would certainly create a higher barrier for those parents with care who wanted to return to work. As we know from all our surveys that most lone parents want to go back to work, we believe that a maintenance disregard with an incentive to return to work would be rather better than providing an incentive for not returning to work at all.

Mr. Dewar: On the costs of disregard, the Minister will remember that, throughout 1994, I was abused by him and the Secretary of State for profligacy on the ground that a £10 disregard would cost £340 million. Does he remember the way in which that figure dropped by May 1994 to £290 million? It is now £205 million. Will he please explain those discrepancies and apologise for some of the abuse that I received?

Mr. Burt: I cannot imagine either myself or my right hon. Friend abusing the hon. Gentleman on that point; it is not in our nature to do so. The changes in costs result from two matters in particular: first, we have been able to conduct greater sampling and, secondly, I am pleased to report that fewer lone parents are claiming income support, which most hon. Members should find quite encouraging.

Disabled People

5. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to reduce discrimination against disabled people.

11. **Mr. Congdon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received on the measures the Government are taking to help disabled people.

Mr. Hague: The Government's plans for ending discrimination against disabled people were set out in the White Paper on 12 January. They involve new initiatives in education and transport, in addition to the proposals in the Disability Discrimination Bill for new rights in employment and access to goods and services. These plans have been widely welcomed.

Mr. Spring: Does my hon. Friend agree that, apart from moral considerations, there are powerful commercial reasons to encourage businesses to provide access for disabled people? Does my hon. Friend agree that legislative proposals for businesses should be sensible and well judged and not based on wishful and woolly thinking?

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Proposals must be clear, flexible and fair—as they are in the Government's Disability Discrimination Bill—and they must lead to genuine practical improvements, such as the recently agreed improvements to access at Bury St. Edmunds post office in my hon. Friend's constituency, in which he and many other people were involved and scored quite a success.

Mr. Congdon: I congratulate my hon. Friend on having the determination to get a Bill to eliminate discrimination on to the statute book. In proceeding with that Bill, will he give serious consideration to whether it might need strengthening to ensure that health and safety

considerations do not cut across the legitimate aim of ensuring that disabled people have access to, for example, places of entertainment such as cinemas?

Mr. Hague: I thank my hon. Friend for his support. He was right to draw attention to that issue. We are determined to ensure that the requirements to provide physical and other forms of access actually mean something and work in practice. As the Bill progresses through the House and the other place, those matters will have to be discussed.

Mr. Barnes: Two Bills are before the House on discrimination against disabled people—the Government Bill, which was supported by 27 votes on a three-line Whip, and my private Member's Bill, which, on a free vote, was carried by 175 votes. My Bill has the support of hon. Members from 10 political parties in the House, including the two Conservative parties, unlike the Government's Bill, which is supported mainly on a three-line Whip by Conservatives. In those circumstances, should not the House have an opportunity to determine between the two Bills or to discover whether there is, alternatively, a move towards the principles contained in the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill?

Mr. Hague: Let us put the hon. Gentleman right. His Bill was supported in the House by 175 hon. Members, the Government's Bill was supported by 307 hon. Members. If it comes to a choice between them, I do not fancy his chances much. The Government's Bill is clear, flexible, fair and in the interests of disabled people. The hon. Gentleman's Bill is confusing, unfair, inflexible and not in the interests of disabled people.

Mr. Corbett: Does not every single organisation of and for disabled people much prefer the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) to the Government's puny measure? Will the Minister therefore accept the need for a disability rights commission to ensure that people with disabilities enjoy the same rights as the rest of us?

Mr. Hague: Disabled people throughout the country want workable legislation that brings about a change in the law and, at the same time, a change in attitudes. That is what the Government's Bill will achieve and that is one reason why we wish to tackle the issue of enforcement by having not a commission but a locally available advice and support network to which disabled people can turn. That will be the sound, practical way to deal with those problems.

Social Security Reforms

7. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what savings will result from the social security reforms announced so far.

Mr. Lilley: Our reforms will reduce projected expenditure by £4 billion a year, in today's prices, by the end of the century. Once the pensions reforms have worked through, in the next century, the total savings will be £14 billion a year as a result of the changes that we have made.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Will he confirm that, with the reduction of unemployment and with the attack on waste and fraud, by the turn of the century the burden on the taxpayer will be down by £8 billion or 3p in the pound on the basic rate of income tax?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The forecasts of social security spending by the end of the century are now £8 billion less than when we first made them in response to the Social Security Select Committee and before the long-term review of social security spending began. Four billion pounds is due to the direct savings of the changes in the structure of the social security system, which we have announced, and the other £4 billion is due to the improved economic and social outlook in this country as a result of the Government's policies.

Ms Lynne: Does the Secretary of State agree that savings to the Government mean cuts in benefit to the most disadvantaged? Does he accept that Government policies such as the jobseeker's allowance will do more to allow tax cuts before the next election, rather than do anything to get the unemployed back into work?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Lady, as is typical of her party and indeed of all Opposition parties, thinks that money comes from the Government. It comes from taxpayers. At present, it costs every working person, on average, £15 every working day to finance the social security system in this country. The Liberal Democrats' aim is to increase that amount; ours is to prevent it from increasing.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I welcome among my right hon. Friend's objectives his desire to eliminate fraud, but will he confirm that the Benefits Agency has found that only 5 per cent. of benefit fraud involves deception about identity? Will he at all times be vigilant to safeguard civil liberties in the development and application of smartcard technology, under the auspices of his Department? Will he set his face absolutely against the introduction of a national identity card scheme, whether voluntary or compulsory?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is quite correct. Of the identified frauds and abuse in my Department only 5 per cent. involve abuse through misrepresentation of identity. The bulk of fraud and abuse is the misrepresentation of circumstances of people whose identity is not in doubt. We believe that we can reduce that incidence of fraud and abuse very substantially by the introduction of a payments card, which I agree with my hon. Friend is a very different kettle of fish from an identity card. People who wish to receive benefit through the post office will need such a card. People who choose to receive benefit through banks will have whatever form of identification the banks require. We are also introducing other measures that will substantially reduce misrepresentation of identity fraud, so the extra gains which might come from a compulsory identity card would probably be very small.

Mr. Bradley: Does the Secretary of State accept that savings should not in any way undermine public confidence and trust in the social security system? Will he therefore investigate claims made on BBC South-West that the Benefits Agency in Bristol has contracted out the opening of mail to a private firm? Such mail might include sensitive and confidential information on benefit claims, and staff might not be accountable to the Benefits Agency or, more important, to Parliament.

Mr. Lilley: I assure the hon. Gentleman that anybody who has any involvement with facts and information

about claimants will be bound by a duty of confidentiality, whether they are employed by the civil service or by a contractor for the civil service. Sub-post offices, all of which involve private entrepreneurs and not employees of the state, have an obligation to claimants equal to that of any civil servant.

Personal Pensions

8. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is taking to make personal pensions more attractive to older people.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. James Arbuthnot): In the Pensions Bill, we are introducing age-related rebates for personal pensions to ensure that appropriate personal pensions are attractive over a broader age range.

Mr. Coombs: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Pensions Bill, which is now in another place, is firmly on course to enact the manifesto commitment of the Conservative party to make personal pensions more attractive across the full range of ages? Does he agree that, with the proposal in law, personal pensions will be attractive to people of all ages and that it will be in their interests to sustain their pensions throughout their lives?

Mr. Arbuthnot: The age-related rebates which we are phasing in will mean that most people will be attracted to maintaining their personal pensions throughout their working lives. They will also be able to choose when to buy an annuity up to the age of 75.

Mr. Chisholm: Does the Minister accept that one of the most unattractive features of pensions for many older women is the diminution of their pension rights following divorce? Given that seven studies have been conducted into the matter already, why are the Government insisting on a further study? Why will they not accept the amendment that has been tabled in another place to ensure the equal division of pension rights following divorce?

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Pensions Law Review Committee said that this was an exceptionally complicated matter. The Government recognise that and, as a result, we have accepted the recommendation of the committee that further work should be done. The research will be available towards the end of the year. A debate is taking place in another place this afternoon on the matter, and no doubt the hon. Gentleman will go along to listen to it.

Dr. Spink: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the average total net income of pensioners grew by 50 per cent. between 1979 and 1992? Does that not show how much the Government care for pensioners? What targets does my hon. Friend have for that figure in the coming years?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is right, but I do not have a limit on targets. Pensioners will do very much better in the next few decades. We have more funded pension provision than any other country in the European Union. The proposals of the Opposition would threaten that very good position.

Poverty

9. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to conduct a major survey of the incidence and extent of poverty currently prevailing in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Information on the patterns of household disposable income are already provided in the "Households Below Average Income" publication of the Government Statistical Service, and more will be available from the first full year of the family resource survey. It is expected to be of considerable benefit to the Department in aiding the formulation and evaluation of social security policy.

Mr. Mackinlay: What is the Government's definitive response to the findings of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Panorama programme "Dead Poor", which showed that the gap between those with health and wealth and those experiencing poverty is getting wider? Do the Government accept those findings? If not, why does the Minister think that they are flawed? If the Government do not accept the findings, will the Minister set up an inquiry using further survey methods to ascertain the full extent of poverty?

Mr. Burt: The hon. Gentleman knows well that poverty statistics are notoriously difficult to analyse. He will also know that whatever statistics he cares to choose will show that the access of the lowest 10 per cent., as regards income, to what used to be called luxury goods—cars, telephones, videos and so on—has risen inexorably over time.

Widening income inequality has tended to come from changes in the labour market, particularly the increase in two-earner couples, and changes in the rates given for different occupations over a period. The solution to the one is physically to restrain two-earner couples—I suspect that that is not the intent of the hon. Gentleman, nor of his party—and to the other is to deal with different wages by a prices and incomes policy. If that is the policy of the hon. Gentleman, he should tell people.

Mr. Jenkin: Does my hon. Friend agree that other measures of standards of living show that the poorest 10 per cent. have vastly improved access to things which improve the quality of their lives, such as telephones, freezers and washing machines? Does he also agree that a party which advocates a national minimum wage cannot be serious about reducing poverty, because a national minimum wage would enormously increase unemployment and poverty?

Mr. Burt: My hon. Friend makes a point about the minimum wage that was made by the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) before the last general election. It had its impact on jobs. My hon. Friend also points out that this is a genuinely complex matter. The best way in which poverty can be attacked is by bringing about improvements through creating jobs. That is why the Conservative Government have introduced policies that have helped unemployment to fall by some 500,000 in the past two years. If those policies were followed by some socialist economies on the continent, those economies might prove a little more successful than they currently are.

Pension Entitlement (Divorcees)

12. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has for allowing divorcees who paid the reduced rate of contribution to share their husband's pension entitlement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Provision already exists which allows a divorced woman who does not remarry before pension age to obtain a pension based on her former husband's national insurance contribution record instead of her own in respect of the period up to their divorce.

Mr. Mitchell: Is not that provision inadequate, given that the pension entitlement is one of the biggest assets that married couples have? Should we not have a simple rule that the entitlement from all pensions up to the date of divorce is divided between the couple? Why do we need the inquiry that the Minister mentioned earlier when the principle is clear and we are the only country in the European Union that does not give the wife some entitlement to her pension? Would there not be a considerable saving in benefit if that were done?

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Gentleman is, I think, confusing the state retirement pension with rights to occupational or personal pensions, so I shall simply rely on what I have already said, which is that a great deal of further work is needed, as the Pensions Law Review Committee has said. We are doing that work.

Benefits

13. **Mr. Sims:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if benefits will continue to be delivered through post offices.

Mr. Lilley: We are committed to continuing to give pensioners and others the right to receive their benefits at the post office. We are moving speedily to an automated system for paying benefit at post offices, including the introduction of benefit payment cards to replace order books and girocheques.

Mr. Sims: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, while there are obvious advantages in making payments through banks and building societies, some people—particularly the elderly—prefer to go to post offices to collect their pensions? Will he confirm that the automated system to which he referred has been welcomed by sub-postmasters and will bring them additional business?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right. Many pensioners and others prefer to receive their benefits at post offices. Many do not have bank accounts so they could not easily have their benefits paid elsewhere. My hon. Friend is also right that the measures that we have proposed have been warmly welcomed by the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters. By eliminating fraud, our proposals will be good for the taxpayer. By making payments more convenient, they will be good for the pensioners. By increasing the range of facilities of sub-post offices, they will strengthen the national network of sub-post offices.

Fraud

14. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how he is planning to reduce fraud involving order books and giros.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced his intention to replace order books and girocheques with a more secure system based on benefit payment cards. This should eliminate fraud related to payments, and will also provide substantial administrative savings.

Dr. Twinn: Does my hon. Friend agree that fraud is widely resented by the vast majority of benefit recipients and by taxpayers? Does he welcome the £100 million of savings that were made in the last financial year in giro and order book frauds? Does he agree that his proposals will be welcomed in the fight against fraud in the future?

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is right. There has also been a consistent increase in the overall savings from fraud that the Department has made. Last year, the savings were £654 million, which was an increase of 17 per cent. on the year before. That is good news for everyone.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that one of the biggest frauds in social security is the fact that about £500 million a year is lost by employers who take their national insurance and tax from employees and do not hand it over to the responsible authorities? Hardly any action is taken against those employers. Why do not the Government do something about it? The Secretary of State can keep his trap shut.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Gentleman has raised that matter before. He was wrong then and he is wrong now.

Habitual Residence Test

16. **Ms Church:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the Income Related Benefit Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 3) Regulations 1994 (No. 1807) on the habitual residence test to come into force.

Mr. Roger Evans: The regulations came into force on 1 August 1994.

Ms Church: How can the Minister defend a system that means that thousands of British nationals find, on their return to this country, that they do not have rights to the benefits that they expected? They are people who cannot be described as crooks, drug addicts or undesirables.

Mr. Evans: I am a little puzzled by the supplementary question because the hon. Lady's main question asked when the regulations would come into force. As I pointed out, they came into force on 1 August 1994; 14,789 British citizens have passed the test and 2,086 have failed. The Government take the view that benefit tourism is strongly resented by the British taxpayer and that those who have not paid taxes in this country recently must expect to wait a while.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Accountants (National Audit Office)

31. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission what is the number of accountants employed by the National Audit Office.

Sir Peter Hordern (representing the Public Account Commission): I understand that the National Audit Office employs about 370 qualified accountants and 62 qualified accounting technicians. One hundred and twenty-three staff are training for those qualifications. In addition, the National Audit Office contracts out about 10 per cent. of accounts audit work to the private sector. As a result, all accounts are audited by trained staff. The NAO also employs a wide range of professional staff in other disciplines, both to undertake value-for-money work and in administration.

Mr. Marshall: I am sure that my right hon. Friend would agree that the level of fraud within the European Union is one of the biggest scandals in public expenditure. Has the Comptroller and Auditor General had any discussions with the European Court of Auditors with a view to dealing with that scandal?

Sir Peter Hordern: The Comptroller and Auditor General is deeply interested in that matter. I can confirm that he has had discussions with members of the European Court of Auditors with a view to finding out what proposals might be put forward to remedy some of the frauds that have taken place and to present those proposals at the next intergovernmental conference. However, the difficulty remains and it is not so much the establishment of that form of corruption, but the lack of will on the part of member countries to deal with it.

Mr. Flynn: Would it not be a good idea to get the accountants and auditors to look at frivolous candidates in elections so that candidates who do not have a hope of proper victory do not get involved in the election process? Will the right hon. Gentleman note that the Conservatives are to be congratulated on getting more votes in Islwyn last week than the Yogic Flyers and the official raving loony party, and are now the official loony party? Can he reply?

Sir Peter Hordern *rose—*

Madam Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman seems anxious to respond. Is that right?

Sir Peter Hordern: I was only going to say that if the Comptroller and Auditor General had to deal with that matter he might equally be asked to investigate what happened in the rugby match between England and Wales.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Maxwell Pensioners

17. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest position concerning the payment of pensions to members of the various Maxwell pension schemes; and what are the prospects for further recoveries.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I warmly welcome the Maxwell scheme trustees' acceptance in principle of settlement offers in respect of various claims. I understand that the Maxwell Pensioners Trust has sufficient funds to continue to support pension payments while discussion of terms and conditions takes place. If a final settlement is agreed, the Maxwell pensioners should enjoy a secure future.

Mr. Mudie: The Minister is aware that even the sum agreed is many millions short of what went missing. Will he reassure the House that efforts to get the remaining money will continue? Does he share my concern about the millions of pounds that should be going to the Maxwell pensioners' fund which are being spent on legal fees, and will he do anything about it?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not take the opportunity to welcome what is very good news for Maxwell pensioners. If the settlement takes place, as we very much hope, it will save large amounts of legal fees because it will avoid the need for litigation.

Sir David Madel: Is my hon. Friend aware that Maxwell pensioners with deferred pensions will welcome that settlement? Will he assure me that the Government will continue to monitor the position closely until a final and happy solution to the dreadful problem is reached and all Maxwell pensioners can breathe freely in the knowledge that all is well?

Mr. Arbuthnot: Yes; and I take this opportunity to congratulate and thank my hon. Friend for the considerable work that he has done on behalf of his constituents, many of whom are Maxwell pensioners. He has approached me on several occasions to make precisely those points.

Retirement

20. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he will take to give people more choice in how to plan for their retirement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer to the answer given earlier today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Social Security and Disabled People to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, South and Maldon (Mr. Whittingdale).

Mr. Waterson: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Can he confirm that some 65 per cent. of recently retired pensioners also have occupational pensions? Does that not underline the great success of this country compared with practically all our European partners in developing a successful and deep-seated private pension industry, which will be further strengthened by my hon. Friend's Pensions Bill?

Mr. Arbuthnot: I can. Not only do an increasing number of people retiring now have occupational pensions, but they have them in increasing amounts. Our pensioners can look forward to a good future.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Day Nursery Facilities

32. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of

Commons Commission, what is the latest position concerning the setting up of day nursery facilities in the Palace of Westminster.

36. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what further progress has been made towards the establishment of a day nursery in the House.

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the House of Commons Commission): The Commission will consider its policy on child care facilities at its next meeting and will take into account the views expressed in the debate in the House on 12 January.

Mr. Barnes: Of all organisations, should not the House of Commons be a top employer in terms of that and many other matters? So that it can recruit and retain experienced staff, is it not important to have creche facilities or, alternatively, child care allowances, for which the unions in this place are pushing strongly? If those are seen as a subsidy, is it not a much more justified subsidy than those which hon. Members receive for car parking facilities, booze and refreshments?

Mr. Beith: The Commission recognises the force of the argument that, as a good employer, it is in the House's interest to ensure that such facilities are made available to staff. The debate was one way in which the Commission sought to bring the matter before hon. Members and to establish whether a creche or voucher scheme, or a combination of the two, was preferred. We shall consider the House's reactions to that at our next meeting.

Mr. Janner: Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise that, in far too many ways, we are not good employers? Hon. Members on both sides of the House are scandalised at how we treat our staff, not least because 4,000 people are employed in the Palace of Westminster with no creche, day nursery, vouchers or special facilities. When the Commission meets next week, will the right hon. Gentleman tell it that an uprising will take place on both sides of the House if it does not move?

Mr. Beith: I would not have described the debate that took place as an uprising, although it was informative. I remind the hon. and learned Gentleman that the Commission, which has not been slow to press this matter on the House, is responsible for the employment of the staff of the House, and not of hon. Members' staff. We are anxious to ensure that any progress made will also benefit hon. Members' staff, but the hon. Gentleman must direct his fire at the appropriate place.

Mr. Jenkin: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it will sit ill upon us if we spend taxpayers' money wantonly on improving conditions for our staff when we do not think that those conditions are appropriate for people employed in other walks of life?

Mr. Beith: I understand that the Government think it appropriate that, in some situations, work place nurseries should be provided and they allow tax relief for that purpose. In many parts of the public service, voucher schemes have been established for child care. The Commission seeks to ensure that its employment policies are in line with the best practice in the public service.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, in the House of Lords, women employees have an allowance for creche or child minding facilities outside the House, but that is not the case for House of Commons staff? If so, why?

Mr. Beith: Yes, although I should explain that the allowance is not limited to female members of the staff of the House of Lords, but to those who exercise parental responsibilities, whether female or male. The debates in January explored how that had developed, and one of the issues that we considered was whether it would be appropriate to do it in the House of Commons. The Commission will be considering precisely that.

Disabled People (Access)

33. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, when the Commission will authorise expenditure to make the Grand Committee Room fully and independently accessible by disabled people; and when the work will be carried out.

35. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what further plans there are to improve facilities for disabled people visiting the House.

Mr. Beith: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), on 8 February, *Official Report*, columns *343-46*, which describes in detail the conclusions of the review by the Accommodation and Works Committee into access for disabled people. The Committee's recommendation for access to the Grand Committee Room is the replacement of the chairlift with a platform lift, which would allow disabled people to remain in their wheelchairs. In addition, it is proposed that the design work for the conversion of the Westminster Hall cafeteria into a visitors' centre should consider how a lift can be incorporated into that area.

Ms Lynne: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Can he tell me what time scale we are talking about, because, as he is no doubt aware, two weeks ago, disabled people lobbied Parliament and were discriminated against yet again in this House? They could not even hear their Members of Parliament speaking, because of a ban on microphones being used in Westminster Hall. In the meantime, before the Grand Committee Room gets a lift, would it be possible for Members of Parliament to be able to use microphones in Westminster Hall when there is a disabled people's lobby of Parliament?

Mr. Beith: Subject to the feasibility study, which is already in progress, it is hoped that work to convert the lift into a platform lift will be carried out this year. I do not anticipate that finance will be an obstacle to that.

The use of microphones in Westminster Hall is not a matter for the Commission, and Madam Speaker explained to the House on 9 February the reasons why the use of the microphones is restricted to the staff in the Department of the Serjeant at Arms. As I understand it, the Hall was fulfilling the function of the Central Lobby

rather than that of a meeting room. I have no doubt that the appropriate authorities will have noted my hon. Friend's point and will give it further consideration if that need arises before the work has been done.

Mr. Skinner: Why should disabled people, when they come to lobby their Members of Parliament, be shunted into draughty, cold Westminster Hall? Why is it not possible for disabled people to come into Central Lobby in the same numbers as ordinary, able-bodied people? Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us how much it would cost to ensure that 200 disabled people can get into Central Lobby as easily as able-bodied people rather than having to wait for about two hours to get through all the various securities, lack of lifts, and so on? Why do not he and his Committee tell the Government exactly how much it would cost to provide equality, and tell this tin-pot Government to provide the necessary money and the wherewithal in the Government's supposed Disability Discrimination Bill, which is before the House?

Mr. Beith: The Accommodation and Works Committee decides the priorities and made the proposal for the changes that I have described. So far as I am aware, the Commission has placed no obstacles in the way of any improvements that the Committee has recommended.

Photographic Unit

34. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, whether the Commission will make it its policy to ensure that a House photographic unit is set up.

Mr. Beith: The Commission's normal practice is to consider expenditure on new services for Members only when a recommendation has been received from the relevant domestic Committee. I understand that the hon. Gentleman recently put such a proposal to the Administration Committee, which rejected it.

Mr. Mitchell: The Administration Committee was looking not at that but at allowing photography by members of the public. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that photography is an essential part of both popular education and communication? It is a means of showing people what this place does and its activities, and encouraging interest in that. Would it not be better if we set up a proper photographic unit to do those jobs—as most grown-up Parliaments do—rather than pretend that photography has not yet been invented? Or do he and the Committee believe that photography steals a part of people's immortal souls, that Members are so irredeemably ugly that they should not be photographed or that we cannot compete with a medium that never lies?

Mr. Beith: I have had my photograph taken by the hon. Gentleman several times—usually when I was not expecting it. I hope that it has done no harm to my soul. The Commission is not responsible for the rules that determine where photographs may be taken, and the hon. Gentleman should direct his inquiries appropriately on that point, but no proposal has been put to us for a central unit. I am not sure that it would meet the wider educational purposes that he described for there merely to be a central unit. I think that he has a wider use of photography in mind.

Health Awareness

37. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, what financial provisions are being made to improve health awareness throughout the House.

Mr. Beith: No direct financial provisions are being made, but since 1991 an expanded occupational health service has been funded as part of the Serjeant's Department. In addition, a number of training courses in health and safety are provided for staff of the House, and the Gymnasium is available for the improvement of personal fitness.

Mr. Banks: May I remind the right hon. Gentleman that, although the House may not be a dangerous place in which to work, it is certainly an unhealthy place in which to work? Many hon. Members are killing themselves through their own lifestyles. I am not making a special plea for Members of Parliament, but surely it is wrong for anyone in this country to die of ignorance—and ignorance, or lack of health awareness, is clearly a major factor in mortality rates. Is it not about time that we had a proper programme that set an example? Is it not time that we in the House had healthy minds and bodies?

Mr. Beith: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right, and I hope that many of us do have healthy minds and bodies; but the Commission's responsibility has mainly been to its staff. A number of initiatives have been taken for staff health and safety, including measures to deal with back injuries and to promote awareness of the dangers of smoking.

Business Of the House

39. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how often he has (a) been able to advise the business of the House two weeks in advance and (b) been able to keep to it.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): Each week since the Christmas recess, I have been able to give the House more information about the second week than under previous practice, particularly in relation to business on the second Thursday. I am glad to say that it has not yet proved necessary to change any business of which an advance indication has been given, although it has sometimes been necessary to add to it.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer, and for the valiant efforts that he is making to give the House more notice of, in particular, occasions on which we may be able to accept speaking engagements outside the House.

Will my right hon. Friend give special attention to the way in which Bills are announced? Last Thursday, he was able to announce that we would be dealing with one Bill and eight orders, but that effectively gave us only two working days' notice. If our constituents want to lobby us in order to tell us that any of the many worthy measures with which we are to deal offends them in some way, they

have only two or three working days in which to do so. May we be given some idea of future business at least a fortnight in advance?

Mr. Newton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for acknowledging the efforts that I have undoubtedly made to give more notice than before. However, his reference to a day on which a number of orders will be dealt with leads me to observe that days like that may involve quite a lot of juggling until a late stage: that is one of the difficulties to which I have constantly adverted.

As for the Bill that my hon. Friend mentioned, I shall be frank about the difficulty. Two weeks ago, there was some doubt about whether it would have completed its Committee stage at the relevant time. Although I should be more than willing to be told that hon. Members would not mind me making a pre-judgment in such circumstances, tradition suggests that the announcement of a Bill's Report stage before it had emerged from Standing Committee would receive an adverse reaction.

The hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) looks sceptical. If she can assure me that the Opposition would not object, in certain circumstances, to the announcement of a debate on the remaining stages of a Bill before its Committee stage had been completed, no one would be more pleased than I.

Procedural Reform

40. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what further reforms of parliamentary procedure he is considering.

Mr. Newton: None at present, but experience with the changes recently introduced will of course be reviewed later this year.

Mr. Hughes: That leaves a gap in which suggestions can be made. May I put two well-rehearsed propositions to the Leader of the House?

First, can we try to minimise unnecessary confrontation in Committees by means of either a Select Committee-type inquiry into a Bill or the publication of a Green Bill? That is now done in many Parliaments. If a draft Bill were published for discussion purposes, we could get the non-controversial aspects as right as possible before embarking on the debate.

Secondly, could we guarantee that, at least once a year, one of the reports of each Select Committee can be debated in full on the Floor of the House, at the Committee's instigation?

Those are two of the many ideas for reform that are currently in the pipeline.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman's second question is perhaps more relevant to the question of procedural reform than the first. Obviously, it could be considered; the Procedure Committee might care to examine it in the course of its own review of the changes made before Christmas.

I must repeat something that I have said on a number of occasions. This is yet another demand for more consumption of time on the Floor of the House, which appears to be at variance with the basic thrust of the Jopling reforms.

Secondly, the publication of Bills is not really a matter for the procedures of the House. It is observable that in recent times Bills have been published in draft before being finally presented. I am keen to see that happen wherever it is practicable. That happened in the case of the Shops Bill, and with a significant part of the Environment Agencies Bill and it happens with significant technical parts of Finance Bills. It is about to happen with a proposed Reserve Forces Bill.

Mr. Dykes: As my right hon. Friend might welcome any opportunity to reduce his horrendous workload, which I know personally, does he agree that generally in this place happiness would be fewer public, Government Bills and more private Member's Bills?

Mr. Newton: I am not quite sure that I agree with that. It possibly depends on how one defines happiness and whose happiness one has in mind. I am glad to say that in the present Session, we appear to be making good progress on both fronts.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (SCOTLAND)

That the Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy or Premature Retirement on Re-organisation) (Scotland) Regulations 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 340) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Andrew Mitchell.]*

Question agreed to.

Point of Order

3.30 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you had any indication of a Government statement on the allegations in the *Independent on Sunday* about suppression of a report by the Equal Opportunities Commission into Government policies and their damaging effect on women's jobs of compulsory competitive tendering?

Madam Speaker: I have not had any indication from the Government that they are seeking to make a statement on any issue today. No doubt those on the Treasury Bench have heard what the hon. Lady had to say.

Opposition Day

[7TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Health Care (London and South East)

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. I have not restricted speeches for either of today's debates. I leave it to the good sense of Back Benchers and Front Benchers to exercise some voluntary restraint so that everyone who wishes to be called is likely to be called.

3.31 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I beg to move,

That this House expresses its concern at the evidence of continuing crisis of health care in London and the South East; believes that the scale and nature of the crisis stems directly from the Government's failure either to assess the health care needs of the area properly or to plan a programme by which those needs can be met; believes that the process of the internal market and Government-driven so-called 'reforms' are making matters worse; and calls for a moratorium on further closures until a fresh and thorough review has been carried out of the mounting evidence of serious misdirection of health care across the whole of the area.

Yet again, it is the Opposition who provide the opportunity for a debate on health care in London and the south-east, both because it is important in itself and because of the light that it casts on the implications for Britain as a whole of Government health policy.

It is important to flush out the Secretary of State for Health to give us her views on these matters. She is fond of talking about stewardship and responsibility, but less fond of exercising them. It is also valuable to have the debate at this time, because we are at a turning point, a crucial point of change.

On Saturday, a large conference discussed the crisis in London health care as the effects of Government policy begin to be felt. In two days' time, the consultation period on proposals to close Bart's hospital will come to an end, and we shall see whether the health authority meant what it said when it suggested that public reaction to those proposals would influence its decisions.

We are on the brink of other, greater change. Decisions will be made against the background of still greater cuts in funding for the authority which controls Bart's, and cuts for other authorities which rank high on the Department of the Environment's list of authorities dealing with high levels of poverty and deprivation. Of course, the debate is also held against the background of the final, full implementation of the Government's dogma-driven policies.

In April, the special health authorities—hospitals such as Moorfields, the Bethlem/Royal Maudesly and the Royal Marsden, which have been cushioned until now from the full effects of Government policy—will face the impact of the Government's so-called reforms, as the full internal market finally comes to London. Londoners await that process with the same anticipation as they once awaited the arrival of Boadicea.

Five years ago, London was the undisputed health care capital of Europe. The French newspaper *Liberation* carried out a survey of medical research and teaching in 1989, which put London's medical schools at the top of

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

the European league, above even Oxford and Cambridge. It ranked them as the best in the continent, not just in Britain, and said:

"the density of its network is such that this premier position is in no way a surprise; the different colleges each on their own cover the full range of specialties."

The report went on to refer, rather optimistically, to

"the one constant which does not change: the supremacy of British medicine."

London has always been the key to the top ranking of British medical science. It trains 30 per cent. of new doctors and a quarter of new dentists. Half of all the highest grades awarded in clinical medicine are gained by people who went to university of London medical schools. That is not accidental. London's large catchment population and the concentration of medical resources have enabled the maximum interaction between science and clinical medicine. That has provided the strong base needed to sustain the caseload required for training and development.

In fact, like that other great national institution, football, until recently the hospital service in London was one of our greatest assets—an institution in which London's citizens could take great pride. It is now threatened with disintegration and collapse. Several of the most famous teaching hospitals on which the medical schools depend face closure, including Bart's and Guy's, while others are to be amalgamated. The post-Tomlinson rationalisation could lead to a flight of research revenue and income. Dozens of professors and top consultants face redundancy, and many are leaving London, with the consequent exodus of medical talent.

As with football, so with health care—London is now in danger of being relegated to the international second division. Like hooligans at a Chelsea-Millwall match, the Government set out wilfully to vandalise a service that was once orderly, well managed and widely supported. The question that we want to ask is the same question as that behind the inquiries into the recent England-Ireland game—is the Government's sabotage of London's health service the action of mindless vandals, or are they motivated by extreme right-wing ideology?

Lord Sutch of the Monster Raving Loony party does not seem to be in any doubt. On Friday, he said how disappointed he was that the Conservatives had just pipped his party into fifth place in the Islwyn by-election. He said:

"We thought we would beat the Tories, but by mistake people voted for the wrong loony party."

I must differ from Lord Sutch—the Government are not just loonies, and they are not just hooligans, although the Secretary of State gets called before judges to account for her vandalism of the health service. She and her colleagues are guilty of wilful destruction, but it is not mindless hooliganism.

Just like many of the troublemakers at our football matches, the Government are driven by right-wing ideology, which they coldly and deliberately calculate will wreak havoc in our public health service, just as it will create opportunities for those who can profit if what is lost from the public sector is replaced in the private sector—and unlike many of football's troublemakers, the Government are carrying out their strategy with stealth, and in furtive secrecy.

Unfortunately, the strategy's effect on London is especially acute. While London is a centre of medical excellence, it is also a city of harrowing deprivation and savage contrasts between rich and poor. Four out of five of the areas of greatest deprivation in Britain are, according to Department of the Environment indices, in London. Unemployment, a major cause of ill-health, in London is double the national average. Perinatal mortality in London is 74 per cent. above the national average. A third—

Mr. Tim Yeo (Suffolk, South): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: In a moment—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to hear the figures.

One third of all those who died from hypothermia in 1992—the latest year for which we have figures—lived in London. Some 75 per cent. of all HIV and AIDS cases are in London; 42 per cent. of United Kingdom reported cases of tuberculosis in 1992 were in London—in itself increased by 13 per cent. since 1988; and 60 per cent. of all Britain's homeless and people living in temporary accommodation are in London.

Being a great metropolitan city also means that London attracts huge numbers of visitors and commuters, all of whom increase the strain on its health service.

Mr. Yeo: The right hon. Lady mentioned perinatal mortality. Does she agree that it is one of the most objective indices of good health that can be applied to any nation and any region of any nation? Does she further agree that, since 1979, there has been a substantial fall in perinatal mortality across the whole of the United Kingdom, and that nowhere is that fall more substantial than in London, where the figure is down from 12.7 per 1,000 to 7.1—a drop of 44 per cent?

Mrs. Beckett: Improvements have been made in perinatal mortality rates. I am afraid that I do not have the figures or the report with me—mind you, Madam Speaker, nor does the hon. Gentleman. He borrowed them from his hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), who presumably had the briefing.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere) *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: I shall give way in a minute—one intervention at a time, thank you.

If one considers, in particular, inner-city wards where deprivation is highest, that puts those figures very much into the shade. The hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) knows that my point is about the deprivation level across London. The overall average figures have improved, as they have elsewhere. That is what we expect. They improve year on year, century on century; there is nothing new about that.

The hon. Gentleman said that the figures had improved, but he knows that they have not done so where greatest deprivation exists. Although I do not have the figures with me, my recollection is that, under this Government, the position has worsened in some areas of greatest deprivation.

Mr. Clappison *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman. Has he now found some other figures?

Mr. Clappison: Will the right hon. Lady take it from me that the standardised mortality ratio shows that

London has an above-average performance in mortality rates? Contrary to what she has said about deprivation areas, the most recent statistics show that the biggest reduction in infant mortality has been among the lowest social classes 4 and 5. The best improvement has been made in those social classes.

Mrs. Beckett: I give the hon. Gentleman the undertaking that I will read carefully what he has said, but it contradicts much of the other published evidence. I hope that neither of the two hon. Gentlemen who have intervened are contesting my basic point about the deprivation level and about the serious problems that occur in London and are concentrated in London, disproportionately even to other inner-city areas in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Suffolk, South is sitting there smirking. Does he disagree with that basic case?

Mr. Yeo: When the right hon. Lady responded to my previous intervention, she tried to imply that I did not know what I was talking about. She may not know this, but other hon. Members will know that, before I came here, my full-time job involved running the Spastics Society, whose major research and publicity campaigns dealt precisely with this point. That is why I have the figures in my head and why she does not.

Does she agree, as I asked her to agree before—she dodged the question—that the perinatal mortality rate is one of the most objective statistics on the measure of health in any country, and in the regions of those countries? Does she further agree that, under this Conservative Government. in the past 17 years, there has been a substantial fall in the rate throughout the UK, and particularly in London? I quoted the figures, which were kindly supplied by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison). They demonstrated that there has been an even improvement across the country.

Mrs. Beckett: I did not dispute what the hon. Gentleman said about perinatal mortality rates, because they are an important indicator. I am never in danger of forgetting that the hon. Gentleman was a director of the Spastics Society before he came to this place, because, as he will recall, I sat with him on a Committee where the Government made savage cuts in the benefits paid to people with disabilities, and I waited for him to protest on their behalf, which he failed to do.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I am sorry to intervene on my right hon. Friend, but, before she concedes anything on that front, may I tell her that, some years ago, I challenged those statistics in the northern region? The statistical base was rubbish, so let us be careful before we concede anything on those statistics.

Mrs. Beckett: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. I note that, despite all that the hon. Member for Suffolk, South has said, he does not appear to be disputing either that deprivation is concentrated in London, or some of the indicators of that deprivation.

There is, of course, much more to London's health service than its hospitals. The glory of the health service in Britain, what is unique, what possibly has made it—or did make it—the most cost-effective health service in the world, has been the emphasis on primary care, in particular in relation to general practice. Unfortunately, in London that has long been an area of weakness.

In the early 1980s, reports identified some 15 per cent. of general practitioner premises as being sub-standard, but, under this Government, that problem has got worse. By the time of the Tomlinson report in 1992, 46 per cent. of general practice premises were said to be below the expected standard, yet such a development must have been foreseen. As early as 1982, the Acheson report drew attention to deficiencies in primary care in London, and to the need for those deficiencies to be addressed. Nothing happened. Not one of the report's recommendations was implemented. Thirteen years on, matters are substantially worse.

I hope that the Secretary of State will neither try our patience nor further undermine her reputation by pretending that the Government's determination to strengthen general practice has led to the attack on London's hospitals. Throughout the Government's period in office, general practice in London has deteriorated, and there is little to suggest that the current Secretary of State will do better than her predecessors.

I cite the precedent of the London Ambulance Service. Two years ago, the right hon. Lady told the House that she would be taking a close personal interest in the service's work and improvement. It is one of the few policy areas for which she has taken any responsibility, and I do not think that even she would claim that an outstanding success.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): After the LAS area collapse two years ago, I sent the Secretary of State a copy of my memorandum to the Page committee. Last week, I sent the right hon. Lady the 50-page memorandum published by the Select Committee on Health, to which I gave evidence 10 days ago. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Secretary of State should reply to my letter asking her to point out any errors of fact in my conclusions or where she differs from them? Is not the Secretary of State responsible to the House, and should she not give an undertaking to reply when she speaks today?

Mrs. Beckett: I am sure that the Secretary of State heard my hon. Friend, and that she will reply to his point. I share my hon. Friend's view that it is part of Government responsibility to deal with such matters and to respond to queries from hon. Members. After all, the Government are accountable to this place.

The Government's continuing implication that improvements in general practice, if and when they come, will lead to reduced demand for hospital beds is indefensible, as is their justification for a further massive reduction in the provision of hospitals and beds throughout London and the south-east. Beds are already being closed at breakneck speed, before investment in general practice can provide an alternative.

The pace of closures is accelerating. Between 1982 and 1990, 7,000 acute beds closed in London, but since 1990, another 3,200 beds—one in six of the 1990 figure—have closed. Since 1982, 39 per cent. of acute beds have closed in London, compared with a national average reduction of 23 per cent.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I will, but this may be the last time that I do so, because I am mindful of Madam Speaker's observations.

Lady Olga Maitland: In suggesting that those bed closures are a scandal, the right hon. Lady is totally misrepresenting developments in modern medicine. Does not she accept that they mean that patients can spend fewer days in hospital, creating less demand for beds?

Mrs. Beckett: Of course I accept that, but the hon. Lady will be aware of severe doubts about the pace at which beds are removed.

Lady Olga Maitland *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Beckett: It is no use the hon. Lady shaking her head. She must know the problems in London if she even looks at the *Evening Standard*—never mind reads it. The Government anticipated reduced demand, rather than waiting to see whether it occurred. The hon. Lady must be aware of all kinds of problems, such as patients being re-admitted after being discharged too early, and of questions about day case surgery and the anaesthetics used. It is not a simple equation of changes in medical technology enabling beds to be taken out of use. Most people in London accept that readily.

There is not a shred of evidence that improvements in general practice are forthcoming to allow a reduction in beds. There is growing belief that primary care improvement in London may reveal substantial unmet need for hospital treatment. The assumption that London has too many beds is increasingly open to question, because of long waiting lists and continuing reports of overwhelming pressure for beds. The latest report shows that psychiatric beds are at 140 per cent. occupancy, with patients sent to centres as far away as York to be treated in the private sector because there are no psychiatric, acute or secure beds available in London.

Not long ago, we were told that not one intensive care bed was available anywhere in London for an adult or a child. The London health consortium has described the pressure on the provision of beds in London. It says that if there are further bed cuts—or a bad winter which, fortunately, so far, we have not had in London—they could prompt a full-scale crisis in London's health service.

The case is open to question—never mind comparisons with capital cities elsewhere in Europe, although those cast doubt on the Government's case—because of comparisons with other cities in the United Kingdom which cast doubt even on the theoretical case for further cuts. Ministers used to argue that London and the south-east had a disproportionate share of hospitals and of beds, and used a disproportionately high amount of health service funds. Earlier studies by the King's Fund, like the Tomlinson report, seemed at first to confirm those assertions although they caused bewilderment among many who found them hard to square with the reality of London health care.

However, further work, most notably by Professor Jarman at St. Mary's hospital, which has been backed up by an even more recent study by the London health consortium, has demonstrated that if we compare like with like and city with city, it is not true that London is over-provided either with beds or with funds. In fact, the most recent figures on bed usage have Leeds, Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham all above London in their use of health service beds. London has only a little above the average figure for the whole of Britain. The evidence on which the Government have relied for their changes is simply not there—quite apart from the huge and fundamental flaw at the heart of both reports to which I referred. The flaw is that they relied on the assumption that Government policies would of themselves, by the application of the internal market, remove beds from London. It was not a question of whether the beds were needed, but a question of the impact of Government policy.

The figure I quoted for the comparison between London and other cities, which shows that there is not over-provision in London, squares with the day-to-day experience of Londoners. It squares with the 168,000 people on waiting lists for the main trusts and the 6,000 people waiting for treatment in the special health authorities. The figure squares with the 140 beds that were never opened at the new Chelsea and Westminster hospital where, in the seven months from April to November last year, there was an increase of 128 per cent. in numbers on the waiting list. It squares with the threat to the existence of University College hospital when the funds of Camden and Islington health authority were slashed. The figure squares with the revelation that in Redbridge, there is no elective surgery for those waiting less than 18 months and with the fact that Redbridge waiting lists have gone up by 46 per cent. It squares too with the fact that Whittington hospital is closed for non-emergency elective surgery, with little indication about where the people whom the hospital previously served are expected to go.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the restriction on non-elective surgery does not apply to the patients of fundholding GPs and private patients? They can get treatment at Whittington hospital. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is the disgraceful two-tier health service which so many people in my constituency are expected to put up with?

Mrs. Beckett: No one could disagree with my hon. Friend's point. The position is very worrying for those who are unable to be in practices that are eligible for the Government's scheme.

The examples of deficiencies in health care that I have given all come from the time before the most recent proposal for still further changes in funding for London's health authorities. Inner and outer London together were expected to lose about £100 million in the coming year. Outer London has had some reprieve, gaining about £46 million more than expected, but £41 million of that gain has been slashed from inner London.

Health authorities in areas which rank among the most deprived in the country now stand to lose still larger sums. East London and the City, the authority in which St. Bartholomew's is situated, now stands to lose a further—almost—£14 million from its funding. Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster stands to lose almost £15 million, and Camden and Islington, which was already set to lose £27 million, will now lose more than £30 million—getting on for £31 million. Every one of those areas was already the subject of concern expressed in this

House, primarily by Conservative Members on behalf of their constituents, in the debate on London health care in October.

Those new figures also show that London will receive just under 15 per cent.—14.9 or 14.8 per cent.—of the funding, despite having to cater for 15 per cent. of the population. So London is receiving an under-provision in revenue, especially when we recall the under-recording of London's population left as a legacy of the poll tax.

That brings me to perhaps the most blatant example of the chaos over which the Secretary of State reigns, which directly results from the neglect, vandalism and incompetence of Ministers. When she launched the new patients charter, the Secretary of State was pleased to boast of a new trolley standard. *[Laughter.]* Under previous Governments, Labour or Tory, the notion that waiting hours on a trolley in a casualty department was a standard daily expectation was inconceivable.

In January, Bart's accident and emergency department closed. The week before its closure, patients were having to wait up to 36 hours to be admitted to the alternative facilities, and some 15 patients could not be found beds because of the pressure placed on those facilities. Guy's accident and emergency department is under threat. Many patients are expected to go to St. Thomas's. But, last week, even before the closure of Guy's accident and emergency unit, patients from St. Thomas's had to be sent back to Guy's, because there were too many to be treated at St. Thomas's.

All London has read of the child with an arrow in his eye, who spent eight hours being shuttled between hospitals before he was allowed into Bart's for emergency treatment.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: Was the boy with an arrow in his eye one of the hon. Gentleman's constituents?

Mr. Bottomley *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Beckett: Then I shall give way.

Mr. Bottomley: The newspaper report said that a child in my constituency had been taken by air ambulance to Moorfields hospital, and that the doctors at Moorfields had been told by the paramedics that the child could not be taken to Bart's. When I checked with the local evening newspaper news desk, it said that, in fact, the child had been taken to the Royal London hospital, and that the doctors at Moorfields had not asked the London Ambulance Service whether the child should be transferred for neurological or ophthalmic treatment at Bart's. If the right hon. Lady is to read newspaper cuttings, she should check them, in the way that the constituency Member of Parliament does.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is in any way casting doubt on the point I made, which is that, right across London, there is huge pressure on casualty departments, and right across London there is strain. It is not surprising that, in such circumstances, people do not always make the correct decision—the decision that they should have made at the outset.

It does not alter the fact, whoever was at fault, that that child waited all those hours for treatment. Nor does it alter the fact that, as we heard in the previous debate, we can produce a string of lists outlining incidents of people waiting hours on end in casualty departments right across London, of which the hon. Gentleman is perfectly aware.

In consequence, right across London and the south-east, there is fear and anger. There is anger at the loss of valuable facilities that people believe are needed, and there is real fear, especially among parents, as private surveys of opinion show, that, should their children be injured or fall seriously ill, the treatment they would need would simply not be there.

In our previous debate, the Secretary of State talked about her stewardship of our health service. Let us examine that stewardship for a moment, and look at her strategy for London and the south-east, especially for accident and emergency services.

Has there been an overall review of accident and emergency services as there has for other specialty services? No. How many hospitals in London provide such services? According to parliamentary questions, the Secretary of State does not know and, what is more, she does not think that it is any of her business.

How many accident and emergency departments are there in London and the south-east? The Secretary of State does not know, and she does not think that it is any of her business. How many accident and emergency departments are due to close in London and the south-east? The Secretary of State does not know that, either, and she does not concern herself with it. Stewardship? The Secretary of State does not know the meaning of the word.

The Government have abandoned the management, planning and co-ordination of change in London. They have abandoned their duty to those who live and work in and around the capital. The Government are always urging on us the virtues of private sector management, but no big business would act as the Secretary of State acts.

The manager of every branch of Woolworth and McDonald's has a degree of freedom to manage the unit, but that freedom can be practised only within a well-defined and clear framework, and within guidelines laid down by the parent company. As I understand it, nothing is more precisely defined than a McDonald's hamburger.

There are varying degrees of autonomy for local business units in London's national health service, but with no strategic framework. Just imagine if the chairman of Kingfisher, the parent company of Woolworth, was asked how many Woolworth branches there were in London, and he had to reply that that information was not centrally held, which is the Secretary of State's stock reply.

Imagine that McDonald's was restructuring its business and downsizing its operation, and, when the shareholders asked how many branches were going to close, the chairman said, "This information is not held centrally."

A whole new vocabulary is developing. "Rationalisation" means—

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No: I have almost finished.

"Rationalisation" means closure. "Information not centrally held" means "I haven't got a clue", and instead of decisions we have strategic directions. We have a

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strategic direction for the Secretary of State: the exit is that way, and she can rationalise the door behind her as she goes.

Mr. Forman: Will the right hon. Lady give way now?

Mrs. Beckett: I have almost finished, and I am mindful of Madam Speaker's observations.

Imagine if ICI had just invested in a new state-of-the-art building, the most modern in the industry, which had cost £150 million and had taken eight years to build. However, before it was even occupied, the chairman decided that the facilities would never be used by that part of the business for which it was intended. Just imagine what the shareholders of the company would say to such a cavalier and irresponsible treatment of their funds.

However, that is exactly what will happen to Philip Harris house at Guy's hospital, which the Secretary of State has decided will never be used for the service that it was intended to provide. That is typical of the Government's cavalier attitude to the use of public and private funds.

In London and the south-east today, there is no strategic planning, no overall investment strategy and little consideration of whether a wider national or public interest should materially affect decisions locally made. There must be a moratorium on further bed closures, in case they have already gone too far.

In the breathing space that such a moratorium creates, there must be a fresh and thorough assessment of the needs of health care in London, of needs driven by medical technology, which was the case made by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland), and of the needs of elderly and frail people, particularly where, as in London, there is such a lack of alternative places. There must be an assessment of those needs, and further consideration of how those needs are to be met.

By no definition, and by no standard, can the Secretary of State's attitude to health care in London and the south-east be called stewardship. The Government are not stewards, because that word implies duty, responsibility and care. The Government are just incumbents, and the sooner they cease to be so, the better for London, the better for the south-east, and the better for Britain.

4.3 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'recognises that, because of medical advance, shifts in the population and the changing needs of patients, reform of the health service in London is both necessary and long overdue; congratulates Her Majesty's Government for its resolve in addressing the modern needs of people in the capital and the South East, in sharp contrast to the vacillation and evasion of the Opposition; and believes that policies now being pursued have already delivered a better health service for the area, enhancing the excellence of research, teaching and treatment as well as improving local health services in the parts of greatest need.'.

I welcome this opportunity to describe the progress being made to modernise London's health service. We are improving the quality and responsiveness of hospital services. We are investing in primary care and we are enhancing the capital's status as an international centre of clinical teaching and research. I shall be announcing more money for primary care. I shall tell the House of important new developments around some of the hospitals and medical colleges in London and important changes taking us nearer to the heart of our vision of four world-class hospital complexes clustered around multi-faculty universities and colleges.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on being here to open the debate. The last time Labour Front-Bench Members chose to debate health in London, their health spokesman did not even turn up. Instead, their transport spokesman came along, mouthed a few sound bites in advance of impending local elections and sat down. He said nothing about Labour policy. That showed the real face of the Labour party: it is interested not in serious health issues but only in party politics and partisan advantage.

I give credit to the right hon. Member for Derby, South. She suffered widespread criticism of her Trappist approach to Labour health policy. With some justice, *The Lancet* recently asked:

"What would a Labour government do with the NHS?"

With some justice, it gave the answer:

"It's no use asking the Party's spokeswoman on health; she refuses to say".

However, the right hon. Lady has now produced a plank of policy. Unfortunately, it is the wrong policy, but we cannot have everything. She wants a moratorium on bed closures in London. She wants, as her motion states,

"a fresh and thorough review".

There have been about 20 fresh and thorough reviews in the past 80 years, and they have all said the same thing: we need movement and improvement, not a moratorium. London needs action and change, not yet another review.

Labour Members have cut themselves off from what has to be done. They have ignored even the advice of *The Guardian*, which stated:

"A party preparing for Government should resist the easy option—opposing all hospital closures—and concentrate on filling out its own plans."

Rarely can a party have so wallowed in the irresponsibility of opposition. Labour Members' dithering in opposition shows why Labour would be such a disaster in government.

I should say at the outset that I cannot comment in detail on the proposals around St. Bart's, the Royal London, or Guy's-St. Thomas's. They are or have been the subject of statutory public consultation and as Secretary of State I am in a quasi-judicial position in relation to the proposals which are likely to come to Ministers for final decision.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): The consultation period on whether Bart's is to close ends tomorrow. Yet in yesterday's edition of *The Sunday Telegraph* there was a quotation from a letter from the Secretary of State for Employment saying that the decision to close Bart's had not been taken lightly by the Prime Minister and by the Government. What is the point of consultation when decisions have been taken before 6 February and consultation is continuing until 21 February?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to make it clear that the matter is subject to open consultation. I am sorry that

there should have been any misunderstanding at all. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and his constituents, and my right hon. Friend the Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke), will be extremely pleased to hear that.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that on the previous matter there was a great effort to take the issue to judicial review. That challenge was totally and utterly rebutted. In all matters, Ministers have behaved with absolute propriety and will take forward the consultation in the proper way. I am delighted to make that absolutely clear.

These are serious matters affecting not only London and Londoners but people throughout the country. I should like to set out again the underlying issues facing those and all the great hospitals in London. They are the same issues which face the south-east and the rest of the country. The issues are linked: what we do in London affects what can be done outside London. The London health service is part of a national health service.

The service in London faces many difficult challenges. One of the reasons why we began the process with Tomlinson was precisely to address those problems head-on. To duck out now would blight the capital's health service for at least a generation. The Labour party's shoddy analysis of London's needs and problems will not do. The fundamental issues, none of which the right hon. Member for Derby, South addressed, result from changes in where people live, changes in how they choose to be cared for, and the need to adapt to the evolving potential of modern medicine.

Within a six-mile radius of this place there are about 22 major acute hospitals. That cannot be said of any other part of the country. That concentration of hospitals grew up mainly in the previous century to meet national rather than specifically London needs, let alone the day-to-day needs of local communities. The population has moved away. London's population has fallen dramatically by about 1.3 million in the past three decades. People who used to come to inner London hospitals from all over the south-east and beyond are now turning to their own hospitals for care.

Lady Olga Maitland: My right hon. Friend refers to the reluctance of patients to come to London. Is she aware that patients in my constituency in Sutton can now go to the St. Helier's national health trust hospital, which provides all the services they need?

Mrs. Bottomley: A generation ago, people travelled from the home counties to the London hospitals, but there has been a massive development of services throughout the home counties. Patients and GPs rightly say that they would rather have treatment close to home than travel to London. That is precisely what is causing great difficulties for the London hospitals, which have fixed overheads.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): Does that square with the Secretary of State's decision to transfer further into London the regional neurosciences units and the cardiothoracic units based at the Brook hospital in Greenwich, which serve the Kent area?

Mrs. Bottomley: I shall be emphasising at some length later in my speech the crucial importance of academic excellence and research. London has been a capital city for medical research and teaching, and there is duplication and fragmentation of centres. If we wish to be a world capital for medicine in the next century, we must concentrate on centres of excellence.

We undertook an unprecedented review of the specialty services, in which about 200 clinicians were involved. The prime position given to the Institute of Psychiatry and the campus at Denmark Hill, and the contribution which could be made to international research and teaching by the integration of the neurosciences centre from the Brook hospital were decisive factors in our supporting the recommendation. It is precisely that commitment to excellence that has driven the framework within which the changes have been seen.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am sorry that I was late for my right hon. Friend's opening remarks. She rightly referred to the growing importance of a comprehensive range of services in outer London and in the home counties. Does she agree that it is vital to keep open—in all and in part—the services of Edgware general hospital in the future?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend—like almost every constituency Member of Parliament—has a great affection for his local hospital, the way in which it has evolved over the years and the service that it provides for the local community. The dilemma that we face—which any responsible Government would face—is that report after report has argued that if we want clinical excellence we must look towards the consolidation of services. For example, at the Royal London we can have a 24-hour consultant-led accident and emergency department.

A couple of weeks ago, a major report from the clinical standards advisory group argued again about the quality that we should be looking for in an accident and emergency department. We can deliver that quality, commitment and back-up in terms of staff only if units come together. A balanced judgment must be taken on the pace at which we move towards those centres.

Another example is cancer services. The Chief Medical Officer's report on cancer services argues for a concentration of centres with a relevant critical mass, which always leads to difficult decisions for individual Members of Parliament.

I say openly to the House that if we want to have the quality of services advanced by the royal colleges and by virtually every expert report, we must see how we can address the issue of hon. Members' great affection for their local hospitals which cannot provide the critical mass, the sub-specialties and the costly equipment that we need for state of the art services.

Mr. Dykes: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of that reply, I beg leave to give notice that, with your permission, I shall seek to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Madam Speaker: I have noted what the hon. Gentleman has said, but as the motion is not a substantive one he should not have interrupted at this stage. He must seek an Adjournment debate and take his chance.

Mrs. Bottomley: I used my hon. Friend's particular example to make a more general point which any responsible holder of my office has to take into account

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when looking at the interface between a series of expert reports and the understandable and strong views of constituency Members of Parliament.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Bottomley: I should make headway. The point is well made. The constituency points made by my hon. Friend are subject to consideration. Decisions have not been made. I was using the example to make a more general point.

Not only do we have hospitals around London. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) said when she gave an example from her constituency, some patients who are treated in London would prefer to be treated closer to home. An example is the new cardiac unit being built in Plymouth to treat, among others, patients who currently come 250 miles to the Royal Hospitals trust. A new £5 million cardiothoracic centre is being established in Brighton. There are two major new oncology centres, in Maidstone and, as my own constituents know well—

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Ah.

Mrs. Bottomley:—in Guildford, where £12 million is being spent upgrading and relocating cancer services.

That is the modern health service taking root. History has left a proliferation of small specialist units within a few miles of each other in central London. Before the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) gets too carried away, he will want to know that in my constituency I have faced precisely the changes that I have described in relation to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East. My own hospitals are becoming community hospitals because we have a concentration of speciality services outside my constituency, in Guildford. I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that.

Those small units, often within a few miles of each other, are run by skilled clinicians. In these days of modern medicine and high technology, it cannot make sense for the speciality reviews to find 10 radiotherapy units, 13 cardiac surgery departments and 11 renal dialysis centres all in such close proximity. The simple fact is that it is impossible to sustain the highest quality care in so many fragmented centres. The talent and expertise of the clinicians, and the money available to purchase equipment, is too thinly spread.

As I have made clear, the number of patients referred to London for specialist treatment will fall. As it does, it will become ever more difficult to maintain the quality of services in each centre. The royal college training accreditation is in jeopardy in neurosciences and other specialities at Bart's because the number of patients that it treats is now below the clinically recommended levels.

For example—this, again, is an issue for my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes)—Professor Sir Norman Browse, the president of the Royal College of Surgeons, has said:

> "To maintain and improve professional standards, we have to amalgamate the remaining in-patient beds so that they achieve the critical mass necessary to provide the experience needed to train and educate junior doctors and maintain the consultants' expertise."

Time and again, expert and independent speciality reviews have argued that for better patient care we must have specialist services concentrated in fewer, larger centres, so as to make better use of finite resources and dedicated staff.

Modern clinical equipment is expensive. A computerised tomography scanner can cost £500,000. A magnetic resonance imager can cost £1.5 million. By clustering hospitals, we can ensure the best use of these medical miracles, which were not even conceived when the NHS began in 1948, let alone when most of London's hospitals were constructed in the last century.

We can make better use of our doctors, with their highly specialised and scarce skills. We are committed to reducing junior doctors' hours. My hon. Friend the Minister is meeting them this week to discuss the issue further. Smaller units needing 24-hour cover require junior doctors to be on site all the time. With fewer larger centres, the load can be spread. We can achieve the ambition both of the Government and doctors to improve the quality of life for medical professionals.

There is another reason why we need fewer, better centres. Fragmenting services across so many sites makes it much more difficult to manage beds. We frequently hear about the pressure on beds for emergency admissions and I do not discount the problem. A recent comprehensive study in London, carried out by the inner London health authorities, dealt with that important issue and I commend it to the House. Copies are easily available in the Library and, I believe, in the Vote Office.

The report states:

> "Larger hospitals and those with larger pools of beds were found to be better able to manage variations in demand for admission. Those with a lower proportion of emergency admissions could operate at higher occupancy levels."

The report concludes:

> "Better clinical and management systems than in the past need to be in place if such problems are to be handled without detriment to quality of care or the planned admission of non-urgent patients."

In a significant passage, it states:

> "It was thought that extra acute beds would not solve those problems in a cost-effective way. They are better addressed by the management of admissions and discharges in collaboration with all the parties involved."

The Government have set out the strategic direction for the health service in London, which that important report endorses.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): On the important question of concentration of facilities in one spot, obviously there is an argument for larger and fewer units and we are familiar with it—it applies to many things other than the health service or hospital services—but there are disbenefits and additional costs from highly concentrated organisations.

The London hospital is to be concentrated on the Whitechapel site, with the closure of the London Chest hospital, part of Bart's and the Queen Elizabeth hospital. A huge and costly investment programme will be necessary on the Whitechapel site to provide facilities which one hopes will be similar and equal to those to be closed. Is there any guarantee that the money will be made available within the time scale involved?

Mrs. Bottomley: Obviously, those matters are all subject to the consultation, on which I cannot comment at the moment. If the right hon. Gentleman has read the

document, he will know that, out of something like a £95 million cost for the status quo, much of the capital cost will be used to refurbish the existing facilities. The document suggests that there will be revenue savings of £22 million a year as a result of concentration on one site.

The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that academics and researchers feel strongly about the great opportunity to bring together research teams; with a larger group, they can have sub-specialties and all the opportunities of mixing disciplines. Academics, with whom I spend an enormous amount of time, are concerned that if we allow the fragmentation of the small centres to continue it will be almost impossible to build up the substantial clinical and research teams with which they hope to pioneer innovations.

Mr. Forman: I am mindful of my right hon. Friend's argument about the benefits for academics of an inter-disciplinary approach in large clusters of hospitals, and it obviously makes sense. But is she aware of another argument, which tends to point the other way—the possibility of diseconomies of scale on the managerial side if the management of those vast enterprises are expected to manage something many times larger than the units that they were managing?

Mrs. Bottomley: I accept my hon. Friend's argument, but the hospitals that we are discussing are relatively modest in size compared, for example, with some of the most internationally famous hospitals in the United States.

I regard Boston as a competitor with London in terms of the prime position in medical research and teaching. It was interesting for me to meet the professor in charge of Massachusetts university hospital recently as he was amalgamating a 1,000-bed hospital and an 800-bed hospital. The changes that we are making in London are being made in Boston, Sydney, Paris and virtually every capital city in the world. Those changes matter so much partly because Londoners deserve a better health service. As the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) may know, my first job was in Bethnal Green, so I know only too well how inadequate and paltry the community and family doctor services were for people in that area. However, I am also strongly committed to our international position and centres of excellence. It is no coincidence that our university hospitals of Oxford and Cambridge, in areas where there is no fragmentation or duplication, find things much easier than some London centres precisely because those are so numerous.

It would be wrong to delay matters, have a moratorium, and abandon the process of change because that would put everyone in limbo and a state of uncertainty. People in London want to know what the future holds and to build for the next century.

Sir John Gorst (Hendon, North): Will my right hon. Friend help me by reconciling her logic and information with the illogical feelings of my constituents, who are unanimously against her proposals? Have I any alternative but to represent their views in the Lobby, contrary to how my right hon. Friend would wish?

Mrs. Bottomley: I repeat what I said to another hon. Friend: a balance must be struck between the move towards clinical excellence, the concentration of services, better services, the issue of junior doctors' hours, and the pace at which change can be achieved. Issues concerning my hon. Friend's hospital are being carefully addressed. I totally accept that every hon. Member must balance local wishes, which are nearly always to avoid change—the populism that we have seen from the Opposition today—and a more principled approach which believes that if we want clinical excellence for the future we must face and take difficult decisions.

Sir John Gorst: Without my vote, then.

Mrs. Bottomley: I hope that my hon. Friend will discuss those matters further.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mrs. Bottomley: No. Many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

We need to invest in the acute sector and more must be done to improve infrastructure in London. We are backing our commitment with a substantial amount of cash: £28 million for redevelopment of the Lewisham hospital; nearly £20 million to develop the Homerton as a full district general hospital serving the people of Hackney; nearly £15 million for the London ambulance service—

Mr. Spearing: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mrs. Bottomley: I heard the hon. Gentleman's intervention in the speech of the right hon. Member for Derby, South and I shall consider it carefully. I greatly appreciated our lengthy and informative discussion on the subject earlier in the year.

We are spending more than £8 million to upgrade and expand the accident and emergency department at King's—

Mr. Spearing: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mrs. Bottomley: No, but I look forward to reading the hon. Gentleman's speech in *Hansard* later.

We are spending £3.2 million on the St. Thomas's accident and emergency department; £2 million for the Whittington; and nearly £2 million at the Royal London. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members do not want to hear that list of investments and would rather drown it out, so substantial and significant is our record of investment in the London health service.

The list goes on and on, but the key issue is that it is investment in the future, not in the past, and it is close to where people live. We should not continue to sustain the current revenue cost of £70 million a year in duplication and fragmentation of an outdated pattern of hospital care. To do so would be unfair to the taxpayer, to other parts of the south-east and the rest of the country and to London when money should be targeted on basic health services in the community, which are so badly needed.

We have come to terms with the paradox that clinical developments point to a need for fewer acute beds. It is a paradox, and I understand hon. Members' concerns, but we see the development of day surgery, minimally invasive surgery, new drugs and other medical advances. All of those mean that we can treat more patients in fewer acute beds.

Because of those developments, the number of beds has been falling in the UK and elsewhere for the past 30 years. But fewer beds do not mean fewer services. There has been a massive expansion in the number of patients treated, reductions in waiting times and a transformation

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in the range and sophistication of treatment available. In the past year, the number of people waiting more than a year for treatment in the Thames regions has fallen by 7 per cent. In a five-year period from 1988, the number of hip replacement operations increased by 2,500. During the same time, there was a fourfold increase in the number of liver transplants. The Labour party should know that it is simplistic just to look at the number of acute beds. We must consider how they are used and what that tells us about the balance between acute and non-acute beds and services generally.

The inner London health authorities' report concluded that the use of acute hospital beds is significantly above the national average. But there is no evidence to suggest that, on average, Londoners need to go into hospital more than people living elsewhere in the country. What the figures reveal is that the wrong beds are being used in the wrong way. Patients—particularly elderly patients—are being kept in hospital longer than they need be when they could better be discharged to proper care outside hospital, which is better for patients and for the NHS. For some, that will mean a nursing home. Evidence shows that, since our community care reforms, the number of nursing home places in London has begun to rise—200 more this year, but 1,800 more in the pipeline. That is a substantial increase in the number of nursing places for older people.

Local authorities have been well funded to meet their new community care responsibilities. This year, the London boroughs have received a total of £850 million for community care—more than one fifth more than in 1993-94. The funds available will rise by a further £95 million for 1995-96. The London boroughs are well placed to support a continued growth in nursing and residential facilities outside hospital. We look to them to discharge that stewardship in a responsible manner. As Professor Jarman has pointed out, we need more "low-tech" beds, as he calls them. It is because of the Government's reforms and the money that we have put back into them that the expansion in services is at last becoming a reality.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South referred to primary care. Sadly, primary care in London has lagged behind other parts of the country, but it would be quite wrong not to draw her attention to the very substantial improvements that have been made since the Acheson report. Of the 31 main recommendations of the report in 1981, 26 were implemented within 10 years. Between 1978-91, the number of general practitioners in London increased by a further 310 from 3,523 to 3,833. Many other recommendations were implemented: the retirement age for GPs; higher payments in underprivileged areas; standards for the reimbursement of rent of surgeries; screening for people over 75; and the co-ordination, by community health experts, of district health authority services for children. The right hon. Lady would be quite wrong to fail to recognise the dramatic changes that have been under way, but there is clearly a need to do even more.

Over the past two years, we have already invested an additional £125 million in primary care, which is creating and supporting more than 1,000 projects in London's areas of greatest need. A transformation is under way. There are more than three times the number of practice nurses as five years ago. The GP contract, introduced in the face of bitter opposition from the Labour party, has brought an increase in child immunisation and cancer screening, of which my hon. Friends are so proud. Above all, the GP contract brought in extra payments for family doctors working in deprived areas. What hypocrisy it is for the Labour party to lecture us about poverty and ill health when it opposed that measure in the House.

Despite those achievements, however, there is more to be done. I am pleased to be able to announce that we shall be investing a further £85 million in primary care initiatives in London's most needy areas in 1995-96. That is a substantial sum. I know that my hon. Friends who represent areas outside London want it to be wisely and well spent, but it will enable us to implement our key objectives—to improve GP practices and other primary care premises; to increase the range of services that GPs can offer their patients; and to assist the development of health teams working in the community. It will include an investment of £20 million over two years in a new education programme for London GPs.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mrs. Bottomley: I do not intend to give way again. I have already given way many times, and I know that my hon. Friends are keen to speak. I am normally rebuked for giving way too much, so I hope that the House will bear with me.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We rarely engage in debates on London's health. If the Secretary of State is not prepared to give way, how on earth can we use our one opportunity to question her directly about matters of deep concern to all hon. Members?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): I said from the Chair the other day that I had long waited to hear a genuine point of order. I also said that it was very unlikely that I would do so in the near future, but that I lived in hope. I am not very satisfied with what I have heard today.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am between the devil and the deep blue sea, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should make it clear that I regard the Chair as the deep blue sea and the Opposition—otherwise. Madam Speaker often severely rebukes Front Benchers for speaking at great length. I realise that I have already spoken for longer than the right hon. Member for Derby, South, although I think that I have given way more times than she did, but we shall consult the record tomorrow.

The issues involved are enormously important. We want to introduce improved training programmes to attract and retain high quality family doctors, and to improve opportunities for GPs to maintain high standards where they are needed most. We are also considering further steps to help, in particular, smaller practices to recruit and retain practitioners and assistants. We want more and better GPs, providing better services; we want in London family doctor facilities and community teams of the range and quality that are already common elsewhere. We want more of the fundholders who have been the pioneers of change in primary care. I am pleased to say that we expect London and the south-east to match the rest of the country by April, with some 40 per cent. of its population covered by fundholders.

I also welcome the prospect of GPs forming groups to purchase services for their patients, and the news that Professor Jarman and others are to join the central London multi-fund.

We are targeting people with specific needs—the elderly, the homeless and people with mental health problems. In the current year, £10 million of additional money is being invested in better services for the mentally ill in London. I can also announce that at least the same amount will be available again in the coming year for the special needs of people with mental illnesses. A vast range of programmes is now in place around the capital to improve care in the community for mentally ill people.

There are schemes such as that run by the Hackney Sanctuary, which provides crisis support to help avoid the admission of patients to acute hospital beds, and there is a new residential scheme in Camden and Islington. There are other schemes in Hounslow, Lambeth, Hammersmith, Greenwich, Haringey and Croydon; throughout London there has been rapid investment in practical schemes to help those with mental illness cope in the community. Time and again, Opposition Members re-emphasise their commitment to the principles of care in the community; I ask them to recognise all that is being achieved, and to acknowledge that more will be done because of the extra money that the Government are committing.

I feel that, as we are discussing important and serious issues, I should set out what is happening, what has been achieved and the issues that remain to be tackled. My hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) referred to the importance of education and research. Those are fundamental to the reputation of London as a world leader in medical teaching and research. Bringing the different specialist centres together in the way that I have already described is difficult, but it is a vital part of securing the long-term objective.

The synergies which consolidation brings will help research thrive. Formal academic integration of pre-clinical medical education with the basic science faculties of the university of London will enhance the range of options for students, researchers and clinicians. *[Interruption.]* It is noteworthy that the Opposition greet with mirth and merriment issues that for many years have concerned Lord Flowers, Lord Annan and the vice-chancellor of London university. People feel deeply about these issues and they should be given proper priority as the changes take place.

We are working towards our vision which is based on four world-class hospital complexes clustered around four world-class colleges. The multi-faculty colleges will provide the engine room of basic science. This will be carried through in their associated medical schools and hospitals into clinical science and clinical research. It will allow the benefits, for example, of new advances in molecular biology and genetics—advances pioneered in this country—to have practical results in the care of patients.

We are making strong progress. All undergraduate medical schools proposed for merger are now committed to merge and are making plans to bring this about. The Institute of Psychiatry, associated with the Maudsley hospital, has entered into a formal association with King's college. A private Bill to enable the merger of King's college with the united medical and dental school of Guy's and St. Thomas's is currently passing through another place.

The Maudsley is the world's pre-eminent research institution of its type. People are already coming from all over the world to work there because of the great opportunities that it offers. Imperial college recently announced agreement by the Charing Cross and Westminster medical schools, the National Heart and Lung Institute and the Royal Postgraduate Medical School to merge with Imperial and the St. Mary's medical school to form a new Imperial medical school. The new school will make a significant contribution to both undergraduate and postgraduate education and to research. It will contain several teams of the highest international standing. These proposals will forge a brilliant alliance between some of our top clinical researchers and Imperial's scientific and engineering excellence.

The merged college will be focused on a new basic and life sciences building to be built at Imperial's Kensington site. The financial case is still being examined by the Higher Education Funding Council. However, I can announce to the House that I am prepared in principle to commit a substantial capital contribution to the scheme. As a result of this work, and the money with which the Government are prepared to back it, the new school should be admitting its first students in the autumn of 1998.

Our policies are also working to underpin the international reputation and excellence of University college hospital. It is making good progress in its association with the institutions based in Queen's square and has recently completed a financial case for the development of the Gower street site. This proposal has strong support from the academic and clinical community. I hope that formal consultation on the resulting service changes will begin before Easter.

I also commend to the House the private Bill which would enable the merger of Queen Mary Westfield college with Bart's and the London hospital medical colleges. These multi-faculty colleges with their clusters of hospitals in London will be ideally placed to take forward the highest calibre medical education and research. The critical mass of expertise within each centre will allow the widespread dissemination of best clinical practice.

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State has been speaking for 40 minutes. I accept that she has taken a number of interventions, but in the spirit of Jopling—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order and the hon. Gentleman knows it. This is a limited debate and many hon. Members wish to take part. Interventions of that nature do not help.

Mrs. Bottomley: I am coming to the end of my speech, but it would be wrong for the House not to be aware of how much is happening in terms of the investment in primary care and mental health services and how vital is the consolidation of medical research and teaching if we are to take pride in our national health service for the century ahead.

The Government will not shy away from what must be done. We utterly reject the Opposition's vacillation and evasion. We will have no truck with their moratoriums, their counsels of delay. We reject their plans for a health service run by councillors, which would inflict on our hospitals the same unholy alliance of bureaucrats and

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councillors as we saw in the Greater London council, which left thousands of Londoners isolated in inner London despair. As *The Economist* said:

"The choice, after all, lies between preserving Victorian glories and providing better health care for Londoners."

London deserves a health service that is fit for the 21st century. Much hard-fought ground has been won, momentum has been generated and much has been achieved. We wish to carry the services forward, accept the change and bring an end to uncertainty in the interests of medical research, staff and patients in London and throughout the country.

4.45 pm

Ms Tessa Jowell (Dulwich): I tried about half a dozen times during the Secretary of State's speech to ask questions, but I regret that she did not give me or a number of my hon. Friends the opportunity to intervene.

On Saturday night, I visited five accident and emergency departments; it is in those departments that pressures are most felt, because of lack of beds. I visited King's College hospital, which is used by most of my constituents, Homerton hospital in Hackney, North Middlesex hospital, Chase Farm and the Whittington, which is my local hospital. Each one except the Whittington was having what was described as its quietest night for weeks. As one sister put it, "Usually by now patients and trolleys are everywhere, coming out of the woodwork. It is chaos."

Each hospital had free beds. For example, the Homerton had 10 beds when I arrived but during the 45 minutes of my visit, five were filled. I was told by one of the sisters, "On a night like this, we do a little better than just cope." That is what is happening on an easy night in London's accident and emergency departments. In every hospital, the staff thought that they were having an easy time if they had any free beds at all. In each hospital, the circumstances of the past 12 weeks were described as barely tolerable for staff or patients.

On 24 January, at King's College hospital, there were 19 trolleys, each with a patient waiting for a bed to become free. On 6 February, also at King's, there were 15 patients waiting on trolleys. At the Homerton two weeks ago, 26 people could not be found beds and at the Whittington the weekend before last, an extra 37 beds had to be put up. During my visit, the staff thought that they were having a quiet night because the pressure was off, but only one of the hospitals had an occupancy of less than 98 per cent. The inner London chief executives' report, to which the Secretary of State referred, accepts that that is too high and that hospitals should aim for a bed occupancy of 85 per cent. if they are to deal with the fluctuations of demand. Ministers believe that better bed management will be the solution to the bed crisis.

One of the reports that accompanied the inner London chief executives' report made plain what passes at the moment for a bed management strategy . The report states:

"In most cases action is taken as occupancy approaches the hospital's 'danger' level".

It refers to

"the early discharge of patients by consultant led ward rounds...Clearance ward rounds were a common feature of hospital life . . . The cancellation of elective admissions or the restriction of elected work to urgent cases only . . . Use of the EBS system"

that is, the emergency bed system

"to restrict the hospital to its catchment area or to medically refereed cases".

I have the latest figures for the emergency bed system, which show a 100 per cent. increase in the number of patients admitted as a result of being medically refereed for the month of January— the intolerably pressurised month referred to by so many of those to whom I spoke on Saturday.

The report continues:

"Treat and transfer arrangements were not a common response. Experience suggested that in times of bed shortages other hospitals were generally unable to provide cover."

The report says that mixed-sex wards, and even mixed-sex bays, are now common. It points out that the transfer of patients between wards and, in some cases, between sites make compliance with the patients charter named nurse standard difficult. It also says:

"Putting up extra beds and the opening of closed wards and bays at very short notice were reported by most inner London Trusts"

There was also the

"Use of day or 5 day surgery wards for medical emergencies".

That is how hospitals are getting by; they are just coping day by day.

At the same time, the Secretary of State has introduced a new patients charter standard—70 per cent. of trolley waits to be admitted within 90 minutes of the decision to admit. Another patients charter standard about to be implemented is that of choice—for elective patients to choose to come into hospital to a mixed-sex ward, or to choose not to come into hospital if the only bed available is in a mixed-sex ward or mixed-sex bay.

What the Secretary of State will not do is accept responsibility. She sets those standards but then walks away from them. She says that it is all the responsibility of the purchaser, while taking even more money away from the purchasers, whose hospitals have to resort to trolleys and mixed-sex wards only because the right hon. Lady will not fund them to open the beds that her cuts have forced them to close.

The pressure is not just on acute beds but, as was recently reported, on intensive care beds—and with tragic consequences. Out of the hospitals that I visited on Saturday, on a quiet night, only two intensive care beds were available.

All this has resulted in another sort of folly. I shall cite a specific instance of the problem being encountered by one of my constituents, who is a consultant at Bart's. For the past two weeks he has been trying to operate on a 75-year-old woman who has a desperately serious form of cancer. She has been in hospital for three weeks being prepared for major surgery. The first time her operation was cancelled was just an hour before it was due to take place, because the intensive care bed that had been booked for her had been taken by another patient. Exactly the same happened again last week and there are now real fears that her condition will begin to deteriorate.

The problem is that there are four high-dependency beds at Bart's that have never been opened, thus requiring intensive-care beds to be used when patients could be better and more appropriately nursed in high-dependency beds. That sort of folly is putting patients' well-being at risk and sabotaging the best efforts of dedicated staff.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, unlike other hon. Members on occasions.

Does she agree that the nub of the matter is the responsibility of the Secretary of State? Can my hon. Friend suggest any reason why evidence given to a Select Committee on the serious matter of the London ambulance service should not, after examination by the Secretary of State, be the subject of a reply from her to any hon. Member pointing out points of logic and matters of fact? The Secretary of State has a responsibility to do that and she should have said so during her speech.

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend has made an important point. What causes us so much frustration, and what causes so much frustration and anger throughout London, is the extent to which the Secretary of State appears to have abdicated all responsibility for the chaos that she has created.

Every night, the folly of Ministers in refusing to accept the evidence is played out in the suffering of patients and the shattered morale of exhausted staff. All are victims of a Secretary of State who prefers to believe her own fairy-tale view of the world rather than confront the reality that she has created.

Florence Nightingale gave her name to the organisation of wards with beds in long straight lines—something that persists in some of our hospitals today. The Secretary of State has given her name to another sort of ward—the Bottomley ward, where patients on trolleys are lined up in corridors waiting for beds to become free.

What is also clear, and what was made patently clear to me during my visits on Saturday night, is that the confidence of both patients and staff has collapsed. So much for the primary-care-led national health service. Patients are voting with their feet. The loss of confidence among them means that instead of going to their general practitioners and facing what they know will be a long wait before a hospital appointment is offered, they short circuit that delay and go to the accident and emergency departments because they believe that that is the only way that they can be guaranteed seeing a doctor.

There is also evidence that 999 ambulance calls are not always appropriate, but again it is for the very reason that people have no confidence that if they go to their doctor they will be referred to hospital before their condition becomes worse. They believe that the only sure way of getting into hospital is to phone for an ambulance to take them there.

There also seems to be evidence of a loss of confidence among general practitioners, which is shown by the increasing tendency to make an immediate decision to refer a patient to hospital. A few years ago, doctors might have kept patients under review for hours or days. However, they now know that their patients will have to wait, so they feel that it is better to get them on the list early.

What is so dreadful about all this is that it is a direct result of ministerial action. The Government have gambled on the possibility that improved primary care will reduce the need for hospital beds. There is no evidence that that is the case; indeed, the contrary appears to be true. They have gambled on the belief that more work will be done on a day-care basis, thus reducing the need for in-patient beds. In fact, all the evidence shows that premature discharge after a day's surgery results in a rise in the rate of readmissions. The cynics would say that that might not be very good for the patients, but it increases the number of finished consultant episodes. That number goes up every time a patient walks through the door.

Hospital beds are being closed before the alternatives have been properly developed and their effectiveness tested in practice. It is a chaos of the Government's making, even on a quiet night in accident and emergency departments in London. As one sister put it:

"You want to do your best for patients but you can't, the pressure is too great, sometimes you cannot even get a patient a drink. We did not train as nurses only to be able to put sick people on trolleys."

If the Secretary of State continues to refuse to listen to the voice of the Opposition, or to the evidence that confronts her every day, perhaps she will consider the evidence in a report she commissioned from inner London chief executives. It said:

"On the basis of the evidence presented to us there are reasons for anxiety about the ability of the system to cope with a further round of bed closures without action to improve throughput and particularly arrangements for the care of the elderly."

I offer the Secretary of State another piece of advice. It comes from Robert Maxwell, in a press release about a report to be published by the King's Fund on Wednesday. He says:

"The pacing and sequence of change must take top priority. Because there is so little margin for error, there should be no reduction in services—whether for those with acute conditions, for continuing care of elderly people, or for those with mental health problems—until alternatives are in place. Accident and Emergency departments should not be closed until other ways of dealing with their work load are secure."

That simply is what we are asking for. We are asking the Secretary of State to accept the advice provided by her own inner London purchasers, and to open the beds that she has closed to relieve the intolerable pressure on the patients of London.

4.59 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): The motion invites us to recognise

"the Government's failure either to assess the health care needs of the area properly or to plan a programme by which those needs can be met".

I suggest that, in her speech, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health effectively refuted both those contentions. The facts and figures that she produced showed that needs have been assessed and that plans have been put in hand to meet them. The assertions in the motion are not true in the part of south-east London with which I am especially familiar—my constituency Bromley. What is happening in Bromley is not unique.

The health authority and family health services authority in Bromley have been working as one for several years, chaired by a very able lady and a most effective board of directors—which include a prominent local member of the Labour party—and run by a professional and energetic chief executive. Bromley health authority has assessed the needs of the local community and it has planned and begun to execute a programme to meet those needs.

Bromley health authority has carried out extensive surveys of the population, their health and their mobility. It has assessed the population's diverse health needs. It has undertaken public consultation and it has organised public meetings and private groups—a process that is continuing with small groups of local people being invited to show their expectations of local health services. As a result of that process, it has developed, among other things, a local rest care service. It has brought plastic

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surgery consultants into local clinics. It has established a local alcohol detoxification service, run by a voluntary body, on whose management committee I sit. The authority has established local mental health teams and devoted extra resources to help promotion. All those policies have stemmed from local consultation.

The health authority has been pursuing the targets in the patients charter, especially in relation to reducing waiting times for both in-patients and out-patients. It has encouraged the use of day surgery. It has had to handle reduced funding, resulting from the operation of the weighted capitation formula, but it has remained within its cash limit and within its budgets. A part of the reason for that success is the operation of the internal market, criticised frequently, and in their motion, by the Opposition.

Bromley health authority has been able to improve the terms of the contracts that it has negotiated, both in the health authority area and outside it. For example, it has been able to save some £500,000 on placements in nursing and residential homes, without reducing the number of placements. The bulk of treatment is undertaken in the health authority area in four hospitals, some of whose facilities are in old and out-of-date buildings. Our great need is to have one modern, fully-equipped acute general hospital.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be aware that plans are well advanced to redevelop Farnborough hospital to produce a new hospital with the latest facilities for acute services, and with a modern accident and emergency department. I hope that, when those proposals come to her desk, she will give them a favourable response, so that my constituents can have the service to which they are entitled.

Even when we have our acute general hospital, and notwithstanding changes in the pattern of medical provision, which my right hon. Friend outlined in her speech, some patients from outer London and further afield will still come to inner-London hospitals, including Guy's hospital, for specialist treatment, as they have been doing for some years. I remind hon. Members that, some years before the Tomlinson proposals, discussions had been taking place between both administrative and clinical staff at Guy's and St. Thomas's hospitals to affect a rationalisation of services and a better use of the resources available. Those discussions, however, did not come to any consensus and, 12 months ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State stepped in and issued what I think was described as a strategic direction.

I give my right hon. Friend all credit for at least doing something to try to break the logjam, but the more I consider her decision, the more I fear that it may have been based on inadequate and inaccurate information. The effect of her direction would be to close the accident and emergency department at Guy's, to move most in-patient services from Guy's to St. Thomas's, and to make Guy's mainly a teaching and research hospital. Not surprisingly, there was widespread reaction to those proposals, and it led to the setting up of the "Save Guy's Hospital" campaign, chaired by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), the local Member of Parliament, and co-chaired by the hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) and myself. Hon. Members will be aware that, among other things, the campaign promoted a petition that attracted well over 1 million signatures, and that was presented in the House just over a year ago.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): It was presented just over a week ago.

Mr. Sims: I apologise—it was presented just over a week ago. It is a year that we have been working on this matter. The proposals and alternative suggestions have been the subject of detailed discussion and debate.

In the interests of other hon. Members who wish to make speeches, I shall not detain the House by going through all the considerations, but I shall make three points. First, hundreds of my constituents, and many of the constituents of my hon. Friends, travel daily to, and work in, the City of London. Surely the City needs an A and E department not only for the everyday accidents and illnesses that occur whenever a large number of people are gathered together, but for major incidents such as a terrorist outrage or a train crash, which might happen at any time in the City. With the closure of the A and E department at Bart's hospital, the continuation of an A and E facility at Guy's hospital is essential.

Secondly, thousands of patients throughout south-east London and, indeed, south-east England, are referred for specialist consultation and treatment to Guy's. They, their relatives and their friends have maximum ease of access to that hospital, which is sited literally next door to London Bridge station, with rail services throughout the south-east, and to a large bus station. Apart from all the other considerations, closing the facilities at Guy's and moving them to St. Thomas's would be very much to the disadvantage of a substantial section of the south-east England community. One feature of the Guy's site is Philip Harris house, to which reference has been made. It was designed and equipped specifically to provide the latest treatment and specialist services at a cost approaching £150 million. Surely it cannot be right not to use that building for the purpose for which it was constructed and equipped.

The "Save Guy's Hospital" campaign commissioned KPMG to report on the implications of the proposals and to suggest alternatives, and the campaign made its own proposals. They are being considered and will reach my right hon. Friend's desk in due course. I realise that she cannot comment now, but when it is time to reach a decision, I hope that my right hon. Friend will meet me and hon. Members from all parts of the House, together with those particularly concerned, to hear our views. I am sure that my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Minister of State want, like me, to ensure the best health care for the people of London and the south-east.

5.10 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am grateful to be called, and grateful to the Labour party for choosing this subject for debate. We have been around this circuit before, but clearly it is necessary to go around again.

It will not surprise the Secretary of State and the Minister to hear that health care is chief among all the issues that currently preoccupy my constituents. That issue probably preoccupies Londoners most, too. Saturday's conference at the Queen Elizabeth II centre,

organised by the *Evening Standard*, was attended by more than 1,000 people. That shows the interest and concern of the people living in our capital.

The hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) pointed out that that concern about London health care does not stop at the Greater London boundary. Traditionally, concern about London's health services is felt throughout the country and all over the world, because patients, students and practitioners are all part of the global network on whom the London health service has always depended and will continue to depend.

At present, there is a dialogue of the deaf. The motion say that there is a

"continuing crisis of health care in London".

The Government answer, "Oh, no, there isn't." The Government say that the health service is getting better. That gets the response, "Oh, no, it isn't." Somehow, the messages are not getting through.

However well the Government think they are doing, they have not persuaded the public—certainly not in the capital—that they are doing well.

Mrs. Barbara Roche (Hornsey and Wood Green): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that one of my constituents, a man of 78, had a prostate operation at the Whittington hospital cancelled because of lack of funds, and has been given no future date? While such incidents continue, the Government will find it impossible to persuade the people of London that they should have confidence in the capital's health service.

Mr. Hughes: Such incidents certainly lower confidence in the system. To be fair, the Government understand that. Recently, waiting lists in London have grown—there is no argument about that. Both the number of people on the lists and the time that they must wait have increased.

The public think that more money should be in the kitty for the national health service. I appreciate that this is not principally a decision for health service Ministers, and we heard an announcement today about more money, which is welcome. The Government must not be troubled by any belief among the public that money should not be spent on health care delivery, because the opposite is true. Opinion polls show that 80 per cent. hold that view. However, the public are suspicious about the £1 billion spent on the management sector of the NHS.

I am not arguing that London should get more than its fair share of the cake. A fair share is, of course, difficult to determine. It should be based not just on residence but on the number of outsiders who use the London health service—the hon. Member for Chislehurst and others spoke of such referrals. People are still not persuaded that the recently revised weighted capitation formula is just. It is not understood, and many suppliers and purchasers do not think it is fair. My local health commission believes that it should be given another £100 million a year. The money that is available is not shared equitably. The capital has a huge mix of deprived and not-deprived areas, and funds do not seem to reach deprived areas to anything like the extent they should.

The problem is not a lack of facts or accurate facts, but, because of their complexity, the facts are subject to all sorts of interpretations and misinterpretations. It is crucial that decisions are based on up-to-date, accurate facts.

Of course the Government's amendment is true to some extent, because Greater London's population has been declining. Of course it is right that people who do not need to come London are treated elsewhere. Of course there have been desperately needed developments in primary care. When the Minister visited my constituency, he saw a much better GPs' surgery than before, when it was in an old building down the road. However, we cannot spend more money on primary care—which I welcome—to the detriment of necessary acute care for Londoners whose acute care centre is the district general hospital.

If the figure for beds per capita in London is lower than the national average, and if waiting lists are larger and longer than the national average, I hope that the Minister agrees that the question is not the number of beds that exist but the number needed. At present, London does not have the beds it needs. I accept that fewer are needed than five, 10 or 20 years ago, but the current number is insufficient.

Beds are often 100 per cent. full. The inner-London chief executives have just said that 85 per cent. was a safe bed occupancy rate. The hon. Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) said that that is rarely, if ever, the case. I argue not for an ever-increasing number of beds but for enough, and not to make it look as though more patients are being treated by throwing others out so quickly that they must be readmitted the next day or week—particularly the elderly—because they are prematurely discharged and returned home for inadequate care.

I do not oppose the idea of a review and of the Government saying, "We must grab the problems of London's health service by the neck and solve them." What I oppose is the fact that decisions are taken on the basis of information that is inadequate or inaccurate, and which is not then brought up to date.

I give a specific example. Professor Tomlinson now says that he was not given all the information he needed. The most contentious example is the fact that when he was shown the trend in the number of people admitted to hospital beds, he was shown only the figures for the most recent months before his report, and was not shown the figures for the period before that. The figures for the couple of months before the report showed a downswing, whereas the previous year's figures showed a consistent increase. Such a misunderstanding, which was not Professor Tomlinson's fault but a result of inaccurate information, led to conclusions that are now working their way through the system.

Since then, Professor Jarman has shown that Professor Tomlinson was wrong; Professor Tomlinson has admitted that he was in part wrong. In the past couple of weeks, the inner London chief executives have brought matters up to date since Jarman. On the radio this morning, the Minister said, referring to Tomlinson:

"nothing has really changed since then."

Some things have changed, and I can prove that to him. In addition, some of Professor Tomlinson's conclusions were wrong because he was misinformed.

Let the Minister have his review, and let him look at the evidence. I do not think that he is acting in bad faith. Let his evidence be accurate, and let it be updated by the facts. The review will then have the confidence of the people of London. The analysis must be right, and the changes must be brought into focus and accurately

[Mr. Hughes]

represented. For whatever reason, many more people have gone into accident and emergency units in the past year than in previous years. I do not know why, but I know that it is a fact. If it is a fact, it must be taken into account.

I am not here to defend vested interests in the professions. However, specialists, who are perceived by the Government to have vested interests, are often specialists in great institutions, which are not only great institutions, but the places that treat the poorest and the most deprived in our communities. They are the most important institutions.

I have no compunction about saying in the House that the most valuable building in my constituency is Guy's hospital. Unarguably, it has done the most good for the most people over the longest period. The patients and the taxpayers are the only vested interests about which I am concerned—the people who pay for and use the service. What do they want?

The people who pay for and use the service want large hospitals for specialist services. I understand all the arguments about that and I understand that having small accident and emergency units without adequate back-up is no good. However, there is no theological answer to the question of what the right size is.

Above all, a different view should be taken about accident and emergency departments. Other specialties are much more high-tech and can be more limited in number around the country. There should not be replication of a service, whether oncology, renal services or paediatric services, between one hospital and the hospital next door, because that would be a waste of resources. There should be rationalisation and consolidation.

However, services that the community needs should be located where the community is. It is no good—taking the argument to its logical conclusion—having a massive hospital with wonderful facilities that is not near enough to be of use to the people it is meant to serve. One cannot make decisions irrespective of the location of the communities and the users.

There is one other point about which I want to persuade Ministers. All acute general hospitals should have elective beds—beds that are not used for emergencies, to which people can be admitted to have operations for which they have waited. People should not have the experience of the constituent of the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), who kept being told that he could not come in because of emergency cases. All acute general hospitals should have ring-fenced elective beds.

London communities are just as entitled to community acute health care as all other communities. Let us assume that my constituency has the same population as the county of Herefordshire. No one argues that people in Herefordshire should go to Birmingham for less specialist treatment. They should get treatment in Herefordshire, and the same point should apply to London. London also needs low-dependency beds and—this is hugely important—nursing homes and residential homes where there are low-dependency care opportunities for the elderly. In inner London, there are hardly any.

I want the Government to get things right. The problem is that people do not have confidence in the process because the precedent does not give them confidence. Many times, facilities have closed and we have not had a replacement service to come to the rescue or, in many cases, a better service. People are, therefore, sceptical and need to be persuaded. Above all, if there is to be change, people need to know that the alternatives are in place and that they are working well.

I conclude with the example about which, as the Minister knows, I am most concerned.

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I have listened with interest to the hon. Gentleman, and I underpin his point that the momentum needs to be maintained. Before he moves on to what I know to be a subject close to his heart, would he tell the House what he thinks about Labour's proposal that there should simply be a review and a total moratorium?

Mr. Hughes: I can answer that question. I do not think that we can ever have a standstill, because the patterns of health care and of need never stand still. I am not arguing that we should stop everything for an indefinite period. I am arguing that there should be a perpetual review, with periodical decisions every five or 10 years, so that everybody knows what we are talking about.

At the moment, we should work within a timetable set by the Government; they are perfectly entitled to set such a timetable. I shall suggest how we could take decisions in a way that would achieve the right results. I am trying to be helpful, because I believe that we have to break through some of the traditional failures in the health care structure in London.

We must have decisions that command confidence. I take the example of Guy's and St. Thomas's. According to the proposals, the accident and emergency unit at Guy's will not be run down until 1996 at the earliest. Ministers can go with the existing proposals and say that they will not look at things again. They can say that they will close the unit and that the provision will shift. That is setting one hospital against another. Such a decision set Bart's against the London hospital, and it is now setting Tommy's against Guy's. The decision sets people against each other, because it is taken by a few people behind closed doors.

Alternatively, Ministers could say, "This is the total money you will have. You work it out. You decide what your priorities are and where your services should be." The great benefit of that would be that the hospitals would have to work together and come to a conclusion. The Minister could say to us in south London, "This is the money; you will not get any more, because of the way in which the contracts work. You make the decision."

I guarantee that the GPs, the community health councils, the Members of Parliament, the local councils and the community would agree to make that decision. We would make decisions to rationalise across the Guy's and St. Thomas's sites, but we might well decide that the priority was to open Philip Harris house for its full purpose, and to keep accident and emergency units on both sites.

I now turn to the reason why Ministers have to get it right. I am trying to help them not to get it wrong again. On 25 July 1991, the Prime Minister wrote to Peter Griffiths, who was then chief executive of Guy's hospital. He said:

"Thank you so much for helping to make our visit yesterday to Guy's Hospital such a successful and memorable occasion.

It was most interesting to learn more of the Guy's and Lewisham trust and its work. I was also struck by the positive attitude of not just the Board or senor management, but of all the staff I spoke to. I am sure Guy's will continue to lead the way in the development of the Trust concept throughout the country.

Norma and I would be grateful if you could pass on our congratulations to all those who helped to organise yesterday's 'Topping Out' ceremony and visit."

That letter was written four years ago. Today, there is not wonderful morale at Guy's hospital, there is not great confidence that it will lead the world in the development of the new flagship concepts of the trust, and the local community does not feel reassured.

On 6 February, a note was sent internally to directors by two people in the local health commission, entitled "Meeting the Needs of the Residents of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe". In summary, it said:

"We have demonstrated that the proposed acute changes will in the short-term make the poor health care provision in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe worse."

There is no excuse for the Government making decisions that make things worse. I hope that they will listen to those of us who are trying to ensure that they do not make mistakes, so that, for everybody in London, especially those who use the London health service, the health service can be better, as—I hope—we all wish to see.

5.29 pm

Mr. David Congdon (Croydon, North-East): I welcome the debate. It is the third one on London's health in the past 10 months. It is unfortunate, however, that Labour Members have deliberately sought to exaggerate the problems in London to try to give greater force to their argument. I intend to outline what I consider to be some of the problems, because it would be foolish to try to pretend that there are no problems when change is being engineered and implemented in the capital city.

Any changes on the scale outlined in "Making London Better" and before those in the Tomlinson report, were bound to cause a degree of uncertainty. Change always causes uncertainty, and always causes fear. That has not been helped by Opposition Members—and, dare I say, some consultants and doctors in the hospitals concerned—whipping up that fear. It has made it much more difficult to conduct a rational debate on the important health changes in London.

No one likes to see great institutions under threat of closure. My plea to the Minister is that, while we must rationalise the provision the London—I shall say why in a moment—we should tread very carefully before we succumb to grandiose schemes involving millions of pounds of capital expenditure, on a wing and a prayer that they will lead to minor revenue savings.

I do not want to develop that point too much, but I make it with particular reference to proposals for St. Bartholomew's and the Royal London, which involve £250 million of capital expenditure. Coming from an outer-London borough, where we have always pressed for further developments in our district general hospital, as indeed has Bromley, the neighbouring borough, I repeat that we should tread with great caution before we accept such grandiose proposals.

We must also recognise that the status quo in London is not an option. It was interesting that the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) did not say that this afternoon, unlike her predecessor, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), and, indeed, Baroness Jay. Most people involved in the national health service and with an interest in health matters have recognised for many years that there has been an over-concentration of teaching hospitals and resources in inner London. To one who represents an outer-London constituency, that has been only too apparent on the ground, since outer London has far fewer health resources than inner London.

There has been much bandying about of statistics, yet they appear to be a moveable feast, as reports are published two to the dozen. As far as I can make out, spending in inner London, as quoted on previous occasions, has been 47 per cent. above the national average per person, excluding spending on the special health authorities. Including spending on special health authorities, the figure rises to 57 per cent.

Much play has been made of beds. My understanding, again on figures previously quoted, is that in inner London there are 3.3 acute beds per thousand of the population, compared with a national average of 2.33 per thousand. Even today, in the second King's Fund London monitor report, which I received this morning and have studied at great speed to see if the statistics add up—

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): They do not add up.

Mr. Congdon: The hon. Gentleman is right, they do not add up. The problem with the report is that it talks of London as a whole. None the less, it says that there are 8 per cent. more available acute beds per capita in London than there are in England as a whole. What is more significant is that 40 per cent. of those beds are in inner London. There is a preponderance of beds in inner London. We also know that the length of stay in teaching hospitals in London is 15 per cent. above the average for the provinces.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South made great play of the fact that, in a sudden surge of inspiration, she had managed to determine that somehow the figures for London were not valid, because London was no better off than comparable cities up and down the country. Yet we knew that, because it was clearly stated in the original King's Fund report, which preceded the Tomlinson report and "Making London Better".

Therefore, we are not debating London only, because the situation in London is comparable to that in other cities that also have to get to grips with problems. However, that does not negate the need to make progress in London. Despite all those figures—possibly because of the apparent over-provision—London has poorer primary care.

I shall address some other aspects of health care in London. I was very pleased that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) mentioned the funding formula, because I think that it is important. Again, it was interesting that the right hon. Member for Derby, South did not remind the House that the original changes to funding, which have affected London so seriously, go back an awful long time, to the doctor who was a Minister of State for Health, Lord Owen. He introduced the resource allocation working party formula, which took funds away from London. Certainly Croydon has suffered from that ever since.

There have also been recent changes to the funding formula which benefit Croydon. Whereas, before, the borough was about on target, it is now £6 million under

[Mr. Congdon]

target. However, I was somewhat disconcerted to learn from figures that I received only today from the South Thames regional health authority that the South East London health authority, which was apparently £5 million under target, is now £4 million over target.

I urge Ministers to look again at the funding formula. I know that they have relied heavily on work done by York university, but there is still concern that too much weight in the formula is given to the age profile of the population and the number of elderly people, rather than to deprivation factors, which clearly have a significant impact on health spending.

We are well aware of the other pressures for change. The switch from secondary to primary care is leading each purchaser to reduce the percentage of funding it spends on secondary care. There is a welcome trend of more patients being treated near home. I know that my hon. Friends who represent constituencies outside London welcome the fact that their constituents do not have to travel to London for care, and that they can receive such treatment at their local district general hospitals.

We have also heard about the significant switch to day surgery. It is obvious that beds are not needed for day surgery. At my local hospital, the Mayday University hospital, 90 per cent. of cataract operations are now carried out on a day basis, much to the benefit of the patient. Micro-techniques have led to much less invasive surgery, which also means shorter stays in hospital. All those pressures justify the general strategic direction that the reforms and changes are taking in London.

I mentioned earlier the King's Fund, the Tomlinson report and "Making London Better". It was significant that "Making London Better" scaled down the figures for bed losses as outlined in the Tomlinson report.

Although it was not really a target, "Making London Better" refers to a bed loss of between 2,000 and 2,500 beds in inner London in comparison with the 1990-91 figure. In last October's debate, I drew attention to the fact that, if London could improve its efficiency of bed usage to the level of other areas in England, that target could be achieved easily. If London could reach the level of 14 beds per 1,000 in terms of the population in inner London, 2,700 beds could be taken out of the system.

That is not the end of the story. There is clearly a serious dichotomy between the strategic direction and analysis of the situation in London and what is happening on the ground today. I castigated Opposition Members earlier for over-exaggerating the problem. I believe that they do that, but it would be foolish to deny that there is pressure on beds in London.

One need only visit accident and emergency departments to witness the pressure that they are working under. I visited the A and E department at Mayday hospital recently. I did not visit at its busiest time, but it was very cramped. I am pleased that major redevelopment is going on at the moment to provide proper facilities. When facilities are cramped and there are problems with getting people into beds in hospitals, there is the dreadful phenomenon of people having to spend time on trolleys. That is clearly unacceptable.

The picture with regard to health in London is confusing, because it is rapidly changing. Reference has already been made to the report entitled "Hospital Services for Londoners" by the inner London purchasers. The report makes several points. Interestingly, it refers to the fact that accident and emergency attendances had not changed significantly. That is surprising, because, from anecdotal evidence, some people had felt that A and E attendances had increased.

It is noteworthy that emergency admissions, whether via an ambulance on a 999 call, or via an ambulance bringing in an urgent case from a GP, have increased significantly. One of the difficulties that I have found with the inner London purchasers' report is that it does not provide the figures. It does not give the scale of the increase.

I am aware that my district general hospital, Mayday in Croydon, has seen an increase of 25 per cent. in emergency and urgent admissions in comparison to January last year. We have had a very mild winter this year. As far as I am aware, there has been no great spread of illnesses, such as a large epidemic of influenza, which would have had a significant impact on such admissions.

I do not know whether the increase in Mayday's emergency and urgent admissions is mirrored across London. I would be surprised if it was, because the figure is extraordinary and it cannot be explained by straightforward demographic factors. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that that aspect is considered.

I wonder whether all A and E departments in London are pulling their weight and taking their share of cases that come their way. I wonder whether some are closing their doors from time to time, putting pressure on other hospitals. If that is the case, it would clearly be unacceptable.

While we are right to press on with the strategic drift of the changes in London, we must be cautious about losing further acute beds too quickly in London. I have received figures only today—today seems to be my lucky day—which show the bed position in London until March 1994. It would obviously be helpful if there were more up-to-date figures.

I was particularly interested in the bed loss figures in inner London. Compared with "Making London Better" and Tomlinson, and the target of 2,000 to 2,500 bed losses in five years, 1,400 beds have been lost in inner London. It is interesting that, between 1991-92 and 1992-93, the bed loss was comparatively small, but it accelerated between 1992-93 and 1993-94. It is possible that that, in conjunction with the implementation of care in the community, in respect of which we know that there is a problem in getting elderly people out of hospital quickly enough because of problems with discharge, is a factor in influencing the pressure on admissions to hospitals in London.

From talking to my district general hospital, my impression is that it is quite possible to reduce surgical beds even further, because of the advances in medical technology to which I referred earlier. However, it is difficult to reduce medical beds which tend to be used mainly by the elderly. Indeed, my hospital has had to open additional medical beds to cope with the demand, and I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider that aspect in more detail.

In addition to the inner London purchasers' report, the clinical studies advisory group has produced a very useful report into A and E admissions and how A and E departments should be organised. I refer to those two reports because they make important recommendations.

There is no doubt that there is a need to improve the management of A and E departments and to ensure that they have proper observation wards and, perhaps even more importantly, admission wards, so that people do not spend time on trolleys. The inner London purchasers' report states that some hospitals are operating to too tight a margin.

If there is very high demand in a hospital, particularly on the emergency admissions side, the inner London purchasers' report makes it clear that the occupancy level of beds must be lower than would otherwise be the case if the level of emergency admissions was lower. That stands to reason, because if a hospital caters primarily for elective surgery, with very few emergency admissions, it can plan for that, and it does not need the slack for emergencies. However, if a hospital has a very high percentage of emergencies, there could be a sudden surge, which could completely disrupt the hospital. That hospital therefore needs greater spare capacity.

The inner London purchasers' report states that hospitals should operate at a level of about 85 per cent. I do not know whether that is a good suggestion or a bad one, but it must be borne very carefully in mind. The report also suggests that, in assessing bed requirements, one particular formula to be applied across London is not necessarily the correct approach. The health authority should assess the needs in its area before reaching a conclusion about bed requirements.

The report makes another important point. We know that London has more acute beds per 1,000 of the population than elsewhere. Interestingly, it has fewer nursing home places. That causes more pressure on medical beds, and that is why we must proceed with caution before reducing those beds further.

The report by the clinical studies advisory group is interesting, covering issues such as bed management. That issue is crucial in any hospital. Too often, there are problems in getting patients on to wards. However, sometimes beds are being kept vacant by consultants. Hospitals must manage beds properly.

It is also important to ensure proper consultant cover in A and E. Too often, patients turn up in A and E and find that the more junior doctors are on duty.

The NHS does an excellent job catering for most people when they are ill. If one is seriously ill or in a major road accident, generally speaking one will be treated very well indeed. But it is not acceptable to have the main entrance to the NHS in A and E departments which are often not staffed by senior consultants and which are often short of facilities for getting patients out of A and E and into the main part of the hospital. That aspect of health care is critical, and it must be given priority.

I shall say a couple of brief words about some specific changes in London, of which great play has been made. There has been concern about the closure of Bart's A and E department, but I am bound to say that, given that it catered for only 30,000 attendances a year, it was right to centralise facilities elsewhere. Indeed, those facilities have been expanded. I welcome also investments in A and E at various centres within London, including King's, the Homerton, and the Mayday in Croydon.

I do not think that there is a crisis in the health service in London. The changes that have been set in train are proceeding in the right direction. However, I agree with the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, who made the plea that responsibility for bringing about those changes in the configuration of particular trusts should be left to them, rather than be determined by the centre—but with the one key reservation that I have mentioned.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will not agree to massive capital injections where they are not necessary. I urge my hon. Friend to be cautious in relation to further acute bed reductions, given the evident pressures on beds at present. I am happy to support the amendment.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. We have 39 minutes before the winding-up speeches commence, and four hon. Members hope to catch my eye. I hope that they will be successful.

5.51 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): The hon. Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) talked about Opposition Members whipping up fears, concerns and anxieties. If he had been at Saturday's conference, which was organised by the *Evening Standard*, to which reference has been made, he would have seen for himself that such fears, anxieties and concerns need no whipping up and that they are genuine.

I shall say something about the lack of strategic planning, control and accountability in London. I start with the London ambulance service. It has been apparent to the general public for many years that things are wrong with the London ambulance service. In 1991, I was involved in a report that was produced by the Association of London Authorities, entitled "London's Ambulances—a Service in Crisis". At about the same time, the National Union of Public Employees produced a report spelling out the difficulties that the London ambulance service faced. Those reports went to Mr. Wilby, the chief executive of the London ambulance service, and to the right hon. Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), the then Secretary of State for Health, and they did nothing about the matter.

We then had the computer crash in October 1992, when the Minister and the Secretary of State said that they would address the serious problems. Since then, we have had the Wells report, which confirmed what Opposition Members had been saying for a long time—that is, that there had been a history of underinvestment and a lack of funding within the London ambulance service. When the Wells report recognised that and made recommendations, the Secretary of State said that it was nothing to do with her and that it was a matter for the region.

I now refer to the contrast in accountability in the London ambulance service and the London fire and civil defence authority. My hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has called it a tale of two services. The London fire brigade provides a first-rate service; the London ambulance service does not. The London fire brigade meets its performance targets; the London ambulance service does not. The London fire brigade successfully introduced a computerised mobilising system; the London ambulance service did not. The London fire

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brigade has successfully set about revising and improving its management structure and working practices, whereas the London ambulance service has not.

The difference between the London ambulance service and the London fire and civil defence authority is that the London fire brigade is accountable to a body of responsible elected representatives from each London borough. We would not have had the crisis in the London ambulance service if we had had the accountability that we have in the LFCDA.

The London ambulance service has an appointed board that meets in secret. Not only are its minutes not available, but its agendas are not available for inspection, either. I understand that its minutes were not even available to the Page inquiry, which investigated problems within the London ambulance service.

Let me deal with another aspect of the lack of control and the lack of accountability. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) has been trying to ascertain figures for the number of hospitals in London that have closed since 1979 and the number of beds that have closed. He has had a very hard task of that within the Library, because he has been told that there is no central source of that information. The Department of Health does not even collect the number of hospitals any more, let alone details of their closures.

After much research, my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton found that between 1979 and 1993-94 the total number of NHS hospital beds in London fell by a staggering 49 per cent., from 64,850 to 33,120. Acute beds fell by 45 per cent. and non-acute beds by 53 per cent. That is one of the consequences of the Government's policies and one of the reasons why the crisis exists. Unlike the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East, I believe that there is a crisis within the health service in London.

I now refer to what some might think is a parochial issue, but it shows quite clearly the lack of accountability and the lack of control within the national health service in London. The catalogue of local disasters in the Greenwich area was put before the House in an Adjournment debate on 28 January last year. In that debate, I expressed my concern about the management of Greenwich health care trust. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) and I called for the chief executive's resignation. I felt that somebody should be responsible. Somebody should be accountable, particularly when that person, Mr. Bruce Joyce, appears to have been one of the 10 highest-paid chief executives in the country. I was pleased to learn from the new trust managers that Mr. Joyce had not claimed any performance-related pay when he left the service. What a pity. On the record of his negative performance, he probably would have owed us something.

I am disturbed to read, however, in the *Woolwich and Plumstead News Shopper* that a BBC documentary alleges that Mr. Joyce, who retired to spend more time with his family, received a pay-off of between £200,000 and £400,000. Unfortunately, no one at the trust was available to comment. The Minister is available tonight, and I await his comment with interest.

Let me now deal with a matter that I have raised with the Minister. In April 1993, the Brook hospital took delivery of a second-hand magnetic resonance imaging scanner. In about September of that year, it came to my attention that the scanner was not working. It was alleged that there was something peculiar about the way in which the purchase had been arranged, that staff had not been properly trained, and that the scanner was incompatible with other equipment. I received assurances that the staff had been trained, that the scanner was compatible, that it was a shared purchase between the region and the Brook hospital, and that it was settling in and would be up and running soon. It was not.

I raised the matter with the Secretary of State on 29 October 1993. On the same day, I asked her how many beds had been closed and how many operations had been cancelled for financial reasons. The hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), the Under-Secretary of State, told me that the Department of Health did not keep such information and that the scanner was nothing to do with the Secretary of State; it was

"a matter for managers and clinicians".—[*Official Report*, 29 October 1003; Vol. 230, c. *835*.]

The Minister referred me back to the trust, which referred me to the region. The scanner—£500,000 of hardware—had still not scanned a single patient. On 18 January 1994, I queried the purchasing arrangements with the Secretary of State. That time, I was referred by the Under-Secretary of State to the chairman of South-East Thames regional health authority.

I raised the matter in an Adjournment debate in January 1994. Half a million pounds-worth of scanner was sitting idle while £116,000 a year was being paid to a private hospital to provide a scanning service. Eight months after the scanner was purchased, the Under-Secretary of State said:

"I share the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Woolwich about the commissioning of the MRI scanner, but, following the trust's inquiries into the matter, we will ensure that any procedural shortfalls are addressed. I understand that a meeting is to be held shortly."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 1994; Vol. 236, c. 600.]

On 15 December 1994—18 months after the scanner was delivered, 15 months after I raised the matter with the trust, 14 months after I raised the matter with the Secretary of State and 11 months after the Under-Secretary said that a meeting was to be held shortly and that shortfalls would be addressed—Greenwich health care trust and the South Thames regional health authority put out a joint press statement that they would be disposing of the scanner, which had never worked. Following an independent district auditor's review, they admitted weaknesses in the procurement procedures, breaches of the region's standing financial instructions and weaknesses in the trust's management of the project. Both the chief executive and the chairman of the trust have now departed. At least the new incoming acting chairman, who inherited the mess and a variety of others, admitted that the episode had

"hurt the Trust and the taxpayer."

It has been revealed that of the £416,000 purchase price, £117,000 came directly from the region and the other £299,000 came from Greenwich health authority's charitable trust funds. That one third of a million pounds was not taxpayers' money, but money donated by local people and grateful patients with an affection for their local hospitals. The money was often left in wills and legacies for improvements to local health services and added comforts for people at local hospitals.

That piece of equipment—although installed in a local hospital—was not for a local purpose. It was for the region's specialist neurosciences department, which the region and the Secretary of State had already agreed should move to King's College hospital in Lambeth in the spring of 1995. Why was the local health authority inveigled by the region into using local charitable moneys for a regional service that was about to transfer out of the area?

I have asked the region to reimburse the local charitable funds, but the regional chairman tells me that that would be impossible as it would be ultra vires. But if the region breached its own standing financial procedures, and that went unattended by the Secretary of State for so long, was not the purchase ultra vires in the first place? If the region cannot reimburse the funds, I believe that the Secretary of State should.

I shall refer briefly to psychiatric services. It is a year since the report into the Clunis affair, and a year since the Health Select Committee published its report, "Better Off in the Community". Both pointed to the fact that there is a crisis in psychiatric care within the capital.

Psychiatrists across the capital have warned in recent months that the Government's care in the community programme cannot cope with the tide of demand for hospital beds for people with mental illness in London. Studies have shown that, across the capital, the average unit has a bed occupancy rate of between 100 per cent. and 120 per cent. What are psychiatrists to do in a crisis when all the beds in London are full and there are no beds throughout the south of England?

Last September, a survey by the Royal College of Psychiatrists revealed that, during one week, 84 people in London who needed hospital treatment were turned away, while a further 24 were prematurely discharged. The college calculated that an extra 426 beds were needed immediately to deal with the unmet need.

In my area, the bed occupancy rate is 120 per cent. When space runs out, patients are referred to other hospitals—often private hospitals—as extra-contractual referrals, sometimes as far afield as Woking or Oxford. Finding an extra-contractual bed is no easy task. Local psychiatrists have told me that it is not uncommon for calls to be made to up to 35 different hospitals before a place can be found, with patients having to wait 24 to 36 hours to be placed.

In 1990, researchers at Central Middlesex hospital predicted a bed famine if London's mental health beds continued to be closed. I do not dispute what the hon. Member for Croydon, North-East said about the need for change, but it is the pace of change that concerns us. It needs to be balanced change. The rundown and closure of beds and institutions without adequate alternatives being provided is causing the crisis in the capital's health services, and a crisis it is.

In support of the plans to cut beds still further, the Secretary of State relied heavily not only on Tomlinson but on an earlier report by the King's Fund. She appears less keen to accept the King's Fund's subsequent findings in "London—The Key Facts", which was published last April. The document stated that

"the capital's health care needs have been underestimated. There are now good reasons for believing that London merits a larger—not smaller—share of the NHS cake".

The Secretary of State also appears unwilling to accept the King's Fund's proposition that purchasing power for hospital and community health services in London

"should be increased by approximately £200 million".

Professor Jarman's findings have been mentioned by my hon. Friends, and they were reinforced by a recent update by James Raferty of the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority and Nigel Edwards of the London Health Economics Consortium. They stated that in 1992-93, the loss of 400 beds would have equalised London's position with the rest of England, but 1,499 beds were lost. They identified particular problems for elderly people, as London has a severe shortage of nursing home and residential care.

Those problems are leading to a crisis, but it will not be solved by cutting more beds. We must provide the resources and facilities elsewhere, and my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Ms Jowell) was absolutely right on that matter. If there is validity in the theory that improvements in primary care will lead to a lessening demand for hospital beds, let us have those improved community GP services up and running before the beds are taken away.

The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology bears out the view that if we improve primary care—particularly access to primary care for those who are currently denied it—we increase the demand upon hospital beds and specialist provision.

I started by talking about accountability. Despite assurances that primary health care would be prioritised as hospitals close, there are now fewer GPs and health visitors in London than there were three years ago. Londoners have no voice in the current arrangements. The patients charter promises patients a greater say in their own health care, but, with no democratic accountability, Londoners find themselves on the receiving end of chaos and cuts.

6.7 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I am an enthusiastic supporter of the NHS. My children took advantage of the NHS, and my parents also take advantage of the service. I can say unreservedly that my family is entirely satisfied with the treatment that we have received.

I do not see a crisis in the NHS. I see challenges and opportunities in today's world. Modern medicine is making tremendous advances and is giving us untold opportunities to provide the very best patient care. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on her positive and caring speech. She has given many examples of investment in the health service and in patient care. I do not believe that anybody could have any doubts about her commitment.

This debate has been full of gloom and doom. Opposition Members have run down the health service and have tried to frighten potential patients into believing that they will never get real service and care. The facts provide a totally different picture. More patients are being treated than ever before. Why do not the Opposition give credit for that? The length of time for which patients must wait for treatment has fallen sharply. Why do not the Opposition give credit for that? Health care and health have improved dramatically in the past few years, while life expectancy has risen by two years for men and

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women. The perinatal and infant mortality rates have fallen by more than two fifths since 1979. Why do not the Opposition give us credit for the work that we do in the health service?

Why do not the Opposition even mention that for three years in succession our immunisation programme has been so successful that no child in Britain has died of measles? Why do not they tell us that services at doctors' surgeries have improved, that there are now fewer patients on a doctor's lists and that the number of practice nurses has risen from 900 in 1978 to more than 8,500 in 1992? Why do not they give us credit for that?

Why do not the Opposition tell the patients the good news rather than try to terrorise them? Why do not they admit the success of the patients charter? Should not the patient have the right to know the success and the results produced by a hospital? Should not patients have the right, which we have now given them, to be guaranteed a standard of service? I have not heard the Opposition mention once the success of the patients charter this afternoon. Are they simply frightened to admit success when it is happening?

Why do not the Opposition accept that once again the Government have increased spending in real terms both last year and in the forthcoming year? The Opposition talk about a shortage of beds. I put a question to the Opposition, which I am sure will be answered during the replies to the debate. If they are so worried about a shortage of beds, as they allege, I am sure that they will support the Government's NHS reforms, their fight against waste and their battle for efficiency in order to provide more money for the very beds that the Opposition seek.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I can answer that now. We do not support the Government's reforms, and we do not support their waste either.

Lady Olga Maitland: The Opposition say that they do not support the reforms, but by the same token they try to take away the opportunity to succeed and provide more for the patients.

Perhaps it would be a good idea if I told the House a little more about the successes that my constituents experience. I have in Sutton the St. Helier NHS trust. It is a proven success. It has made achievements that are well worth noting. Let us take waiting times for an operation. Now, 60 per cent. of our patients are treated within six months. The vast majority wait only nine weeks for a non-urgent out-patient appointment. As everyone knows, urgent appointments can be made within days or, indeed, hours if necessary.

Let us consider the success that we have achieved in hip replacements. Now, no patient need wait a day longer than six months. Let us consider gynaecology. No woman need wait longer than six months for treatment. Let us consider treatment for the eyes. No patient need wait even as long as six months. Often patients are treated within four months. Let us consider the success of day surgery. Now, 50 per cent. of non-emergency cases are treated as day cases. That is the result of modern medicine and techniques.

Five years ago, 20 per cent. of cases in the ear, nose and throat department in Sutton were day cases. Today we get through 60 per cent. of cases as day cases and more people are treated as a result. Let us go back for a moment to the patients charter. Does not the House think that it is marvellous that a patient can now expect to be seen within half an hour of arrival in out-patients? In my St. Helier hospital, 90 per cent. of patients are seen almost immediately.

What about accident and emergency departments, which have been so run down by the Opposition? At my local A and E department, 90 per cent. of the patients who turn up are assessed within five minutes. The nurse makes the initial assessment, reassures the patient and the whole system is put in motion. That is a tremendous advance. There is no longer that sense of fear, not knowing and not getting immediate help. My hospital trust is aware of the pressures at the A and E department and has managed already to allocate resources for a further 25 beds as a result of our efficiency reforms in that department. Curiously, we have the resources for an A and E consultant, but no consultant has come forward for the post. I find that a sad reflection.

Let us consider the success that we have had in children's medicine, which is an important area. Since the children's hospital was moved from the old Queen Mary building into St. Helier's, there is no doubt that children in Sutton have a much better environment in which to be treated. They no longer have to suffer the experience of being moved from one ward, loaded into an ambulance and taken to another building for an operation. Now they will be treated entirely on site. That gives the doctors more time for patient care and enables them to waste less time travelling around.

As a result of the revision of our management of child care, we now have an intensive care bed for children. The children are taken care of by dedicated paediatrically trained nurses. Such successes in Sutton are appreciated by my patients. Why cannot the Opposition bring themselves to admit the successes that can take place within the management of an NHS trust?

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): Is my hon. Friend aware of the similar chronicle of achievement at East Surrey hospital, which is not too far away from St. Helier hospital? Does she agree that the rationalisation of health care within central London frees up resources and that hospitals such as St. Helier and East Surrey on the edge of London stand to be prime beneficiaries?

Lady Olga Maitland: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. He is right that, when we re-examine the concentration of health services in the centre of London, it is appropriate that we recognise that there has been a depopulation of the centre and movement to outlying areas. Furthermore, patients no longer want to travel into the centre of London when they can receive excellent service and treatment close to home.

Another success in St. Helier hospital is in the provision of diagnostic equipment. We now have the most up-to-date diagnostic equipment that any hospital could wish to have. We have a new magnetic resonance imaging scanner and we are ordering a new computerised tomography scanner. With that combination of diagnostic equipment, the hospital will be in the world class in providing services for patients.

Let us contrast the success of medical care both nationally and in my constituency with the gloom, doom and fear-ridden material that has been fed to us by the Opposition. I find it stunning that the Opposition should

seek to use what I can only call the Chinese water treatment. They believe that if they give people big, bad news often enough, people will believe that it is true. Every time that I am out on the doorsteps in my constituency, I ask people, "How are you getting on? What are your worries? What are your concerns?" They tell me that they are worried about the health service. I ask what experience they have had that upset them. Then they say, "Oh no, I have been well treated. I have an excellent doctor. I had wonderful treatment in the local hospital. The doctors were dedicated. The nurses were kind. I came home and I am now fit and well." I ask why they feel worried. They say, "It is what the politicians say on television."

It would be more appropriate if the Opposition stuck to honesty and the truth and acknowledged success when it happened. Such success is abundant and widespread. It does not help patients if they hear endless scaremongering stories that create a tremendous amount of nervousness and fear.

I shall give the House an example. Hon. Members have only to look at the Opposition motion. In the first line, they refer to a "crisis". There is no crisis in the health service when it is moving along with the punch, the power and the impact of investment and resources. What do they mean by that?

The Opposition also keep talking about failure. There is no failure when more patients are being successfully treated than ever before. It would be more worth while if the Labour party was a little more honest about what its plans would be, should it ever have the opportunity to run the country. Thankfully, the country will never vote for Labour.

I do not believe that the patients, about whom the Opposition say they are so worried, have any idea that Labour plans to put our medical care under political control. The Opposition want to abolish GP fundholding and break down national health trusts, and put them under the local authorities and town hall politicians. As a patient, I would not want my medical future to be controlled by town hall politicians—certainly not by socialist ones.

Thank heaven a Conservative Government are taking care of the health service and that there is not a hope in hell that the Opposition will ever take over.

6.20 pm

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): Tomorrow night we shall be debating Third Reading of the Health Authorities Bill. That Bill offered the Government the opportunity to set up a strategic health authority for London, which would have gone a great way to help to resolve the crisis in London's health care. Such an authority could have monitored health care throughout London, co-ordinated activity and avoided the duplication of services to which the Secretary of State referred. It could have targeted resources and developed a coherent health strategy for the capital, which would have benefited the people of London. The Government lost that golden opportunity because they do not listen, not only to the Opposition, but to the people of London.

It was interesting to hear the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) say that people did not come to her with health care problems. In the past year, more than 60 people have come to my surgeries to complain about aspects of London's health service. If that were duplicated throughout every London constituency, it would add up to about 60,000 people with complaints about what is happening to them and to the health service. It might be useful for the Minister, and through him the Secretary of State, to hear a few examples.

A Miss Beirne was admitted to Lewisham hospital in May 1994 for two hip replacement operations and was given a blood transfusion on admission, in preparation for surgery. Her operation was due to take place within a week or two. Six weeks later, she was still in hospital and had not had an operation. She spent more than eight weeks in hospital for an operation that should have taken no more than two. The hospital said that it was a painful decision when the surgeon had to choose on which cases to operate.

Mrs. Jean Anderson, a 78-year-old pensioner, suffered a fall in her home and fractured her leg. She was released into the care of her frail 80-year-old husband. No attempt was made to give her any form of care or back-up such as a home help. Thirteen days passed without any contact from medical services in the form of aftercare or otherwise. Mr. and Mrs. Anderson were left to fend for themselves and, not surprisingly, Mrs. Anderson's health deteriorated dramatically. Her son contacted Lewisham social services, which offered assistance and, finally, visits from a community physiotherapist and a district nurse were arranged, but she collapsed and died at home less than 24 hours later.

In a letter to me from the community health council, the acting chief officer said:

"Her chances of surviving would have been increased immeasurably if she had been receiving social, medical, nursing and physiotherapy support."

She received none of those.

I mention that case because the Health Secretary suggested that there was sufficient aftercare and enough beds for elderly patients. The "London Monitor", published by the King's Fund, states that there is a severe shortage of residential beds for the care of elderly people, which is not compensated for by the greater than average number of hospital beds in the capital. London has 5 per cent. more hospital beds for acute and elderly care, but 30 per cent. fewer residential care beds for the elderly. The chief executive of the King's Fund said:

"The complexities of the health care system in London require a high degree of co-ordination if change is to be achieved without paying a very high price in human terms."

It is not only patients, or even nurses, who come to my surgeries to talk about the state of the national health service. Two weeks ago, a consultant neurosurgeon sat in the waiting room of my surgery for more than an hour because he wanted to talk to me about the state of the health service in his hospital. It comes to something when a consultant neurosurgeon has to queue up to see his Member of Parliament to explain the sorry state that the health service has reached in London. He said that the internal market was falling considerably short of being a "free market" because of the substantial financial distortions. He told me about the interminable forms that he must fill in whenever he wants to refer a patient. He now employs two secretaries when previously he had none. He told me that competition in health care has resulted in such problems that the free exchange of information has all but disappeared, which is having a negative effect on patients. He also said that the NHS

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collects the most user-friendly, rather than the most accurate, statistics. One of his colleagues logged 36 appointments for eight patients. For statistical purposes, that was deemed to be 36 patient episodes and, therefore, 36 patients.

I am a great fan of "Coronation Street" and I try to watch episodes whenever I can. I do not expect, and nor do my constituents in east Lewisham or Londoners, expect to be considered as episodes like a soap opera. It is a contemptible device, by which the Secretary of State can pretend that the health service is treating more people when it is not.

I hope that the Secretary of State will listen to the Opposition, to patients in London, to nurses, to neurosurgeons and to the other staff of London hospitals. If she cannot listen to them, perhaps she will listen to the editorial of the *Evening Standard* today which says:

"Of course there are national problems with the NHS reforms; in London however these are aggravated by dogmatic hostility to the teaching hospitals, chronic underfunding and a profound inability to appreciate the scale of problems unique to a capital city. There is no room for complacency. This is an urgent situation which calls for acknowledgment and amendment from Government."

Let the Secretary of State for Health listen for once, not merely to us, but to the people of London and to London's newspaper, which held such a wonderful conference at the weekend. It explains today exactly why this debate is taking place—because of the crisis in health care in London.

6.27 pm

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lewisham, West): I shall try not to delay the winding-up speeches too long. As the motion makes clear, more than anything else, there is a crisis of confidence in health care in London, especially in south-east London, and I am delighted to follow my good friend, the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice).

I was a member of the area health authority, as it was then, for Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark in 1976 and went on to be a member of the successor district health authority—it was disbanded in 1990—until I had to leave for having had the temerity to be an elected member representing Lewisham council. When I first joined the area health authority, there were at least 16 hospitals in Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark. Today, there are four. At that time, there were six hospitals in Lewisham alone—today there is one.

As a member of the district health authority, I was deeply involved in the planning of what became known as Guy's phase 3—Philip Harris house, which has been mentioned. I took great pleasure in imagining that, one day, it would serve the needs of the people of south London and much further beyond in the ways for which it was designed. That will not happen now.

Trusts in south-east London need to be rebuilt. We suffered the first of the flagship authorities in the formation of Guy's and Lewisham. We were told at the time that Lewisham had to amalgamate with Guy's because it could have no independent existence worthy of the name and the matter was a fait accompli. The result of the consultation that took place was overwhelmingly against the creation of that trust, yet no notice was taken of it and the flagship set sail.

The Tomlinson report, which was merely a cover for the fact that, left to themselves, the market reforms would have severely damaged health care in inner London, then suggested that the Lewisham and Guy's trust could be broken and Lewisham could happily find its own way in the world as an independent trust. It said that Guy's needed to erect a new flag of convenience and amalgamate with St. Thomas's. If Lewisham did not have a secure future on its own in 1990, how could it have one in 1993? Either way, somebody was telling the people of south-east London less than the truth. Although the result of a consultation on the Tomlinson report was overwhelmingly against the setting up of a Guy's and St. Thomas's trust, once again that view was tossed to one side.

The consultation on the latest plan closed last Friday. Most people fear that it will lead to the closure of Guy's hospital in all but name and that all its services as a district general hospital will be extinguished. South-east London needs that district general hospital and the expertise and excellence that Guy's has come to represent. I implore the Secretary of State to make this a genuine consultation exercise, to listen to what people say and to consider the alternatives. Nobody says that nothing at Guy's must change, but that part of south-east London needs four district general hospitals to serve the community.

We need only look at the pressure that already exists at the accident and emergency departments of Guy's, King's, Greenwich and Lewisham, made worse by the closure of both Bart's and the Brook. The Brook hospital estimates a 20 per cent. increase in the pressure on the accident and emergency departments in surrounding hospitals and everyone in the area knows that those departments are not coping even now. Earlier speakers mentioned the fact that people are kept waiting on trolleys. A constituent wrote to me about her father, for whom even a trolley could not be found, who had to sit in a wheelchair for six hours at Lewisham hospital. It is foolish to believe that that position will do anything but deteriorate sharply if we lose the services at Guy's.

To understand that, one need only see the response of clinicians at Guy's about the safety of medical procedures if the A and E and intensive care departments are curtailed. I remember speaking to Peter Griffiths, who was general manager of the district health authority in 1986. He went on to be chief executive of Lewisham and Guy's and was famed for being the man who could drive two cars at once, because that is what he got for the job. He then joined the national health service executive. In 1986, he said that there would be a Government clear-out of hospitals in central London, and his job was to ensure that, whatever else happened, Guy's was not one of them. Sadly, he has failed, but the thrust of what he foresaw was patently clear. We need to save the services at Guy's, not just for the people of south-east London but for its reputation as a research centre, which will be seriously undermined if the watered-down scheme being advanced is proceeded with.

My final point is about the acute trusts and relates to what my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) said about accountability. I do not have the same problem with the mental health or primary care trusts, but getting responses to inquiries on behalf of constituents from any of the acute trusts is almost impossible. They respond only after they have been badgered time and again. I have occasionally been forced

to table questions asking the Secretary of State to tell them to reply. They do not reply because they know that they are accountable to no one for what they do and think that they can reply, or not, as they see fit.

I shall have to ask the Secretary of State to press the acute service to respond to a letter about a case with which I am dealing. I have had replies, but only once they have been pressed into replying, from the patient liaison manager; the operational and nursing director; the service manager, anaesthetics and intensive care unit service; and the chief executive, all of whom say that they will provide more information at a later date. That shows the insularity that they enjoy in their privileged positions, where they are cut off from the public whom they serve.

Others have said how the London ambulance service is scandalously failing to provide a proper service for the people of London, exacerbating people's problems when they eventually arrive at accident and emergency departments.

Despite Government figures, people know that London's health services are being damaged. That is not because we are spreading bad news to them; on the contrary, they come to us with complaints of what is happening to them and to their families and loved ones. It is patently clear that that is damaging the Government. On Saturday, I received a letter from a woman who said that it took 10 hours for her son to have an emergency operation at Lewisham hospital. She said:

"I am afraid I never voted for you at the last election, but as my MP I would like you to take up a matter with Lewisham Hospital."

She went on to say:

"I do not blame the doctors or nurses, but I do blame the bloated management and contractors for the poor state of cleanliness in the hospital—I will never again vote Conservative!"

That is what the experience of the NHS is doing to Government supporters.

The people of London need and deserve better from their health service. Once this Government are out of the way, they will get better.

6.35 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): "I will never again vote Conservative" may be the most telling point to be made in this debate, and it has been endorsed by hon. Members from both sides of the House. Apart from the Secretary of State, only one hon. Member has spoken passionately and wholeheartedly in favour of the Government's current stewardship of health care in London. Every other speaker, with differing degrees of emphasis, has referred to his or her fears and concerns and, in the case of Opposition Members, expressed the belief that London's health care is in crisis.

There is a financial crisis and a crisis in secondary care and in accident and emergency services. The promised shift to primary care simply is not happening. There is continuing underdevelopment of community health services, community care and services for the mentally ill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) rightly said, the London ambulance service remains a cause for concern, three years after the Secretary of State first said that she would make it her personal priority. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) rightly pointed out—the theme has been echoed by other hon. Members in the debate—that there is neither an overview of services in London nor a recognition of the special and important features that affect health care in the capital.

Condemning the Government's stewardship of the capital's health care services is no reflection on the hard-working public servants in the health service, from consultants to those who clean the hospitals. We do not condemn the work, heart and energy that they put into providing health care in the capital. If they had the Government's support and the necessary resources, they could do a first-rate job, but they have neither the Government's support nor the resources.

I understand that Mr. Roy Lilley has just appeared on the early evening media speaking for the Conservative party about the nurses' pay rise and said:

"The money is there for the nurses local pay rise; but not for just turning up"—

which cannot be compared with Tory Members Parliament. That is not a fair way to deal with nursing staff, whose dedication is much admired on both sides of the House. I understand that the Secretary of State is hinting this evening that she is considering abolishing the pay review body if the nurses do not agree to a 1 per cent. national rise. If the Secretary of State is hinting at that, it is a complete disgrace. If she is not, although time is short, I will happily give way to her now to put all our minds at rest. Frankly, I will happily give way to anyone who can put our minds at rest, but I see that nobody is rising to do so.

I return to the theme of today's debate: the health care crisis in London. At the bottom of the crisis is funding. The allocation of funds to the capital's health authorities, as my hon. Friends have pointed out, has recently been recalculated. The new Government formula appears to benefit outer London at the expense of the inner-city areas. I wonder why. One does not have to think very hard about it. It is quite instructive to place a map of Conservative-held constituencies over one showing the just-losers in the redistribution formula compared with the heavy losers. I have no doubt that it is politically driven and that people who live in the inner cities will lose out. London's 16 health authorities stand to lose £111 million from their budgets over the next five years. That is a cut. As has been pointed out, the biggest losers are in the inner-city areas, with Camden and Islington the hardest hit with a loss of some 14.6 per cent. in purchasing power.

Spending on health care in London as a proportion of total NHS spending has fallen from 20 per cent. in 1988-89 to some 15 per cent. in 1995-96. London has about 15 per cent. of the population, so the Government will no doubt argue that the figures are commensurate, but that is not so, as I hope to show in a moment. The Conservatives do not make the same argument when talking about spending on London's police force. Although the population is the same, spending is 29 per cent. of the national total. Average health authority spending per head for 1994-95 shows London lagging behind Liverpool, Newcastle, Manchester—the other major metropolitan centres. There is also a shortfall in the spending per head on the family health services authorities.

London is a special case, not just because it is the nation's capital, but because it has the nation's largest concentration of inner-city deprivation. Half the entire United Kingdom population of drug abusers is in London. London has 60 per cent. of the homeless population and 75 per cent. of all known AIDS cases. The unemployment

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

rate in inner London is double the English rate. Inner London has three times the English proportion of poor housing and overcrowding. Some 25 per cent. of London's school children qualify for free school meals. Although Conservative Members try to resist the argument, there is a direct link between poverty and health. London boroughs account for seven of the 10 most deprived districts in the UK, as measured by the "Breadline Britain in the 1990s" survey. London boroughs account for 11 out of the 12 of the most deprived districts in the UK, using the Townsend deprivation index.

That has an impact on health. Inner London mortality rates are 25 per cent. above the English average. So London is a special case. The Government's claim to be redistributing resources from secondary to primary care is just not borne out by the facts. They are cutting the budget. The Labour party is calling for a moratorium, a chance to examine again the conclusions of the Tomlinson report. I know that the Minister of State will argue that it is a call for a review of a review, that it is, therefore, time wasting and that we should get on. That is what we are calling for. It is important. If the nation is marching in the wrong direction, it would be better to stop and think again rather than continue marching in that direction, which is the case that the Minister is about to advance on us.

It is our view that the Tomlinson report is flawed. In fairness to Tomlinson, however, he was not asked to examine provision for health care in the whole of London—he should have been—and his report deals only with inner London, and mainly with acute beds. He concluded that London is over-bedded. On that he is wrong. The most realistic figure that I can get—it is substantiated by the House of Commons Library—is that London has 2.5 acute beds per 1,000 of the population. I know that when the Minister responds he will quote a figure of more than four beds per 1,000 of the population, but to get that figure he is including every bed he can possibly find—no doubt including those in the private houses of Conservative Members. It is an exaggeration.

The other argument that Tomlinson addressed is that London has 15 per cent. of the population but 20 per cent. of the expenditure. When one excludes the London allowance and the extra costs involved in the teaching functions of secondary care in London, the comparison is 15 per cent. of the population and 15 per cent. of the resources. There are other reasons why the Tomlinson report is flawed, but time prohibits me from going through them.

In summary, however, the report tries to treat inner London like an "average" English district, which of course it is not. It tries to suggest that increased primary care means fewer hospital patients whereas it may well not. One might well stimulate demand for secondary services by providing primary services. Tomlinson believed that patients from outer London did not use inner London hospitals. That, too, is wrong. Research by the King's Fund has shown that, of half a million in-patients treated in inner London, 150,000 came from outer London or other parts of the country. Tomlinson's calculations also failed to distinguish between the different types of beds—surgical and medical. The crisis is not just one of secondary care, but primary care as well. If the present rate of closure of London's psychiatric beds continues, there will be none left by the year 2000. That cannot be the Government's objective, or the Secretary of State would never be out of the courts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woolwich (Mr. Austin-Walker) referred to the London ambulance service. Some 37.8 per cent. of ambulances failed to arrive within the patients charter standard time of 14 minutes in London. What on earth is the point of having a charter if the service that is supposed to be supervised by it cannot live up to the results? The London ambulance service is long overdue for a thorough management review, as promised by the Secretary of State three years ago. She told me that it was to become a trust. The trust institutions are the Government's remedy for the problems in the NHS. If that is their preferred remedy, why has it taken so long for it to be put in place in the London ambulance service, where the problems are the most acute?

Mr. Spearing: My hon. Friend noticed earlier that the Secretary of State will not say—I do not know whether the Minister will—whether she will reply factually to the matters that I raised in my two memorandums. Surely the answer is there somewhere, and with the Select Committee on Health examining the matter in its inquiry, which both Ministers have pre-empted.

Mr. Brown: I am convinced that becoming a trust will not solve the problems of the London ambulance service, which seem to be management and technology driven rather than anything to do with the trust structure. If everything is all right in the London health service, why are waiting lists in London the longest in the country? When the *Evening Standard* sponsors a conference in association with the Association of London Authorities and the NHS Support Federation, why does it talk about the loss of beds, about there being fewer beds than in any other inner-city area, about the increase in waiting lists—just about everything except giving the Conservative party a ringing endorsement? It concluded by passing a resolution, part of which said:

"We call for an urgent independent inquiry, open to the public, to secure London's threatened health services, teaching and research."

That is not an endorsement of the Secretary of State's stewardship, but rather a plea to vote for the motion that the Labour party has tabled today.

6.49 pm

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) for leaving me some time in which to wind up an extremely important debate.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned nurses' pay. I assure him that the Government do not wish to give any impression that they are thinking of abandoning the review body mechanism—an important mechanism set up some 14 years ago, all of whose report recommendations have been honoured. As the hon. Gentleman raised the point, let me also emphasise that there is money in the system to finance its recommendations. I hope that we shall be able to make progress in that regard.

I said this morning—when I was engaged in some broadcasting with the hon. Gentleman—that Labour's policy was a review of a review, and that is exactly what it is: "Let's mark time, let's do nothing." I hoped that this afternoon we might hear some intellectual underpinning for that policy. We heard a number of the constituency

points that Opposition Members would be expected to raise in an Adjournment debate, but we were not shown a broad picture of what Labour intends to do about London's health care problems.

We heard no suggestions from Labour Members to deal with the over-provision of specialties and the future of medical education in London. We were not told whether they endorsed the movements that were taking place in the context of our policies; they said nothing about the way in which they would tackle the challenges posed by new technology to the provision of acute care in the city, and how rationalisation could take place in the light of such developments.

I expected the debate to give the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) an opportunity to address these matters anew. After all, she comes relatively fresh to her portfolio, and—as Conservative Members know—she comes to it refreshed by a vigorous campaign for the Labour party leadership. She should be in full flow, exhibiting the drive that she exhibited during that campaign in her examination of the policies. I wondered whether, between that time and now, the right hon. Lady would screw up her courage sufficiently to secure a positive policy from her party. She tells us that she and her hon. Friends have looked at the matter in the round, consulted widely and called for a moratorium. I do not think that that suggests that a great deal of thought lies behind what they are saying.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Malone: If the hon. Gentleman will excuse me, I shall move on.

I was about to say that it was interesting to note the contrast between what the right hon. Lady said and what was said by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who at least conceded that movement was needed on all these fronts and that it would be wrong to arrange a moratorium and yet another review. When asked this morning about the time scale of the review, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East said that the review and moratorium would both take place when Labour was in government, "in perhaps two years' time": I dispute that. In any event, organising the review and moratorium would doubtless take some time. Even if Labour achieved office, it would be committed to a "do nothing" policy for London until the end of the century. It would simply fiddle while London's health stagnated.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Minister is having fun with what he parodies as our policy, but he is not telling us much about his own. We are merely asking the Government to stop and think. They are going in the wrong direction. We are saying, "Do not carry on—stop and think."

Mr. Malone: What London's health care needs is for a Government to act on the basis of information before them, and a positive agenda of bringing about change. I shall say more about that shortly.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South had a choice when she embarked on her present responsibilities. She could have played a constructive part in the on-going debate about what should happen to London's health care, or she could have adopted the more fashionable course and joined the "London luvvies" campaign. They attend every demonstration; they come fresh to the scene, and then depart pretty quickly. I am sorry to say that the right hon. Lady seems to have jumped on to the fashionable demonstration bandwagon, rather than contributing to a constructive debate.

Much has been made about whether there has been a real transfer of recourse to primary care. The answer is that there has been, particularly through the London implementation zone initiatives: they involve numerous projects that have improved health care substantially in hon. Members' constituencies. I have seen quite a few of those improvements. I visited the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon), and observed the results of the donation of £30,000 to a mobile unit in the area. That and the provision of £118,000 for community dental services in Hackney are just two examples of many that are being supported by the London implementation zone initiatives—together with the £170 million in capital expenditure on primary care that is taking place over six years.

Earlier this week, I was pleased to be able to announce a £10 million education programme for primary care in London. Such initiatives will continue as primary care improves—and it is vital that that improvement takes place.

During the debate, we heard a number of suggestions about when the need for a change in London's health care originated. In fact, it happened rather longer ago than any hon. Member suggested. I can provide a quotation that underlines what is being done for London's health care extremely well:

> "Never think that you have done anything for the sick of London until you have nursed them in their own home".

That is precisely the context in which we are moving care from the acute sector into the community, closer to people; but the quotation is not from Tomlinson or Acheson, but from Florence Nightingale in about 1880. She understood exactly what was wrong with centralised services that were not serving the community properly.

When the health care debate was well under way, the King's Fund said:

> "The status quo is not an option, because Londoners need a first class 21st century health service system, rather than a decaying 19th century one."

The question is whether change can be managed, and whether transition can be given an impetus by Government. That is what is happening now, enabling the configuration of health services in London to meet the needs of Londoners.

However, the debate is also important to those who live outside London. It cannot be right for a single part of the country—no matter how much it may say that it deserves resources—to take up an unfair allocation. There has been considerable discussion of hospital beds today. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East is right: I shall cite the figure that he expected me to cite. In 1993-94, inner London had 4.2 available acute hospital beds for every 1,000 people; the national average was 2.3. That illustrates that a large management problem is involved in the spreading of resources around London's acute hospitals, and that it is time that it was rationalised.

London now has 43 major acute hospitals, each of which has more than 250 beds. It has far more than any comparable city. It also has far more specialist services, which consume a tremendous amount of revenue and capital resource. They are spread around the city, and

[Mr. Malone]

need reconfiguration. That is why rationalisation is required—and not in the impossible never-never time scale set out by the Labour party.

As for overall expenditure and commitment to the people of London, district health authority expenditure per capita in inner London is approximately 50 per cent. above the national average. Family health service authority expenditure, however, is approximately 5 per cent. below the national average. That demonstrates the need to ensure that the resource is transferred, over a reasonable timescale.

Time will not permit me to answer a number of constituency points raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I shall read the *Official Report* and if any of the points require an answer, I shall supply one.

Opposition Members suggested that there was no funding for this transitional period. There is continual funding, both for the acute sector and for primary care. I mentioned the London implementation zone initiatives. In addition to that, £65 million of transitional funding is available for the acute sector. I completely deny any suggestion that what is happening is not being properly funded.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South made what she thought was a rather amusing remark about hooligans on the terraces. We are the players on the pitch and the right hon. Lady is the hooligan on the terrace shouting to cause delay. The Opposition are hooligans with the oddest possible slogan. Hooligans usually shout, "Oh, ah, Cantona!" The right hon. Lady has a new one—"Oh, um, moratorium!"—but it will not wash.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:

The House divided: Ayes 229, Noes 282.

Division No. 77] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alton, David
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd South West)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wlkshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack

Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Estelle Morris and
Mr. John Cummings.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen

Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbrown and Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

Question accordingly agreed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House recognises that, because of medical advance, shifts in the population and the changing needs of patients, reform of the health service in London is both necessary and long overdue; congratulates Her Majesty's Government for its resolve in addressing the modern needs of people in the capital and the South East, in sharp contrast to the vacillation and evasion of the Opposition; and believes that policies now being pursued have already delivered a better health service for the area, enhancing the excellence of research, teaching and treatment as well as improving local health services in the parts of greatest need.

Regional Electricity Companies

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I have to announce to the House that Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.14 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the President of the Board of Trade's decision not to refer the hostile bid by Trafalgar House for Northern Electric to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, given its unpopularity with the majority of Northern Electric's shareholders present at the special general meeting of 15th February, the absence of any experience on the bidders' part in running a private domestic monopoly energy utility, the concerns of the Director-General of Electricity Supply about his ability to regulate a regional electricity company which becomes subsumed within a larger group, the ongoing inquiries being made by the Securities and Futures Authority into insider dealings involving the bidders' advisers the Swiss Bank Corporation, and the expiry on 31st March 1995 of the golden share held by the Government in the 12 regional electricity companies, which will leave them open to predatory or hostile bids without any established procedures for transfer of ownership or the protection of small shareholders, consumers and employees.

It is appropriate and timely that the House should have the opportunity to debate the future ownership, control and regulation of regional electricity companies. The motion reflects the widespread public anger—indeed, contempt—felt by consumers and employees alike for a Government and their energy privatisation policies that have left them wide open to exploitation.

Those views are strongly held across the United Kingdom. They are reinforced week in, week out by further news of massive pay rises, huge no-risk share options and self-enrichment by directors who award themselves grotesque increases which bear no relationship to their own or their companies' performance. It is an abuse of their stewardship that we, the public, the press, consumer watchdogs and successful directors in the private sector condemn, but which the President of the Board of Trade condones, defends and, apparently, even believes in.

People are rightly outraged by the frequent widespread abuse of private monopoly power, which Ministers take no action to prevent. Consumers increasingly despair of a regulator who is powerless to act in their interests, who cannot prevent abuses and who has no remit to consider the employees' situation in regional electricity companies.

Everyone recognises that electricity privatisation created private monopoly power, captive consumers and weak regulation in cash-rich industries, all of which have been a recipe for exploitation. As one City analyst said last week:

"Regional electricity companies are quite unlike anything else. As monopolies governed by a kind of regulator they are a licence to print money."

That is what experience has confirmed. Everyone believes that with the apparent exception of Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry. As the Under-Secretary claimed again last Wednesday, when referring to regional electricity companies,

"they are indeed normal companies, operating in the private sector."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 1002.]

It appears that Ministers are unique in their isolation in holding to that belief. The City does not believe that; the press does not believe it; consumers do not believe it;

even the chairman and directors of the regional electricity companies themselves do not believe it. They know that if what the Minister said was true and if market discipline genuinely prevailed, they would not be able to get away with the hugh share options and salary increases through which they have been ripping-off consumers. It is a scandal.

Outstanding share options for directors and chief executives in regional electricity companies add up to more than £103 million. The 14 million share options total £103.4 million, according to figures provided by the House of Commons Library. That is the nature and scale of the rip-off that those people are awarding themselves at the consumers' expense. Far from any protection for consumers, the great and false claim at the time of privatisation that regulation would protect them has failed to have any effect. The price controls imposed last summer were so lax that shares in regional electricity companies rose immediately afterwards. The City was pleased that the new regime allowed the money machines to continue.

Sir Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): It was probably a slip of the tongue, but the right hon. Gentleman said that share options were ripping off the consumer—I think that those were his words. I am sure that he did not mean that because, as he knows—or should know—share options are not paid by the companies; they come from shareholders. Any share option does not cost the company one single penny. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks about it, he will realise that that is true.

Dr. Cunningham: We all know where the shareholders' money is coming from—straight out of company dividends. Shareholders and directors are the main beneficiaries of what has been going on, at the expense of consumers, employees and the taxpayer. Following last year's new decisions, shareholders once again won at the expense of consumers and employees.

It is against that background that the first hostile bid to take over a regional electricity company has occurred; indeed, it is because of that background that it has occurred. It involves Northern Electric and Trafalgar House, but it could be any regional electricity company and any predator. With one or two exceptions, the scenario would be the same.

We should bear in mind the fact that the Government's privatisation White Paper envisaged retaining regional-based electricity companies to respond to local needs and to promote regional identity—that was the Government's policy at the time. That basic concept has apparently been abandoned by the President of the Board of Trade. Apparently, any bid for any regional electricity company is now authorised. It is open season because he has ignored—indeed, he has abandoned—any public interest in the matter.

Strong grounds remain for a reference of these issues to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on public interest grounds.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): What would be the point of referring a United Kingdom company's bid for a regional electricity company on public interest grounds when no such reference would be made in relation to a bidder from another European country?

Dr. Cunningham: I am not sure that that is necessarily true. A number of public interest grounds exist, including not least the ability of the regulator to continue even with his weak powers in the face of a takeover by a multinational conglomerate, whether it be Trafalgar House or any other organisation.

The Labour party strongly holds the view that the bid should be referred. It is not alone in that view, as the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) knows. That is the view of the National Consumer Council, the public watchdog. Its chairwoman, Lady Wilcox, has made that clear. She wrote to the Office of Fair Trading to raise key consumer concerns. She said:

"Questions about issues like cross-subsidy and disposal of assets must be fully explored by the MMC to safeguard consumers . . . We believe this will become a major issue for consumers which needs to be tackled as soon as possible."

The letter goes on in that vein. No doubt exists, therefore, about what the council believes.

The industry regulator holds the same view, but it has been swept aside by the President of the Board of Trade. The very person appointed by the Government with a framework of regulation to look after consumers' interests believes that the reference should take place. That is not all. I have a copy of a letter written by three Back-Bench Conservative Members to their colleagues. It is from the hon. Members for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), and for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway).

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I am here.

Dr. Cunningham: I am pleased to see that at least one of the hon. Gentlemen is in his place. Apart from reiterating my point that

"the privatisation White Paper sets out the case for retaining regional based electricity companies"—

the hon. Gentleman is right about that—those three Conservative Back Benchers say:

"A reference by the President for the Board of Trade to the MMC is an appropriate way for the important issues raised by the Trafalgar House bid to be examined."

On this occasion, we can safely say that support for the reference exists on both sides of the House. It may come as some surprise to the hon. Member for Colchester, North that his Back-Bench colleagues do not share his view, but I thought that he would like to know that they share the Labour party's view. Perhaps the President of the Board of Trade will tell us how many other Tory Members have written to him expressing the same view.

Mr. Devlin: In the letter that I and my colleagues sent to many of our colleagues, we did not express a view as to whether Trafalgar House should be allowed to take over Northern Electric. We said that a number of issues needed to be explored. When I was on the radio the other night in Newcastle, one of the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues would not answer the question of what Labour would do if it were in power. Would it refer the bid or renationalise the industry? No Labour Members have yet said a word about their attitude to that.

Dr. Cunningham: I understand the hon. Gentleman's embarrassment at being found out, but there is no doubt that we would refer the bid to the MMC. I share his view. This is not a question of Trafalgar House, or of being for or against the management of Northern Electric or Trafalgar House. This is a test case. We know that all the other regional electricity companies will be up for grabs.

[Dr. Cunningham]

In the public interest, the matter should be thoroughly examined, and the MMC is the most appropriate forum in which to carry out that examination.

I hope that the President of the Board of Trade will tell us how many more letters he has had in that vein from his right hon. and hon. Friends. The hon. Member for Stockton, South and his colleagues the hon. Members for Ryedale and for Tynemouth will have their resolve put to the test, because at 10 o'clock tonight, they will be able to vote for a reference of the bid to the MMC. The hon. Member for Stockton, South has told his constituents that he wants a reference. Those three Conservative Members will have the opportunity to vote for that at 10 o'clock tonight. We and his constituents will be watching to see whether the hon. Member for Stockton, South puts his vote where, apparently, his beliefs are.

The President of the Board of Trade has no interest in the public interest. He is, after all, the man who boasted at the Tory party conference of his determination to intervene—he is the great intervener. He has failed another test, passed up another opportunity, and sold out on intervention in this case, as in many other cases before. His decision has produced a huge scramble for cash in the City. As we all know, every electricity company will become a target, not for investment in new plant or equipment, not for investment in new skills, education and training, and, above all, not in attempts to give consumers lower prices or better services; they will become a target in the battle to control private monopoly power to generate cash without competition, as those organisations have been doing since their inception.

To defend itself, Northern Electric is offering shareholders more than £500 million in cash or in marketable securities, including its share of huge windfall profits from the sale of the national grid, another sell-out of the taxpayer's interest by the Government. That offer will be financed, among other things, by huge borrowing, by more job cuts, as the chairman of Northern Electric has candidly admitted, and by reducing investment in the business—so much for long-term approaches to the future of electricity supply. Consumers and employees are the losers. Customers will, of course, pay heavily for the cost of the takeover, whatever the outcome of the struggle for control.

All of us, including taxpayers, will pay for all of this because Trafalgar House's bid will be significantly financed by its overseas tax losses, perhaps totalling some £300 million over time. Trafalgar House, cleverly, saw the possibilities for financial engineering, to acquire Northern Electric and make the taxpayer foot part of the bill. At least it made a gesture to consumers, with the offer of a rebate of £20 per consumer, or perhaps per household. Consumers are rightly asking themselves, "If all that money is available to battle for control, and if rebates can be given, why are we paying so much for our electricity?" Why is the regime so lax that all that money can slosh around in the system to benefit shareholders but not consumers?

Employees are asking, "If the companies are so profitable and desirable, and are such cash generators, why should we pay for all this with our jobs?" The likelihood is that those events will be replicated in other regional electricity companies. In Yorkshire, the midlands, the north-west and elsewhere, consumers, employees and taxpayers will foot the bill for the President's indifference to their position.

The Government sold Northern Electric for £240 million. Trafalgar's first offer is £1.2 billion. The difference of £770 million is the amount by which the Government shortchanged the taxpayer with their ill-judged privatisation. There are 12 RECs. All were underpriced and the loss to the taxpayer runs to billions of pounds. The fact that Trafalgar values Northern Electric at £1.2 billion says it all. Mr. Kevin Lapwood of Smith New Court said:

"It represents a capitulation on the part of the politicians"—

he meant the right hon. Gentleman and his friends—

"and the regulator."

That view is not surprising, given that RECs now have market capitalisation of more than £16 billion, compared with £5.2 billion four years ago.

It is not as though consumers had a good deal on prices. Figures from the Library show that between December 1990 and January this year, electricity prices rose by 4.3 per cent. in real terms against a background of falling world basic energy prices—oil by 26 per cent., gas by 27 per cent. and coal by 18 per cent. So much for claims that privatisation has done a good job for consumers.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): Why does not the hon. Gentleman accept that, since privatisation, electricity prices have fallen by 3 per cent. on average?

Dr. Cunningham: Because they have not. The hon. Gentleman is confused. Last September's study by London Economics on productivity growth in RECs stated:

"No clear privatisation effect is apparent. Whilst there is a slight improvement in the overall average productivity level in the post-privatisation period, this is so small as to not be considered statistically significant . . . Furthermore, there is no consistent record of improvement among the 12 firms that would suggest that privatisation can be associated with efficiency gains. In fact, while six of the companies improved productivity, three experienced slower productivity growth in this period, two were unchanged and one company actually became less efficient . . . We cannot accept the hypothesis that productivity growth in the distribution industry as a whole is higher in the post-privatisation period than in the period before."

There is no escaping the conclusion that in privatising RECs, the Government got it hopelessly wrong. Directors and shareholders are winners, while consumers, taxpayers and employees are the losers—as are energy conservation policies, long-term capital investment and, ultimately and disastrously, the future of the coal industry and mining communities.

I put specific questions about the Trafalgar House bid to the President and his Ministers before and received no answers, but I will try again. Are the assurances given to the President by Trafalgar House legally enforceable—yes or no? If regulation is unable to protect consumers now in respect of a stand-alone utility, will it not be completely inadequate to deal with multinational conglomerates? The regulator thinks that the answer is yes. What is the right hon. Gentleman's answer?

Is it appropriate for the bid to proceed when the Securities and Futures Authority, the Securities and Investments Board takeover panel and the right hon. Gentleman's officials are investigating the conduct of the Swiss Bank Corporation in respect of share deals in

Northern Electric? Is not it possible that at least some of those inquiries may lead to proceedings under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1993?

Who tipped off Trafalgar House last Monday, 13 February, that the President did not intend to refer the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission? Trafalgar clearly knew last Monday, before any public announcement by the right hon. Gentleman. As he was in London on Monday, he clearly made his decision then, so why not make a statement to the House? That Trafalgar House knew on Monday is confirmed in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) from the Director General of the Office of Electricity Regulation. Professor Littlechild wrote:

"Following the announcement of the Secretary of State's decision, members of my staff met Trafalgar House representatives on Tuesday 14 February."

So far, so good. He adds:

"The meeting was arranged in the afternoon of Monday, 13 February."

That was the day before the announcement. Professor Littlechild concludes:

"I hope this information is helpful."

It is, because it tells us that notwithstanding the right hon. Gentleman's quasi-judicial role—his excuse for not answering questions in the House—he must have been in direct communication with Trafalgar House, telling it of his decision before having the courtesy to inform the House. He did not have the courage of his convictions or to tell Parliament of his decision. Instead, he announced it in a press statement the next day, after he had left the country. Who tipped off Trafalgar House before any public statement was made?

If the President was so sure that he had got it right, why did he not tell the House of his decision? He had every opportunity. We pressed the Department for a statement, but the right hon. Gentleman ducked it. If he had had his way, the House would not have had an opportunity to debate the issue. If the President and his colleagues had had their way, nothing would have been said in the Chamber. Our private notice question brought the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs to the Despatch Box last Wednesday, and our selection of this topic today has given the House the opportunity for debate.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Perhaps my right hon. Friend would like the news in a parliamentary answer that I received shortly before this debate. The President of the Board of Trade received the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading on the matter on 2 February. Twelve days passed before the announcement to the House. A meeting with Trafalgar House was held at the right hon. Gentleman's behest on 13 February. Is my right hon. Friend disturbed by that information?

Dr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend is just confirming what is apparent—that the President of the Board of Trade, or his hon. Friends or officials, had conveyed to Trafalgar House long before the announcement of his decision, what the effect of the decision was when that decision was clearly in its interests.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Would this be the appropriate moment to remind the House that Trafalgar House has given £600,000 to the Conservative party since 1979? Does my right hon. Friend think that it is possible that there is an inside track for companies that enjoy this close relationship with the Conservative party?

Dr. Cunningham: I suppose that Tory Members would describe that as throwing public money at the problem.

The regulator clearly believes that his powers are insufficient to deal with an electricity company wholly owned by Trafalgar House. Does the President of the Board of Trade support the regulator in his wish to require Trafalgar House to float off 25 per cent. of the company? Will he give us a straight answer to that question when he replies? The regulator is dissatisfied and has made a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission because he cannot get satisfaction from Trafalgar House. Will the right hon. Gentleman overrule a reference by the regulator? Yes or no? The public interest reasons for a reference of the bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission are overwhelming. The President of the Board of Trade should think again. In its vote tonight, the House should oblige him to do so.

7.40 pm

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'applauds the improvements in performance in the electricity supply industry since privatisation; welcomes the benefits which customers are receiving in terms of lower prices and improved service; supports the continuing development of competition in the electricity market and the maintenance of effective regulation where this is necessary; and notes that the Director General of Electricity Supply will continue to promote competition and protect the interests of consumers.'.

In anticipation of this debate, I spent some time looking at the Opposition motion. If I may, I shall take the motion as my text. I hope that the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) will forgive me for sticking to the subject as expressed on the Order Paper.

Apparently, the reason for deploring what I have not done is that the bid by Trafalgar House for Northern Electric was unpopular with

"the majority of Northern Electric's shareholders"

who turned up at a meeting on 15 February. That is the first reason.

The second reason is that, apparently, Trafalgar House has no experience of

"running a private domestic monopoly energy utility".

The third reason is that

"the concerns of the Director-General of Electricity Supply about his ability to regulate a regional electricity company which becomes subsumed within a larger group"

were ignored. The fourth point, to which the right hon. Member for Copeland referred, is

"the ongoing inquiries being made by the Securities and Futures Authority".

The fifth point is

"the expiry on 31st March 1995 of the golden share held by the Government in the 12 regional electricity companies".

Those are the reasons which the Labour party gave notice that it wished to draw to the attention of the House tonight.

I am at something of a loss to understand the thinking behind those reasons. Perhaps we can explore just what Labour Members have in mind. It seems that, if a

[Mr. Michael Heseltine]

company has a meeting at which an undefined, unprescribed number of shareholders turn up, and if a majority of those who turn up hold a particular view, no matter how few they are, no matter the views of the others and no matter whether proxies are registered from the majority, the fact that those who turn up hold a view should be the determining factor. That is a curious constitutional innovation in the way in which British public companies should be run.

I find it fascinating that the Labour party believes that the view of a small number of possibly wholly unrepresentative shareholders should be the basis on which the President of the Board of Trade reaches his judgment. What about all the other shareholders who did not turn up? What about the majority who may not have expressed an opinion? Supposing that they were against the view of the small minority who did turn up? Am I supposed to ignore them? Am I not supposed to listen to their views and to a range of other people's opinions on the matter?

The fact is—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. There are too many seated interventions. I expect Front-Bench Members in particular to set a good example.

Dr. John Cunningham: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker; you are absolutely right.

It is no good the right hon. Gentleman coming out with this fraudulent nonsense about listening to people's views. He did not want to listen to any views. He did not want to come to the House, and he did not want to make a statement. He did not want to answer a private notice question, and he did not want a debate. The truth is that, with perhaps one or two exceptions, he did not want to listen to views.

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Gentleman could have put all that in his motion, in which case I would have addressed it. My point, to which the right hon. Gentleman has no answer, is that nothing is so lacking in intellect or logic as the suggestion that I should take the views of a minority of shareholders as the determining factor in such a matter.

The nearest equivalent I can think of immediately is the mass meeting of the trade union movement at which a minority of vocal militants were able to dominate the scene, which led to strike action. This is the sort of technique that the right hon. Gentleman thinks should be introduced in British public affairs. I am not prepared to have anything to do with such an argument.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No, because I want to make a bit of progress.

I move on to the next argument paraded, which is the absence of any experience on the bidders' part of running a private domestic monopoly energy utility. This is said by the party that, for 40 years, has nationalised industry after industry after industry so that it can put trade unionists, civil servants and politicians in charge of the commanding heights of the British economy. This is the party that, for 15 years, has sat on the Opposition Benches.

Labour Members have never run any serious industry in their lives, yet they now claim the right to run the whole of the British economy. I have never heard—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must contain themselves.

Mr. Heseltine: If Labour believes that a company making a takeover bid must have had specific experience in the particular industry, it should say so. The fact is that lack of experience has never stopped Labour Members pursuing any policies of any sort in any circumstances. I cannot believe that they seriously believe that this argument should weigh with me.

I move on to the concerns of the Director General of Electricity Supply about his ability. Here I thought that the right hon. Gentleman asked some important questions, but I was intrigued that he managed to avoid any reference to the Director General—

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Condescending.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Secretary of State, but I have made the point before that a continual running commentary from a sedentary position is not acceptable.

Mr. Heseltine: I come back to the point. How can the right hon. Member for Copeland pray in aid the views of the Director General of Electricity Supply, important though his views are, without reference to the Director General of Fair Trading? There was a difference between the two regulators, which I freely admit, so I had to weigh the advice that I was given from two different regulators. I chose to follow the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading.

I found it absolutely fascinating, having listened to what I thought at the beginning of the right hon. Gentleman's speech were to be paeans of praise for the Director General of Electricity Supply, that he provided a catalogue of criticism on how the industry had been badly regulated, how prices—apparently—had been allowed to go up and how consumers had been ripped off. But all that is the responsibility of the Director General of Electricity Supply, the one person who, according to the motion, I am supposed to listen to, as opposed to the Director General of Fair Trading.

Dr. John Cunningham: Of course, the right hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. The Director General of Electricity Supply can work only within the regulations laid down by the right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends. The Director General of Electricity Supply is as much a victim of this hopeless, hapless system as are the consumers who are paying the price.

Mr. Heseltine: Now we have—I have not got the words down, but we will have them all in the morning, as they will be carefully recorded—an apparently hapless system that is so unsatisfactory. So I gather that the Labour party, if it ever had the chance, would want to change it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] That is very interesting. Would I be right in thinking that that would be the case not only for the electricity industry, but for a

range of other industries? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Yes, it would change industry after industry after industry. Where would the Labour party stop?

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): At the utilities.

Mr. Heseltine: It would stop at the utilities. So am I to understand that the National Freight Corporation, British Airways and British Steel, and all those other privatised companies, have been given a clean bill of health? Are they now safe from the predatory instincts of the Labour party? We are talking only of the utilities. That is what one might call a halfway house. All the utilities are under threat from the Labour party.

Dr. Cunningham: No, they are not.

Mr. Heseltine: No, they are not. Let us not talk about a divided party. Let us not have references to splits. Are we for clause IV or are we against clause IV? Are we dealing with clause IV(a) or clause IV(b)? Who is the great arbiter between clause IV(a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) or anything else? Is it the spokesmen for the party above the Gangway, below the Gangway, on their feet, on their bottoms? Who speaks for the Labour party?

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East) *rose—*

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone) *rose—*

Mr. Heseltine: I shall give way to both hon. Members.

Mr. Mudie: Will the President be serious about a matter that may be funny to him, but is of extreme importance to millions of consumers? The man whom the President has to represent consumers, the regulator, advised the President not to allow Trafalgar House to take over 100 per cent. of Northern Electric, and that 25 per cent. was needed for transparency. The man responsible for protecting consumer interest put that position. Will the President take that advice, which would give the customer some protection, or will he sweep it aside?

Mr. Heseltine: I would seriously like to help the hon. Gentleman. The Director General of Electricity Supply has responsibilities, which he is discharging. I understand that he is in conversation with Trafalgar House. Certain assurances have been given, and those are now being discussed by the regulator. It is right and proper that that should be taking place. What the outcome of those discussions will be, I do not know, because that is something within the purview of the director general. But the right hon. Member for Copeland raised some important questions, on which I want to be as helpful as I can to the House, such as the timing of the announcement.

It is perfectly true that, on Monday last week, I left for India. During that afternoon, I reached a judgment about the matter. It followed from that judgment, because I was interested in the assurances that Trafalgar House was offering, that officials in my Department pursued the matter, which they did.

Of course, it was not possible to announce the outcome, because we did not know at that stage whether such assurances would be forthcoming. It is also perfectly true that it fell to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs to make the statement. I would be the first to say that I felt uncomfortable, because I could see how the circumstances were developing. I shall share exactly with the House the dilemma that I faced.

I knew that I was leaving for India. It was a very important trip, as the House would recognise. There was nothing that I could have done, or that I would have wanted to do, to avoid it, and I am sure that no one in the House would have asked me to do so. But I knew that, if I were to have made the statement, it would have had to wait until I had returned on Thursday. I did not believe that information of such sensitivity would hold between Monday and Thursday.

Therefore, I took the initial decisions, and I instigated the consultations that were to lead to the assurances which were forthcoming, and which are now the subject of discussion. I believe that, in that way, I behaved perfectly properly.

Dr. Cunningham: Will the President tell the House whether those assurances are legally enforceable?

Mr. Heseltine: No, they are not legally enforceable. But that is not the end of the matter, because the powers of the director general remain. He has powers first—as he is now doing—to discuss the matters with Trafalgar House; and, secondly, he has powers to refer Trafalgar House to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, if, in future, he should in any way feel the need to do so. So it is important to understand the balances that exist.

Dr. Cunningham: If the regulator determines that a reference should be made to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, would the right hon. Gentleman accept that decision, or would he overrule it?

Mr. Heseltine: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, once that process is under way, I am in a quasi-judicial position. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members must understand that someone in my position, a position which this House has put me in, as a quasi-judicial authority, is extremely constrained, and rightly so, in their actions. I cannot prejudge matters. I have to listen to all representations, I have to take all such matters into account, and I have to be guided by the very clear legislative framework within which I operate. The judgments are often complicated, finely balanced and difficult, but I reject utterly and absolutely any suggestion that such matters are not carried out in the proper and full way.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the President comment on the assurances that have been given? Trafalgar House does not have a reputation for being a company in which there is total transparency. It is felt that cash assets are being transferred from one member of the group to another. Have we assurances that such movements will be transparent, so that Northern Electric's consumers may be sure that they are not paying to prop up some other member of the group?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman raises essential questions, and those exact issues are now being discussed by the director general and Trafalgar House. The director general is bound to do that. It is not for me to say that I support him in doing so. It is his legal duty so to do. I understand, as does the House, that that process is now under way. I also understand the need for that transparency, and the public confidence which would flow from it, to be in place.

Dr. Cunningham: Those are important points, as the right hon. Gentleman says. A question now arises over the apparently independent regulator having a right to make a

[Dr. Cunningham]

reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Is the President of the Board of Trade saying that he would respect that independent right? If the regulator were to act in such a way, would the President intervene again to refuse the reference?

Mr. Heseltine: I have no power to stop the director general referring the matter to the MMC. I have a right to challenge the view of the MMC in the recommendations that it makes, but afterwards. That would be done in public, after public debate, and I would have to account in public to this House or wherever appropriate for any decision that I took. I would hope that, like any Secretary of State from any party, I would exercise that discretion and make those decisions in the way in which the House would expect me so to do.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): Will the President give the House his view on the notice presented by Offer, in terms of changing and varying the licence in relation to section 11(2) of the Electricity Act 1989? If there is an objection in 28 days, there could well be a referral to the MMC.

Will the President give us the Government's view about that variation of the licence which, I think, was printed in *The Financial Times* on 10 February, particularly in light of Northern Electric's position on pricing when it can effectively give shareholders about £380? That point was referred to a little earlier by my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Mr. Cunningham). That was effectively price control, which could now vary the licence conditions that were printed in *The Financial Times* on 10 February. Will the right hon. Gentleman gives us his view about that?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman raises a complicated issue. It is not a straightforward issue, and I will not give him an answer off the cuff. However, I will ensure that he gets a proper answer, because these are highly complex and technical legal matters, and the House is entitled to be properly informed. Either my right hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Industry will reply to the hon. Gentleman in his response to the debate, or I will ensure that the Chairman of the Select Committee receives a letter setting out the matter in detail.

We have now dealt with the substance of one of the legitimate concerns. I hope that the House feels that I have dealt with it at some length, and I do not apologise for that.

I was surprised at the suggestion that, if the takeover is successful—I do not know whether it will be successful or not—that is somehow centralising the decision-making in London. As I understand it, Trafalgar House has made it clear that it will leave the headquarters of Northern Electric where it is presently based. It will therefore remain a provincially based company.

I could not understand how the Labour party could argue in that way when, during the last half-century, Labour nationalised provincial company after provincial company and centralised the control of those companies in London. I do not understand why Labour should find it extraordinary that this Government have returned all those companies to provincial headquarters.

The fact that the water and electricity companies and the gas industry now have major provincially dominated headquarters is a very important part of the Government's process of spreading power throughout the country, as opposed to centralising it in London. It is not in the Labour party's gift to suggest that we are trying to centralise powers by the back door—

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): Will the President give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No, I want to say something else—

Mr. Rogers: The right hon. Gentleman is not telling the truth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. Did I hear the hon. Member for Rhondda say that the Secretary of State was not telling the truth? If so, I hope that on reflection he will want to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Rogers: I said that the President of the Board of Trade was misleading the House. I will withdraw the remark that he is not telling—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That will not do at all. The hon. Gentleman must rephrase his comment.

Mr. Rogers: I never said that he was deliberately—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw that comment.

Mr. Rogers: I withdraw my comment, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Heseltine: We all make such mistakes. However, if I had made that mistake, I would have admitted it more quickly than the hon. Gentleman did.

Mr. Rogers: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) has just corrected himself. He should just sit there.

Mr. Rogers *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is clear that the President of the Board of Trade is not giving way.

Mr. Heseltine: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not giving way.

The most distressing feature of the debate, of the speech made by the right hon. Member for Copeland, and of many of the comments made by Labour Members is the relish with which they want to portray a major British company like Trafalgar House in the least favourable light.

Trafalgar House is one of our leading overseas companies. It falls to my Department, and it is my privilege, often to spend a lot of time with the export managers, directors and executives of that company, travelling the world trying to obtain business. I wonder what kind of impact Labour Members feel it makes on the people whose lives are devoted entirely to trying to further British interests when they have to listen to the carping criticism that we have heard from Labour Members.

If by any chance the takeover bid goes through—I have no knowledge as to whether it will go through or not—Trafalgar House will then be able to point to its experience of running an electricity company in the United Kingdom as it bids for major world opportunities to install, run and manage electricity facilities internationally.

In this country, we must understand that fighting in the international marketplace today demands a scale of expertise in an ever-toughening competitive world. If, every time we try to put together a major British company to win in the world, we hear carping criticism from Labour Members who constantly talk about rip-offs, the consumers being robbed, soaring prices and any other slanderous attack they can find, they are simply undermining this country's ability to win in the world marketplace.

Dr. John Cunningham: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No, the right hon. Gentleman has had a fair go. He knows full well that he and the rest of those on the Opposition Front Bench never miss an opportunity to undermine the excellence of British exporting companies across the world.

Mr. Clapham: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heseltine: No, there is another Opposition Member trying to get in on the same act.

We are now winning in the export markets of the world on a scale which would have seemed almost inconceivable two or three years ago. We should be immensely proud of that.

We heard another classic canard from the Labour party. I do not want to blame the right hon. Member for Copeland for originating it. The canard was that prices have been soaring—

Dr. Cunningham: No.

Mr. Heseltine: If the right hon. Member for Copeland did not say that, I apologise straight away. I turn my attention to where the blame should lie, and that is with the Leader of the Opposition. Obviously, there is another split in the Labour party. The Leader of the Opposition says prices are going up, but the right hon. Member for Copeland does not believe they are.

That is a welcome conversion—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Copeland should be quiet for a moment and decide which side of the argument he is on. I want to nail the Leader of the Opposition. When the Electricity Bill was before the House, the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said:

"outside of the Conservative party and the Department of Energy, it is barely an issue that prices will rise because of privatisation."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1988; Vol. 143, c. 684.]

What has happened? Prices to customers have fallen. They are down by 9 per cent. in real terms to domestic users in the past two years. Industrial consumers have also seen falls in real terms. That record compares with a real increase of 5 per cent. in industrial prices, and a 22 per cent. increase in domestic prices under the last Labour Government.

The right hon. Member for Copeland cannot deny that he said that the quality of service has not improved. However, there has been an 80 per cent. reduction in the number of domestic customers who have been disconnected. Customer complaints to the regulator are falling. The right hon. Member for Copeland then said that investment was not taking off. However, the electricity industry has increased investment by more than 10 per cent. in real terms since privatisation.

Productivity is also rising. It is perfectly true that the regional electricity companies have reduced staff in comparison to pre-privatisation levels. They have introduced more flexible work patterns and pay bargaining. However, is Labour arguing that we must continue to employ people in companies that could achieve the same results with fewer people? Is that what Labour Members are saying? If they are saying that, how would they achieve productivity gains to pay the real increases in wages, upon which real increasing prosperity depends?

Whenever there were job losses in any industry, Opposition Members never said, "Britain is becoming more competitive." They tried to pretend that we could freeze—fossilise—our industrial and manufacturing capability in the chaotic world that we inherited from them 15 years ago. That simply is not an option. It was not an option then—that is why they lost power—and it is not an option now. We are winning so much extra export market because we have turned the tide of British productivity.

In this debate, as in all others, Opposition Members cannot come to terms with the fact that it is only within the private sector that we will make the gains upon which the increasing wealth of this country depends. Opposition Members talk about shareholders doing well. I take credit for that and pride in it, because I know that shareholders are the pensioners, the people with the insurance companies, the people who are the savers, and the workers in industry who bought shares in their companies. One should rejoice in that, not condemn it left, right and centre whenever one has an opportunity.

The Labour party cannot come to terms with the fact that, 100 years ago, some lunatic dreamed up the idea called "socialism". It is bust, it is finished, and that is why Labour Members are on the Opposition Benches, and will stay there.

8.10 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I do not intend to take up much time because this is a short debate. I come not to praise Northern Electric or to condemn Trafalgar House, but to refer to the concerns of users, employees and some of the shareholders of Northern Electric. At a special general meeting in Newcastle last week, to which reference has been made, the individual shareholders who attended the meeting and voted overwhelmingly against the threatened takeover were heavily outvoted by the proxy votes of big institutions. So much for the so-called benefits of wider share ownership, which privatisation promised. That point is made in the motion, and well the President of the Board of Trade knows it. The fat cats still call the tune and their poodles in the Tory party dance to it. That might be a rather badly mixed metaphor, but it is appropriate.

I have no particular sympathy with Northern Electric. The company is responsible for 700 job losses since privatisation, a further 800 job losses between now and 1997 and, we are told, about 100 job losses per year after

[Mr. David Clelland]

that, in search of more efficiencies. I look forward to the day when directors will be rewarded according to how many jobs they create rather than how many they destroy, which does not seem to require great genius.

While all those jobs have gone, putting pressure on remaining employees to produce the same and more, the salaries of members of the board of Northern Electric have risen sixfold. The company chairman now makes more money in his lunch hour than the waitress who serves him makes in a whole week. On top of that, senior directors stand to make more than a quarter of a million pounds each from shares obtained by virtue of their position as directors.

To try to stave off the Trafalgar House bid, the company has offered what has been described as a package of perks, the cost of which is reflected in the forecast job losses after 1997 and the decimation of the investment programme that we were told would be one of the great benefits of privatisation.

What of electricity users? I refuse to call them customers. They do not go out shopping for electricity. We are told that the price of electricity has come down since privatisation. Of course, that means since 1991. Electricity prices were hiked up before privatisation in order to make the sell-off more attractive and to allow for a fall after privatisation so that board members could tell us how clever they were and justify their huge salary increases. Users, along with employees and the investment programme, too, will bear the cost of that struggle for power. Last week, BBC North produced a programme about the matter, entitled "Better the Devil you know". That is the theme which the majority of northern Labour Members, electricity users—which, of course, includes all of us—and employees have adopted during this sorry saga. There are implications for the rest of the industry and, of course, for the taxpayer, estimated to be about £270 million in lost tax revenue if the takeover goes ahead.

The electricity supply industry cannot be treated as if it were a sweet factory. It is not like any other industry. It could not possibly be allowed to collapse and threaten the continuity of supply. In such circumstances, however unlikely, even a Tory Government would be forced to step in. We must remember that a Tory Government nationalised Rolls-Royce to save it from extinction. The industry should never have been removed from the public sector. I for one certainly look forward to the day when it might be returned to it. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Yes, indeed. I share that hope with the vast majority of the British public, certainly people in the north-east who now suffer because of privatisation.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Does the hon. Gentleman share that aspiration with his own Front-Bench colleagues?

Mr. Clelland: The Labour party believes that the major utilities should be in public ownership or control. *[Interruption.]* That is without question; there is no argument about that. In the meantime—*[Interruption.]* If the President of the Board of Trade wants to go into the matter a little more deeply, I am sure that the time will come when we can do so.

In the meantime, we must suffer the unedifying sight of the money market squabbling over an industry that is vital to the lives and livelihoods of millions of people who are helpless to influence the outcome, because their Government have relinquished control over the industry and prefer to leave its fate to market forces.

The campaign against the takeover that is now being waged in the north-east is about not Trafalgar House but the retention of control over a vital industry—vital to the regional economy and to everyday life—within the region that it serves.

In his recent answer to me, the President of the Board of Trade confirmed that he regarded the continued regional basis of the electricity supply industry to be an important principle, but there seems to be no sign that he or the regulator have any intention of enforcing that principle. On the contrary, his refusal to refer the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission has led to open season on other regional companies and the creation of even bigger monopolies. In his answer last Wednesday to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs confirmed that the safeguards to which the President of the Board of Trade referred are not protected by statute. Indeed, the President of the Board of Trade confirmed that again tonight.

The major utilities are too important to be left to the financial juggling of the market. They are too important to our regional structure to be subjected to the threat of takeover or sell-off. It is the job of Government to secure such services in the interests of the people and of the country. If the Conservative Government will not do that, a Labour Government will.

8.16 pm

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): I shall make a brief contribution. I am the vice-chairman of the Conservative Back-Bench deregulation committee. I am also the Member of Parliament for Scarborough and Whitby, which are supplied by Northern Electric. I am a business man with a factory which is on the coast and which consumes electricity supplied by Northern Electric. I am also a householder who spends most of his life trying to turn out the lights that his children have left on. I do not, however, speak as a shareholder. I carry no torch for either company involved in the discussions.

In my dealings with Northern Electric, I have found it responsive and helpful. Towards the end of last year, there was a proposal to erect pylons from Lackenby to Whitby, which would have vaulted across some of England's finest coastal scenery and through many villages in my constituency. I should like to record my thanks to Northern Electric for shelving those plans. I hope that they remain firmly on the shelf.

The motion is yet another example of scaremongering and nit-picking. Opposition Members know nothing of the world of business, in which takeovers, both hostile and otherwise, are commonplace. Their experience as employers is limited to the countless research assistants who saturate the Palace of Westminster, yet their motion feigns concern for small shareholders whose company may be subjected to predatory or hostile bids. The only hostile or predatory bid that the shareholders need to fear is that which might come from Opposition Members should they seize the reins of power.

The motion undermines Trafalgar House in a most dishonourable manner that suggests an "absence of any experience". The absence of experience lies entirely on Opposition Benches. In the world of business, it is not unusual for a company to diversify by acquiring unrelated interests. Sometimes enormous opportunities flow because of the dovetailing of such interests with those of other companies within the group.

In the *Financial Times*, Trafalgar House is listed among the diversified industrials, as is the Hanson Trust. No one ever asked Lord Hanson what he knew about batteries before he bought Ever Ready, about cigarettes before he bought Imperial Tobacco, or about bricks before he purchased the London Brick Company. No one bothered F.H. Tomkins when it took over Firth Cleveland or Rank Hovis, yet all those companies have thrived.

I would not mind if the Labour party thought that Trafalgar House was a stranger to the north-east, but it is not. The firm owns Redpath, John Brown Engineering, the Davy Corporation and the Cleveland Bridge Company, which is based in Darlington. The last named has just won the Hong Kong harbour bridge contract, which is much to its credit, and many jobs will flow from the company's activities.

Many people in my constituency, and thousands of others in the north-east, rely on Trafalgar House for their employment. It is wrong of the Labour party to suggest that some of those people might lose their jobs as a result of the takeover. It made the same prediction when Rowntree was taken over by Nestlé, but the factory in York has thrived.

If there is any danger to employment, it is presented by the Labour party, a party whose members attacked the Japanese for so-called "alien practices" when Nissan came to the north-east, a party that wants to impose a European job-shredder on companies in this country in the form of the social chapter, and a party masquerading as the business-friendly party of the 1990s. Yet beneath the veneer lurks the same old monster, intoxicated with the urge to regulate and tax. I urge my hon. Friends to reject the Labour motion with the contempt that it deserves.

8.21 pm

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): The consequences of the President of the Board of Trade's decision not to refer the Trafalgar House bid are vast not only for this case and the many consumers whose interests it affects, but rather more for the precedent that it will set for the future. I echo the comments of the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) in expressing disappointment that the Government did not choose to bring the matter to the Chamber of their own accord.

The stock market is already preparing itself for the prospect of a wave of takeover bids for regional electricity companies. The Trafalgar House bid sets a precedent for the takeover of utilities by companies that do not have the supply of utilities as a core business. Questions legitimately and reasonably must be addressed about the commitment of those firms towards the electricity industry.

There is a central contradiction in the decision not to refer the bid, between the Government's stated objectives when they privatised the electricity companies and the attitudes implicit in the decision to give the bid the green light. The prime example is the golden share. The Government's golden share was intended to protect companies such as Northern, presumably because the Government believed that ownership was a matter of public interest. Certainly, previous Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry have seen the provision of power to several million customers as a matter of public interest. There was enough of an interest to ban bids from state-owned firms from abroad, which have been tipped by some to follow the Trafalgar House example now.

Most people naturally presumed that the public interest was the justification for the golden share in the first place, and that its purpose was to provide a defence against precisely such a bid. Perhaps the Government would like to explain the purpose of the golden share in the light of the fact that it has been used only to delay a takeover, rather than to prevent one.

Another central argument about the privatisation of the industry and a stated objective of the Government was on the importance of regional identity. Under the present set-up, there is scope for substantial input from regional electricity companies into their respective regions, whether it is in the arts, sport or any other issue of community importance. Without saying anything specific on this case, I believe that the likelihood of foreign or multinational companies which bid for the regional companies having the same high commitment to the regions is minimal.

Even if the company headquarters remained in Newcastle, decision making would in reality move to London, to the detriment of the north. There have been notorious examples in other cases, when promises that have been given about corporate headquarters have been nakedly broken after the event.

Another stated objective of privatisation was to deliver the efficiency and strength that would benefit customer, employee and company alike. Yet a precedent is now being set for allowing takeover bids from companies which have manifestly failed to prove that they can improve investment or even long-term customer care.

We have been offered only four promises on the maintenance of standards, and the President of the Board of Trade admitted this evening that they had no legal substance whatever. The assurances need to be judged in the light of certain economic truths. Takeovers create a self-perpetuating climate of insecurity, and that has already added £1 billion to the value of the regional electricity companies on the market.

Dividend payments will rise, as they must if the price of shares is not to drop, leaving companies even more vulnerable. Prices in turn will rise, as the price cap allows, to provide the cash flow needed to maintain high dividends and, for the very same reason, jobs will be cut. Investment will not be exempt from the squeeze required to keep shareholders happy, and that runs to the core of the problems that have beset British industry for such a long time.

As a nation, we distribute far more in dividends than our competitors—double the proportion, for example, of Germany or Japan. The results are higher prices for customers, the threat of redundancy for workers and the loss of essential investment in the industries.

[Mr. Nick Harvey]

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Does the hon. Gentleman have evidence for his assertion that prices are higher or that customers are in some way disadvantaged because of dividend policy? There is no evidence of that.

Mr. Harvey: It is self-evident that if more is given out to shareholders in the form of dividends, less will be available for investment, salaries and any other cost that a company might incur.

Serious questions need to be asked about Trafalgar House's commitment to fulfilling the Government's stated objectives at the time of privatisation. What was the purpose of the golden share? How committed is Trafalgar House to the region or to investment? How determined is it not to shed jobs for the sake of maintaining dividends? What evidence is there that the takeover is not simply designed to give Trafalgar House tax advantages? Has not the company admitted that financial engineering is part of the rationale of the bid? Will the customer benefit from the new ownership?

Those questions will undoubtedly return when other regional electricity companies are subject to takeover bids. For that reason, the bid should have undergone a more thorough and impartial investigation at this time. The President of the Board of Trade's explanation that he had two different pieces of advice from the two regulators and chose one rather than the other does not stand up to much examination. The Director General of Fair Trading has a general concern on competitive issues, but the Director General of Electricity Supply has a much more specific interest in the industry. The fact that either of them raised serious concerns or interests should have amounted to a case for a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The idea that the two were looking at the same issues does not seem to be right at all.

A referral to the MMC would have been appropriate and desirable, considering the precedent that the case will set. On Wednesday last week when the issue was briefly debated, Conservative Members claimed that those pressing for a referral to the MMC did not understand the market. The truth is quite the opposite. We understand the market only too well—well enough to understand the difference between competition and monopoly, well enough to understand the difference between a company that is subject to all the rigours of the market and a company whose customers have nowhere else to go, and well enough to understand the difference between a chief executive and a management team whose salaries reflect a genuine market value and those who are in the privileged position of having a trapped market.

We understand that the regional electricity companies are fundamentally different from the majority of other private companies, and that is why they are regulated. That is why a case such as this should be referred to the MMC. The electricity industry is not internally competitive. It provides a necessity that people cannot do without and, as such, it has social obligations to its region and customers. That was the reason behind the golden share and the reason why there is a regulator.

This situation is typical of the many problems that the Government's economic policy is running into. The Government's "hands-off" approach is undermining Britain's competitive aspirations. It seems that asset-stripping, job-shredding, executive riches and financial engineering are now the ideals of the laissez-faire system. Those who claim—as the Government do—to be the champions of the free market must find that something of an embarrassment.

A sound takeover proposal has nothing to fear from a referral to the MMC for investigation. If Trafalgar House could have proved that the various fears that had been raised were unfounded and that the customers, employees, the region and the company would not be disadvantaged, that would have become apparent. Unfortunately, the opportunity has been missed, so the fears remain. The President of the Board of Trade has declared open season. The customers of Britain stand to lose out.

8.29 pm

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): We have had this evening from the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) a parade of verbiage which has not done his argument any favours. He talked about exploitation, a licence to print money and ripping off the consumer. From hon. Members behind him on the Opposition Benches we had a parade of fat cats, as if we were not well aware that that was the dream of the Labour party. It dreams about the horror of fat cats. In the mythology of the Labour party, fat cats are companies that make profits. That is what Labour Members want to get rid of—any company that makes a profit.

Opposition Members have shown no appreciation of what privatisation produces. They have shown no understanding of how it reduces the interference of bureaucrats and the lack of motivation that prevails in a state-organised utility or company. To quote the words of a former Treasury Minister:

> "When the government owns, an owner's concerns dominate its thinking. If we look at parliamentary records for the 40-year period after World War II—when nationalisation was at its peak—debates on the state-owned industries focused on such things as investment needs, losses, debts, labour relations, and strike records. Little time was spent on Parliament's more diffuse obligation to consumers."

The Opposition have shown little, if any, understanding of the market. There has been a reference or two to customers, but the regulator was not referred to as a constraint on an entrepreneur and a business, which is what he is in practice. No, not at all. The regulator was paraded before us as an example of the alleged failure of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Opposition Members have shown no appreciation of the role of the investor and the City. There was a reference from the Conservative Benches, but none came from the Opposition Benches, to the fact that probably everyone in the Chamber, many millions of people in the north of England and many millions of people who are represented by Opposition Members have a stake in what was going on. They have a stake not because they are direct investors but because they have pensions or policies. They have a small stake in the City institutions that happened to vote in the majority to put the bid through in what is referred to in the motion as the "meeting of 15th February".

Nor is there any understanding on the Opposition Benches of the performance of the electricity companies since privatisation. The right hon. Member for Copeland said that I was wrong when I intervened to say that there had been price reductions since privatisation. I can give

him and the House my source. It is a small booklet available in the Library of the House of Commons. It says:

"In the case of manufacturing industry, the latest DTI figures"—

this was published last year—

"show that average electricity prices have fallen in real terms by nearly 7 per cent. in recent years.

Domestic consumers are also starting to benefit from lower prices. Overall, real terms domestic electricity prices have fallen by over 3 per cent. since privatisation, and by 7 per cent. in the last two years."

I challenge the Labour party. Perhaps it has better figures. There have been real reductions in prices to both domestic and manufacturing consumers of electricity. Instead of the proper appreciation of the industry that we would have expected from Opposition Members, the politics of envy has been paraded intermittently through the debate. It positively replaces the understanding of management and its role.

I understand that some of the directors of utility companies have received huge pay increases. They may well have demoralised some of their employees by taking rises when others have taken pay cuts. That may be a management mistake, but it has nothing to do with the politics of envy. That, and the failure of the Labour party to make the broader point, shows exactly where Labour Members are coming from.

What of the performance of the Labour party with nationalised electricity? We have heard a great deal of rhetoric, but we have not yet heard precisely what was the Labour party's performance during its last tenure of office. Prices rose by 2 per cent. Was that between 1974 and 1979? No. Was it per year? No. Was it six monthly or even three monthly? No. Every six weeks electricity prices rose 2 per cent. between 1974 and 1979. That is the performance of the Labour party. It cannot get away from it. Comments such as the one that we heard a few moments ago from the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland), in which he suggested that we raised prices artificially moments before privatisation, totally fail to recognise that the Labour party increased prices 2 per cent. every six weeks between 1974 and 1979. It was a hypocritical statement. What about concern among the customers? That was a bust fuse, too.

8.38 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I wish to deal with a different issue—the possible changed ownership of the regional electricity companies in the context of its effect on the strength, diversity and success of local and regional economies. You and I share the same region, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I am sure that you will not mind me referring to our region as an example of the issue that it is most important for the House to consider.

Whatever can be said about privatisation, the efficacy of regulation and the balance of benefits to consumers or shareholders, there is one indisputable fact. Electricity, water and, to some extent, gas companies can and do act, under private or public ownership, as positive forces in the building and rebuilding of a viable industrial base in the regions of Britain.

There is clear evidence of strong support and commitment to the regions on the part of the utilities and certainly my local regional company, Yorkshire Electricity. The company is built on its relationships in Yorkshire. It expanded its involvement in the economic development of the region. The company is active in assisting small, medium and other enterprises on a variety of issues. It involved itself extensively in a range of local initiatives such as the Yorkshire and Humberside Development Association. It supports local universities and works to develop profitable partnerships with training and enterprise councils, chambers of commerce and the institutions that seek to secure a dynamic life for the region. Opposition Members would be poorer if we did not recognise some of those facts.

In that respect, Yorkshire Electricity is not dissimilar to some of the other privatised utilities. All three companies have put themselves at the heart of the economic and industrial regeneration of the region, whatever else we may think of them.

Given the constraints of European directives, Yorkshire Electricity and many other regional electricity companies have consistently tried their utmost to maintain their position as significant purchasers of locally derived goods and services. In other ways, such as in its proactive role in local campaigns involving disabled people, children and the environment, Yorkshire Electricity has become a familiar and reliable member of the local community. Opposition Members understand that.

At a time when the arts are increasingly dependent on private-sector sponsorship, local electricity companies, such as Yorkshire Electricity, have become most important benefactors and have fulfilled valuable social and cultural roles in the regions.

The Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. Tim Eggar): I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman in full flow, but I have been listening carefully to what he has said and he seems to be giving us a eulogy to privatisation. Can he confirm that?

Mr. Sheerman: I am trying to point out that, under both public and private-sector ownership, Yorkshire Electricity, NORWEB and Northern Electric have played an important role in supporting the regional economy. Perhaps, after hearing something that he might like, the right hon. Gentleman will hear a few things that he will not like. I am trying to give a reasonably well-balanced group of remarks.

In concert with local authorities, regional electricity companies have developed effective partnerships on a range of questions, including public lighting, crime prevention and energy efficiency. We have observed the growth of an awareness on the part of those companies that their future prosperity and development are inextricably linked to that of their consumers and the community that they serve. On that basis, they represent a major regenerative influence and have the potential to diversify and develop exciting initiatives in the regional economies.

Opposition Members would be foolish to ignore that, but the move that the President of the Board of Trade has set in train will at one stroke destroy all that potential. He is often seen as a man of action, rather than deep thought. In this instance, his thoughtlessness could do incalculable damage to our other goals and objectives in the regions. He espouses many other causes to try to help the development of local industry and small and medium-sized enterprises. He expresses concern about regional diversity and growth and about the ability of small and medium-sized enterprises to flourish. Indeed, his competitiveness White Paper, his interest in regional

[Mr. Sheerman]

supply networks, local sourcing and business links all point to a commitment to, and concern for, a successful and diverse regionally rooted economy.

However, all that is hot air if we judge it by the effects of the right hon. Gentleman's failure to refer the bid for Northern Electric to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. All the effort that is being put into a range of initiatives by chambers of commerce, TECs, local authorities, universities and colleges could be utterly wasted if his decision on the ownership of regional utilities remains unchanged. What is more, regional economies on the brink of real growth and development will fall back into decline, with yet another positive influence hived off to London or beyond.

Too often, we have witnessed the effects of a takeover that results in the ownership of a company transferring to a national or international conglomerate. The Government have not been very forthcoming about those sorts of decisions. To the detriment of local companies and whole regions, decisions are no longer made in the regions, or even in this country. Down-sizing, asset stripping and the mean bottom line are all that counts. Local and regional loyalties are consigned to the waste bin. The Government's policies have initiated and hastened that process time and again.

In our region, an example is the disastrous effect of the Government's initiatives and legislation on the brewing industry. Look at the, perhaps unintended but disastrous, consequences of the change in the franchising system for regional television. We have lost the independent Yorkshire Television, which has combined with Tyne Tees and is soon likely to be taken over by Granada.

Time and again, the Government's policies carelessly destroy the viability of local and regional industries. It is a sad day when a political party—whatever its other ideological follies and sheer wrong-headedness—abandons values that, at one time, it held dear. There was a time when the Conservative party believed profoundly in the diffusion of economic power and saw the strength of our democracy being rooted in strong regional prosperity. Today, they have sacrificed that belief, like so many others, on the altar of market forces with tragic consequences that will leave our regions permanently damaged, demoralised and disheartened.

8.45 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I must start by declaring a minor interest. Like hundreds of thousands of people, including no doubt some Opposition Members, I hold a few shares in regional electricity companies, but not in Northern Electric or in Trafalgar House.

This has been an interesting debate for me as I had some knowledge of the predecessor to Northern Electric, the North Eastern electricity board, when I represented Newcastle upon Tyne, Central in the 1980s, before I gracefully withdrew to enable the present hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins), who has unfortunately left the Chamber, to pursue his political career, which I gather that he is still contemplating.

Much play has been made of the involvement of regional electricity companies, such as Northern Electric, in the general good of the regions. Before the companies were privatised—under the old nationalised set-up—the regions and areas in which they operated received little support, yet the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) seemed to be extolling the virtues of nationalisation and promised that, when he had the opportunity, he would return electricity to state ownership. That would certainly strip away any opportunity for regional support to come from the unit serving the area.

I do not believe that the fact that ownership might change need in any sense alter a company's commitment to a region. When I was in the north-east, it was evident that many of the companies that gave great support to the region—I will not be unfair by picking out one or two—were branches of national concerns. They were not locally based or local companies, but simply had regional offices there. In certain cases, they had decided as a matter of policy to support certain regions. There is no necessary connection between where the corporate headquarters of a company is and ownership resides, and where its loyalty can be found, in terms of support for an area in which it operates. If that were the case, virtually no regional support would emerge from such companies. It would all be channelled to the area in which it had its corporate headquarters—central London or elsewhere. That simply is not the case.

For some time, I worked for Northern Engineering Industries, which was a proud north-eastern company, connected with the electricity industry in that it supplied generating plant. Eventually, Rolls-Royce took over NEI, which ceased to have its corporate headquarters in the north-east. At the time, there were many scares and it was said that when Rolls-Royce took over there would be wholesale redundancies in the north-east. That did not happen. There were some—I was one—but it was hardly wholesale. People also said that there would be wholesale reorganisation and that all the power would seep off to London or Derby, with no control left in the area. That turned out to be totally untrue. Control remained in the area and almost as many decisions were made there as before.

It was said that control would be completely lost, but the company—I refer to NEI but the same applies to Northern Electric—was ultimately controlled by its shareholders, the majority of whom did not reside in the region in any case. Moreover, like any large company, the company depended on the operation of capital, which in turn was largely controlled by the City. So the idea that the power base is automatically transferred when a company is taken over flies in the face of fact.

The Opposition seemed to believe that they could change the position and that, if they had state control of industry, the market could be ignored. That does not happen in reality. They now seem to believe that they can insulate an individual company against the operation of the capital market and that Northern Electric could be retained as a private company and protected against takeover bids. That, too, is wrong.

Trafalgar House has given guarantees, as my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade said.

Mr. Rooney: Name them, then.

Mr. Merchant: It has guaranteed that it will give sufficient financial and management resources to enable Northern Electric to carry out its statutory and licence obligations; it will ensure that the Director General of

Electricity Supply is provided with such information from any company in the Trafalgar House group as he requires in relation to the exercise of those functions.

Mr. Mullin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Merchant: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a minute. First, I shall finish answering the question posed to me by naming two other guarantees: Trafalgar House will co-operate with the DGES in ensuring appropriate financial separation and financial independence for Northern Electric; and it will ensure that Northern Electric agrees to appropriate licence amendments.

Moreover, it is clear that if those assurances are breached, the DGES can refer the matter to the MMC, under the Electricity Act 1989.

Mr. Mullin: Did the hon. Gentleman not hear the President of the Board of Trade say that the guarantees given by Trafalgar House were not binding?

Mr. Merchant: If I remember correctly, my right hon. Friend said that they were not "legally" binding, but a guarantee is not invalid if it is not legally binding. In all our activities, we give guarantees that are not legally binding. The important qualification is that, under the Electricity Act, the DGES can still refer the matter to the MMC if those guarantees are broken.

Opposition Members, particularly those who represent north-east England, should rely less on what a few shareholders may have said at a public meeting that they attended, but should weigh up what would be in the best interests of the region. I do not speak in support of the Trafalgar House bid and I understand why people in north-east England feel strongly about the need to retain regional identity among the companies that operate up there. I hope that, if Trafalgar House goes ahead with its bid, it will give further guarantees about maintaining the headquarters of Northern Electric in the region and other links with the region.

Opposition Members should be careful, however, because takeovers are not necessarily bad and Northern Electric may be strengthened, having been taken over by a large outside company. It may benefit from being part of a bigger organisation with access to more capital and expertise; more markets for its products, as well the ability to draw on existing markets; and more financial strength to back it. Consumers may benefit from the better service that would thereby be provided. Opposition Members spoke of the critical job losses under Northern Electric. As part of a larger organisation, instead of simply being made redundant, people could be transferred to other jobs within that organisation. Consumers may benefit from lower prices and a better service as a result of a takeover, and current shareholders in Northern Electric may gain a better return. So the advantages of a takeover should be weighed in the balance. Neither must we forget the role of the regulator and his considerable power to protect consumers' interests.

We should look at the motives of Opposition Members who spoke strongly against the Trafalgar House bid and want it stopped or referred to the MMC. I understand their regional affections but some of their arguments are muddled and they do not see the positive benefits. I suspect that the smoke screen that has been thrown up is to hide the desire of sections of the Labour party to return Northern Electric to public ownership, perhaps not in the direct way referred to by the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge, but in a more subtle and dangerous way, by extending the power of regulation and control in such a way that the company could not operate in a free market but would be at the whim of political manipulation and control.

We should not allow this debate to pass without marking the success of privatisation of the electricity industry. We must not allow one debate, important though it is, to obscure that fact. We are the only large European country to have reduced our electricity prices. Even including VAT, the price of electricity in this country is the fourth lowest in Europe, so all the talk about the rapid rise of electricity prices is inaccurate. Small companies pay among the lowest prices in Europe; since 1993, disconnections have been reduced by 95 per cent., and the number of complaints has fallen by 30 per cent. New options such as "Fuel Direct" are available for people who have difficulty paying. Customers who do not receive proper service now receive payment for default and there has been a revolution in management skills and attitudes. Whereas, in 1979, the taxpayer had to foot the bill when losses amounted to £50 million a week, now the Exchequer, and therefore the taxpayer, receives net proceeds of £48 million a week.

The case for privatisation has now been made, in terms not just of rhetoric but of hard fact and experience. I fear that this debate is motivated by a desire to spoil the truth with scares about what might happen in hypothetical situations. Using one example, every negative outcome that could possibly be conjured up has been used in an attempt to spoil the truth that should be put clearly before the House: privatisation has been a success for all involved, but particularly for the consumer.

8.58 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): The Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs made it clear to the House on Wednesday, in the debate on Northern Electric, that ownership of the regional electricity companies should be decided by the market, and that the Director General of Fair Trading, in his statutory advice, said that the merger did not raise any competition concerns. That is hardly surprising, as Northern Electric, like the other regional electricity companies, will be a monopoly supplier in the domestic market until 1998.

I am interested in the other public interest aspects of the bid. So far, they have been dealt with via advice to the President of the Board of Trade from the regulator and the Director General of Fair Trading, which has led to some discussion about the extent of the regulator's concern and the response of the President of the Board of Trade to that concern. I am further interested in why the regulator has not used his powers under the Electricity Act 1989, to which the Under-Secretary of State referred in the debate in the House last Wednesday, to refer the bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on public interest grounds.

Section 12(1) of the Act says:

"The Director may make to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission . . . a reference which is so framed as to require the Commission to investigate and report on the questions—

(a) whether any matters which—

(i) relate to the generation, transmission or supply of electricity in pursuance of a licence; and

(ii) are specified in the reference,

[Ms Ann Coffey]

operate, or may be expected to operate, against the public interest; and

(b) if so, whether the effects adverse to the public interest which those matters have or may be expected to have could be remedied or prevented by modifications of the conditions of the licence."

Public interest is the key phrase. This goes beyond the definition of the director general's role in the Government's amendment, which says that the Government

"notes that the Director General of Electricity Supply will continue to promote competition and protect the interests of consumers."

Public interest has a common law interpretation, and it may be considered as something to be distinguished from the private interests of individuals so that the expression is akin to the economic doctrine of the greatest good of the greatest number. Public interest is synonymous with public benefit. The question, of course, is whether a particular thing that is in the public interest is a question of the times and is a question of fact, to be decided in the light of all the circumstances and conditions as they exist at the present time.

It is easy to see how the MMC can decide whether a monopoly situation operates against the public interest by increasing prices or whether economies of scale outweigh that advantage. Even then, however, there are considerable problems in practice—I refer the Minister to the brewing industry. Ultimately, of course, the objective facts must be evaluated, and at the end it comes down to individual judgments. The President of the Board of Trade is an elected member of a democratically elected Government, totally committed to the free market, and believing that public interest is served by the free market. That is his belief.

What of the regulator, however, who is supposedly independent and unfettered by such ideology? Why has he not referred the matter in the light of the following issues? First, some £300 million in tax payments to the Treasury would be lost if the bid goes ahead. Is that not a matter of public interest? I can certainly think of things that the Treasury could spend £300 million on—raising nurses' pay beyond the miserable 1 per cent. that they have been given, for instance, and perhaps giving local education authorities the money to fund the teachers' 2.7 per cent. increase in salary which currently looks as though it will be funded by lost jobs.

Secondly, there will be further job losses in addition to those already lost. In that context, it is specific not only to this bid but to other electricity companies. Some 10,939 jobs have been lost since privatisation and it is likely that the number of job losses will increase as the regional electricity companies come under increasing pressure to give ever larger returns to shareholders to keep them happy. Is that not a matter of public interest?

If the regulator feels that those issues are not of public interest and do not merit referral to the MMC, he has a very narrow definition of public interest—as narrow as that of the President of the Board of Trade. Perhaps public interest is ultimately a matter of individual judgment based on individual belief. I do not know what the regulator's personal beliefs are, but in this bid, after the abdication of responsibility by the President of the Board of Trade, the regulator was the last protector of public interest in the widest definition of the greatest good for the greatest number—a definition that I know is not shared by the Government.

It is important that the regulator should refer the bid to the MMC so that we can have a proper examination of the public interest and the public can see the independence of the regulator operate; otherwise he will open himself to a critical examination of his independence on public interest issues and bring into dispute the whole regulation system.

9.4 pm

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): The hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) referred to the public interest. The interest taken in the debate by Opposition Members is shown by the number who are present; but I believe that the hon. Lady confused the public interest with interest to the public, given the allegations that she made. Let me point out to her that the public interest is best served by cheap electricity and an efficient company. An inefficient company will result in job losses and high prices; we want jobs and low prices, and both have been provided following the privatisation of this company and many other formerly nationalised concerns.

My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade did a masterly demolition job on the motion. In their speeches so far, Opposition Members simply have not made their case. The motion refers to a meeting at which an unknown number of shareholders expressed concern about, or indeed opposition to, the proposed takeover. I have an answer for those shareholders: they do not need to sell their shares.

Another point—which has been answered time and again—relates to the Director General of Electricity Supply and his ability to regulate the industry. I was astounded when I saw that in the motion; I can only assume that it was tabled by someone who was not present last week when my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnor (Mr. Evans), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs, concentrated on that and many other pertinent points relating to the takeover.

The third aspect of the motion that strikes me is the concern about the removal of the golden share from the regional electricity companies, which would apparently make them vulnerable to "predatory or hostile bids". A well-run, efficient company, looking after its customers and employees, need not fear a hostile takeover as it will know how to fight such takeovers effectively. If a company is insulated from the market place, it is insulated from the needs of its customers and will no longer act in the best interests of those customers. That is why companies must be left to trade openly and fairly.

If a lesson is to be drawn from the debate and the bid, it is that if regional electricity companies want to defend themselves from takeovers they must continue to reduce consumer prices. I also believe, however, that takeovers and amalgamations often produce a combined strength—to which my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) referred—allowing companies to compete in an international market place which they would not have been able to do alone.

Mr. Mullin: Does the hon. Lady agree that one of the problems of the takeover culture that exists in British industry, and especially in the City of London, is that it

obliges companies to be remorselessly short-term in their thinking? One effect of regular takeovers is that everyone is concerned with making the fastest possible buck in the shortest possible time, which is not necessarily conducive to the long-term interests of either companies or customers.

Mrs. Knight: Remarks such as that can be made only by someone who has lived in a sheltered world, perhaps a lecturing establishment, rather than working for companies. If the hon. Gentleman had worked in industry, he would know what an extraordinary comment that was. If—as his expression suggests—he has now decided that he has worked in industry, I suggest that he go back and find out what it is all about.

Mr. Mullin: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Knight: No. I have already given way once, and the hon. Gentleman will no doubt have an opportunity to have his say later if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It was extraordinary that, in the somewhat mournful diatribe with which he opened the debate, the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) should talk about the sale of the national grid. I have news for him: the national grid has not yet been sold. No doubt the right hon. Gentleman is already putting down yet more markers against privatisation. He criticised the difference between the sale price of the regional electricity companies and their valuation now, implying that the companies had been underpriced in the first instance. That increase in the valuation of the companies shows the improvement in their performance since privatisation. We should be proud of that: it demonstrates precisely what privatisation has done.

The hon. Gentleman then quoted one year's electricity price increase. What a selective use of statistics! I also obtained the statistics from the Library, which was the hon. Gentleman's source, and they show a continuing trend of price reduction. Long may that last. In the debate the anti-privatisation lobby has come back out and reared its ugly head. I am sure that we all recall the debate on British Airways when the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said that British Airways would be the pantomime horse of capitalism, if it was anything at all. British Airways is now the world's favourite airline.

When we debated British Telecom privatisation Opposition Members said that the public telephone box would be threatened with extinction. The number of call boxes has doubled, and what is more they work. These things mean something to people. British Gas prices have fallen since privatisation but that was never projected by Opposition Members. I do not know whether any of them read the journal *Science in Parliament* which is sent to us. The one which arrived last week had articles on nuclear power and nuclear privatisation by Greenpeace, which is in favour of privatisation. That is a turn-up for the book, and the articles are well worth reading.

As the House knows, I spent many years in industry before being elected to Parliament. In the years before privatisation the experience with nationalised companies, the state monopolies, was quite different and poorer from what happens today. Those companies, including the electricity companies, frequently ransomed British industry. They were able to do that because they were in state control and, ultimately, they were responsible to the House of Commons. Hon. Members took a close interest in them and effectively ran them. That is why they were inefficient and why they made a loss of about £50 million a week.

Opposition Members should be honest about these matters. If those companies had not been privatised the money that they now contribute to the Exchequer would not be available to be spent on the health service, education and social security. They contribute a great deal weekly, monthly and annually to the Exchequer. If the Opposition do not want that they should say which hospitals and schools they want closed because that is the choice.

Irrespective of whether it is taken over I want this electricity company to continue to produce electricity as cheaply as possible for its consumers and in an efficient and practical way. That has happened because of the competition that has resulted from privatisation, and more competition is now entering the electricity industry.

One of the matters of substance in the debate is regulation. Hon. Members have said that the regulator has no power, that he is some poor, weak individual sitting in an office and that he cannot do or say anything. That is rubbish. The regulator's key duty is to protect customers and promote competition in the electricity industry. That is what we want and it is what industry and the consumer want. He is responsible for settling disputes, issuing licences and investigating complaints, and for making sure that prices are not excessive. His responsibility for fixing a price formula has resulted in a drop in price to the consumer—my consumers and those of every hon. Member.

Those are some of the benefits that have resulted from the work of the regulator. Why does no Opposition Member seem to be prepared to speak about some of the positive happenings? Why are they always so mournful and negative? Not only have consumers benefited because prices have gone down but complaints have gone down as well. There was always a stream of complaints about electricity and long waits for repairs. People never knew when they would lose power or when it would come back. What is more, one could never get through on the telephone but the charges continued. That was the reality of a state monopoly.

The reality for my family in 1988 was that the electricity supply was cut off on Boxing day and it was not reconnected until two days later. That would not happen now because there is an efficient organisation which 99.8 per cent. of the time reconnects the electricity supply within 24 hours. It answers the phone and it compensates people who have lost their power supply. That is the sort of improvement from which customers have benefited. Opposition Members should give the electricity companies credit for that. It is the sort of service that my constituents want.

I mention briefly someone who has been ignored in this debate—the shareholder. He is always portrayed as some awful, scrubby individual in a black mac who somehow makes a profit at somebody else's expense. Who are the shareholders? They are the pension funds—indeed, there are 15 million people in pension funds, which means 15 million of my and other hon. Members' constituents. I want their pension funds to increase so that they can benefit. Who else is a shareholder? Some 6 million private individuals, both men and women, have put their savings into such companies. I want the electricity company we

[Mrs. Knight]

are debating to benefit them. The shareholder is an ordinary man or woman who has saved some money, put it to one side, and who has now invested himself or is in a pension fund. He has benefited and will benefit from the electricity companies.

It is shameful that the shareholder is either ignored or painted in the way that he was this afternoon. The great achievements of privatisation have been the efficiencies and improvements that have resulted in companies being taken out of the Government's hands. The Opposition have done some if-ing and but-ing about whether the regulation system should be changed for the utilities or whether it should be changed for everybody else. Some Labour Members spoke about renationalisation, but their Front-Bench spokesmen rapidly shook their heads. They do not know what they are in favour of, other than taking as much control as possible. That will do nothing for the companies, the customers or the shareholders.

There are one or two improvements, however, that I would like to see. I would like more competition within the industry and for there to be lower prices, especially for some of the major energy users. The prices that they pay should be brought closer to those paid by some of their competitors on the continent. I hope that the Government will consider that point.

Although I am conscious that the privatised utilities receive more scrutiny than almost any other company, I would like greater clarity and coherence in the remuneration packages of a few who work within them. There are many thousands of hard-working, first-class directors and managers in the industry and I would not want their efforts to be destroyed because of the perceived excesses of a handful. I want to ensure that the undoubted benefits to the consumer of privatisation are not muddied by over-concentration on the pay of a few. What I want is concentration on the successes; something that is not even mentioned in the Opposition motion.

9.18 pm

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): When the President of the Board of Trade gave some guarantees about the electricity industry, my mind went back to his guarantees to the miners about the mining industry and the possible closure of 31 pits. Despite his guarantees, all 31 pits have now closed. His guarantees are not worth the paper that they are written on.

Our debate today is not about shareholders or about whether the industry is being run in the right or the wrong way. The industry has been privatised. I worked in a nationalised industry—the coal industry—all my life before coming to this place. Nationalisation has its faults—I could talk about them all evening— but this matter involves one big fault. It is all about a company—Trafalgar House—which is not into electricity, about the capitalist system, and about private entrepreneurs taking a stake in what was a nationalised industry.

The industry was privatised and, obviously, it put up the costs. Figures show that fact, and my hon. Friends have mentioned that prices have risen. Anyone who thinks that they have not should look at their own bills. We do not have to defend that view. I would not even try to defend it. People out there know that their bills have gone up since privatisation. That is where all the profits have come from—hence Trafalgar House's bid for Northern Electric. It made the bid, not because Northern Electric does not deal with complaints any more, or is run badly, but because it has good cash flow and has made a whopping big profit. Trafalgar House wants the takeover to get itself out of the mire.

Tax was mentioned. I have raised the question of tax on two occasions, once with Prime Minister. I did not hear the President of the Board of Trade mention the tax that will be lost to the Treasury.

Mr. Booth: How does the hon. Gentleman deal with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) that it is not just a few rich entrepreneurs making a profit? Privatisation is helping 15 million pensioners and others to secure their futures.

Mr. Campbell: As I have said, it is not a question of someone making some money for some dear old pensioners, but of a company taking over another company which has good cash flow and vast profits. The profits would be wiped out. It is not a question of anything else. All the hogwash that I heard the other night was crazy. This is about the money that Northern Electric has accrued and about the cash flow that is coming in.

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): Is my hon. Friend aware that, because of the takeover, Trafalgar House is likely to save £270 million in advance corporation tax? The taxpayer will lose because the company will be able to set that money off in buying Northern Electric.

Mr. Campbell: That is exactly what I was saying. I asked the Prime Minister about tax last week, but he refused to answer because he was not aware of what was happening. Perhaps the Prime Minister has washed his hands of the matter and disagrees with the takeover because he is on the Treasury's side. I am sure that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be peeved.

We are not talking about only £270 million. That amount is involved not just with one electricity company, but with all 12 electricity companies. One could speculate beyond that—one thinks of the water companies, with their vast profits and cash flow. Ministers cannot tell me that water bills have not been increasing for many years.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Does the hon. Gentleman realise that, when those companies were nationalised, the taxpayer used to lose £50 million every week? The taxpayer is now gaining £48 million every week. Is that not a significant factor in the equation?

Mr. Campbell: As I said, I am not arguing about nationalisation in the old days. I know who ran the nationalised companies—Colonel Blimps and other people. It was a "give us a job" sort of thing. They ran a company but did not know what the hell they were doing half the time. That was the problem with nationalisation. There is nothing wrong with nationalisation if it done run properly. In the mining industry, we have always said that if we had been given the chance we would have run it properly. That is the problem—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."]

Of course I would renationalise, because the industry is a utility and it belongs in the public domain. Any energy company belongs in the public domain. I hope that the mining industry will be brought back into the public domain. I hope that the mining and electricity industries

will be returned to public ownership. However, when we return to power the companies will be in such a mess that we shall not have a penny to do anything, because the Government have got the country knackered now.

We heard tonight of insider dealing by the Swiss Bank Corporation, which is now buying shares in Yorkshire Electricity. Perhaps the Minister can say why—and perhaps the corporation is buying shares elsewhere. There is some hanky-panky going on, and it will come out in future. I hope that the press are listening because someone who delves deep enough will find that there is a rabbit away and that someone made a lot of money from the deal.

Mr. Mullin: I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend, but the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) seemed to be under the impression that electricity companies did not make profits before privatisation. They all made profits. Northern Electric made profits of £50 million in 1985-86, £49 million in 1986-87, £47 million in 1987-88, and so on.

Mr. Campbell: The National Coal Board also made profits in a few years when I was there and broke even in other years. If the Minister for Energy and Industry examines the records, he will discover that for himself. That is not to say that they were all right. I could talk all night about the faults of nationalisation, but if I were a Minister in charge of nationalisation I would at least know where the faults lay, which the Minister does not. I know where nationalisation went wrong in the pits. It was not the fault of the miners or of the men at the pit head, but of people elsewhere.

The regulator is most important, but Professor Littlechild will see his job disappear. More takeovers will occur. Yorkshire Electricity will be next, and Trafalgar House may take over the whole lot, with the Swiss Bank Corporation. The companies may be formed into one huge multinational electricity industry, which would take us back to square one. If the regulator loses his powers, he may as well sign on the dole because the big companies will not take a blind bit of notice of him. They are interested only in making vast profits.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said that the Tory party has made £600,000 from Trafalgar House since 1987. Over the next few years, I will keep a close eye on how much the Tories get from this deal. I bet that they do very well from it—and from any company taking over other utilities, such as water.

I begin to wonder if a rabbit is not away here and that all this is being done on purpose. A Labour Government will soon be in power. I know what I would like to do, but I am not a member of the Front Bench. A Labour Government will tighten the powers of the regulator, but such takeovers will make a nonsense of him and put him on the dole. When Labour comes to power, we will not even be able to regulate the industry. It will be a case of dog eat dog, vast profits, and billions in shares for directors. It is absolutely crazy.

All this is not about pensions and small shareholders in Newcastle and the north-east. It is about greed by private companies and monopolies in taking over industries that have cash flow and profits.

9.29 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I want to make a couple of points about the Trafalgar House bid for Northern Electric which have not been mentioned in the debate but which merit examination. Trafalgar House is a very large company which has a number of large companies within it based in my constituency. It is majority owned by British institutions. It owns Cleveland Bridge, Cleveland Structural, Davy Offshore, Davy Engineering and Trafalgar House Offshore. It has maintained its subsidiary headquarters in the north of England.

I hold no brief for Trafalgar House or for Northern Electric. However, Northern Electric has, to its credit, brought down the price of electricity, imposed a pay freeze for the past three years and reduced its prices to large consumers in real terms since privatisation.

In this debate, Labour is caught on the horns of a dilemma. It waxes on about high pay and the supposed deficiencies of privatised electricity companies, but it now wants to save some of them from the rigours of the market economy. On the radio last week the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) told us:

"It's our money and we want it back."

What does that mean? As we have heard from the hon. Members for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) and for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell), it means nationalisation. But that is not official Labour policy.

Labour's policy is, apparently, to restore state control by the back door by giving the regulator greater powers to intervene. In the weeks and months ahead, as we head for the general election, I look forward to exposing the truth about the Labour party's position. Labour has a hidden agenda to renationalise many companies, but it will not tell anyone in case it does not get elected because of it.

9.30 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I start by responding to the point made by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) and I refer to a briefing that Trafalgar House made available this evening, on ownership of the regional electricity companies. It makes the point that neither the Government nor the Opposition are opposed to a change of ownership of the regional electricity companies in principle. The point is that we are not here this evening to renationalise those companies. We are concerned about the position, among others, of the regional stakeholders who have invested money in companies across the country.

Many of us were in the House when we first dealt with the privatisation of the electricity companies. We heard at that time that it was to be an extension into the regions of popular capitalism and that it was to be an opportunity for ordinary people to get a share in major utilities in their area. The fact is that the utilities are not like international conglomerates; they are different in character and in function. They are subject to different disciplines, depending on the nature of the market.

It was significant that the President of the Board of Trade seemed to think that any company that had been at some stage in public ownership was a public utility for the purposes of this debate. As far as we are concerned, a company that has responsibility for providing gas, water

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

or electricity—the fundamentals of a civilised life in our society—has to be the subject of regulation and has to be the subject of special and different forms of control.

The President of the Board of Trade has refused to intervene in a bid for a regional electricity company and we must look at the reasons why. It could be suggested that the right hon. Gentleman is merely bowing to one of the major paymasters of the Tory party. It could be that he is ignoring the deep anxieties about the behaviour of the Swiss Bank Corporation, or it could be simply that he is turning his back on the small shareholders and favouring his friends in the City. Those criticisms are commonplace when dealing with takeovers of any kind.

Some of us in the House remember the same criticisms and the same concerns being voiced at the time of the Guinness bid for Distillers. We were told then that the headquarters of Guinness were to be located in Scotland. We were told then that it would be a major international company operating out of Scotland. Virtually within days of the bid being agreed, all those undertakings were reneged on. The now discredited owners and leaders of Guinness turned on their heels and left Scotland behind them. It is against that background that we judge tonight's speeches on the takeover.

We are dealing with a private energy utility, which has at least three more years of monopoly franchise to run. Indeed, it is quite likely that that franchise will run for longer. The regulator has already stated that he has no idea how long it will be before the metering technology is available to enable competition in the regions in the electricity market. At present, there is not the means whereby domestic consumers' electricity consumption can be metered from more than one source. So it is quite possible that the three years of monopoly under the franchise will be extended for a much longer period.

It is certainly clear that with such a monopoly and the lax price controls that the regulator put in place last year—if anyone doubts the laxity of the controls, he need only remember the reaction of the market to the distribution price review, when the prices of shares rocketed because of the relief that the regulator was going to give the industry an easy time—Northern Electric can look to increasing its debt ratio to a figure in the region of 225 per cent. by March next year, if the bid is successful. It will take another four years after that before its debt ratio comes down to about 100 per cent.

Indeed, the *Financial Times* is right to say in its editorial today:

"As stable, cash generative businesses, the Recs ought to carry high proportions of debt".

They should be capable of carrying such debt because they have the guarantee of income and the guarantee of a market for some considerable time to come.

It is not surprising that, having become so cash rich, Northern Electric should feel so relaxed about throwing money at its shareholders to defend itself. After the privatisation of the regional electricity companies at an artificially low price, and after they have been allowed to be regulated by the most feeble poacher-cum-gamekeeper, it is not surprising that so much interest is now being taken in them.

Perhaps it is not right to attack the director general personally, but it has to be said that he seems somewhat lax to choose, in the middle of a major industrial crisis of the kind that seems to be currently taking place, to go on his holidays. It certainly suggests that he has not quite got his eye on the ball.

One can understand the frustration of Trafalgar House at the regulator's suggestion that it should separate its activities so that he can regulate them more effectively. The regulator maintains that that separation could be achieved either by a re-flotation of some 25 per cent. of Trafalgar House's electricity business, at a cost of between £100 million and £150 million, or simply by changing the original operating licence. If a re-flotation is unacceptable to Trafalgar House, is a change in licence acceptable to Northern Electric? After all, the power to amend electricity licences arises only after a report on the merger has been laid before Parliament and when both parties are subjected to the regime of the Electricity Act 1989. I believe that Trafalgar House is not subject to the Electricity Act regime at present. Perhaps the Minister will confirm that in his winding-up speech.

As we understand it, if Northern Electric is not prepared to have the licence changed, there is no reason why the licence should be changed. If the licence change was not available, Trafalgar House, even if it were successful in its bid, would not be able to sell electricity under the terms of the Electricity Act. Therefore, there is almost a power of veto in the hands of Northern Electric.

The licence modifications have already been referred to in the debate. Indeed, one of the few useful parts of the President of the Board of Trade's speech was when he came down to earth and addressed the status of the guarantees. He made it perfectly clear that the guarantees to be given by Trafalgar House to the regulator were meaningless because they had no force in law. The right hon. Gentleman said that if the regulator was not satisfied, he, the President of the Board of Trade, would be powerless if the regulator sought to refer the bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

The President said that, at the end of the day, he has to decide whether to accept the MMC report. However, the report may take a considerable time to produce and it may sufficiently frighten off potential predators for other regional electricity companies and make things that much more untidy and difficult for the people concerned.

I refer to the behaviour of Trafalgar House and its supporters last week at the meeting to which reference has been made. I am glad that the President has returned to the Chamber. He did not seem to appreciate that, when he was in purdah, or in opposition, writing books or having books written for him, telling us how he was going to intervene in industry, when the privatisation went through, the companies were organised on a regional basis precisely to attract the small shareholders into those companies.

When meetings are held to consult those people, it cannot be unreasonable for those voices to be heard, especially when at least one of the participants in the casting of the block vote, because that is what the institutions were doing—the Swiss Bank Corporation—is still under investigation for insider dealing. I am led to believe that an appeal to the takeover panel's ruling could still be made by Northern Electric and Warburg.

It is not just the shareholders and the bankers who are important. We must also consider the work force and the customers. In recent weeks we have heard a great deal about highly motivated men who have been richly rewarded by grateful shareholders. We all know about the

massive pay-outs awarded to directors and senior executives who, it can be argued, were simply being recompensed for paying off others.

After all, the so-called savings that have been achieved have not been as a result of massive capital investment, because there has been little of that at this stage. They have not been achieved as a result of an imaginative or original pricing policy, because it was dictated by a regulator who seemed to be more concerned with inflating share prices than with cutting electricity bills.

Those so-called savings have been achieved because of lower transmission costs and falls in the international price of coal and gas, through subsidised nuclear power and, most of all, as a result of the paying off of massive numbers of staff. One of the major attractions of Northern Electric to Trafalgar House is that its staffing cuts have been only about 15 per cent., which is only half Eastern Electricity's figure—it has cut 30 per cent. of its staff—and three quarters of that of Midlands Electricity, which has cut 20 per cent. Of the 12 RECs, five have cut more staff than Northern Electric.

It is little wonder that the workers of Northern Electric are looking anxiously at the intentions of both parties as their jobs will have to be sacrificed, as will future price cuts and investment, to pay for the takeover battle.

Mr. Caborn: Does my hon. Friend agree that not to allow the stock exchange's investigation to be concluded when the Swiss Bank Corporation took 8.5 per cent., at £135 million, in Yorkshire Electricity alone and Yorkshire Electricity had to have a search in companies legislation because the investment was supposed to be market-making, is totally out of sync with anything that has ever happened before on the stock exchange? Is it acceptable to allow the takeover to take place? Are the genuine shareholders being protected?

Mr. O'Neill: The activities of the Swiss Bank Corporation should be investigated further, if only because it seems to be a very easy and convenient arrangement whereby it is consulted by Trafalgar House and, before anything else happened, it acquired a substantial shareholding in the company in respect of which it is supposed to be acting as an adviser in relation to the takeover. It all seems to be too convenient. If the Minister had considered that, he should have thought again about a reference.

The current board of Northern Electric is prepared to sacrifice any number of staff to save the board's skin. However, the responsibility of the House is to all the people of the north-east. It is not their fault that they will be the captive consumers of a monopoly electricity supplier for years to come.

If Trafalgar wins with a higher bid than that promised by Northern, there will be precious little money left for distribution of the national grid flotation funds, which will have to be used instead to reduce the gearing or, alternatively, to offset tax losses elsewhere in the financial black hole that is called the Trafalgar House accounts. That company may be able to run cheap discount food stores, but, judging by the experience of passengers on the QE2, when the December Atlantic sailing was made to look like Christmas on Elm street, it has a lot to learn about consumer relations. Its one test in relation to individual consumers in Britain was a disaster.

These matters will not be decided by debates in the House. We shall not receive proper answers from Ministers—we have discovered that tonight. We need the cool assessment of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

When energy was privatised, many Opposition Members feared that a great many risks were being taken. Some of those fears have been proven to be exaggerated—we must admit that. There have been complaints about regional electricity companies. My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) made the point—if the President of the Board of Trade had been present, he would have heard it—that many of our past concerns have diminished. In terms of the accounts and the complaints side of things, matters have become better. However, other fears relating to price, certain aspects of customer satisfaction, the protection of small shareholders' rights, future employment guarantees and management profiteering have still to be resolved. Most of them will require a change of government.

What is required now is reference to the MMC of this, the first, but not the last, bid for a regional electricity company. Such companies will be monopolies for years to come. The shareholdings represent the major savings of many people of modest means. They have provided well-paid and, until now, safe jobs for many people in areas of high unemployment. RECs have responsibility to keep people warm and safe in their homes at reasonable costs. Utilities controlled by small groups of largely unaccountable people deserve better treatment and protection than a brush-off from an indifferent Government. For all those reasons, we call on hon. Members who believe that there are public issues that can be considered only by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to join us in the Lobby tonight.

9.46 pm

The Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. Tim Eggar): The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) has a reputation for being a moderate—a man of the centre road within the Labour party, always waiting to smell the wind, and always waiting to keep just the right side of it. It was interesting to hear what he said. He detests shareholders. He is not prepared, nor is the Labour party, to allow individual shareholders and institutional shareholders to make up their minds and to make their decisions about whether to accept the bid by Trafalgar House. Not a bit of it.

The hon. Gentleman is not interested in protecting the interests of the many hundreds of thousands of pensioners, both present and future, who will have the right to make decisions based on their investment, which has been made on their behalf. He is not willing to trust the judgment of individual shareholders of Northern Electric and elsewhere. Opposition Members do not understand the free market system or how free enterprise works. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members revert instinctively to central planning. *[Interruption.]*

I am not surprised that we have some interruptions from the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell). He is deeply uneasy about what his Front-Bench colleagues say. He thinks that the hon. Member for Clackmannan is too moderate. It would be very interesting to take a straw poll. Based on the contributions of Opposition Front-Bench Members, what would north-eastern Members really think about the future of the electricity industry in their area? I

[Mr. Tim Eggar]

shall tell the House. It was clear that the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) wanted renationalisation, as did the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) who was honest and came out with it immediately.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must control himself.

Mr. Eggar: It took a good honest Yorkshireman to stand up for Yorkshire. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) yelled out the benefits of Yorkshire Electricity, and pointed to the major contributions it has been making throughout the region. The hon. Gentleman defended privatisation, and the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) agreed. The hon. Gentleman said that there might be one or two things right about privatisation. He admitted that privatisation works.

One of the great pleasures I have had since the general election has been my frequent visits to the north-east, because I looked after the north-east for the Department of Trade and Industry until July. I admire and respect the sense of community and belief which goes deep in the north-east. There is a deep-rooted belief, shared by local Members of Parliament, that whatever is local is good, and that the status quo has to be defended at any cost.

If the status quo happens to be a nationalised regional distribution board for electricity, it must be defended. *[Interruption.]* Nobody fought privatisation harder than the hon. Member for Blyth Valley, or the other north-east Members. But now we have a privatised regional company, and what do they do? They rush to defence what is local. They defend the status quo.

Those hon. Members do not use as a defence the argument deployed by my hon. Friends, that prices have come down and that standards of service have improved—not a bit of it. Their defence is simple. It is a north-east company, and it must be defended whatever its rights or wrongs. Northern Electric is worth defending because it is there, but those hon. Members forget that Trafalgar House is also a major company in the north-east.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) pointed out the number of companies which the firm owns in the north-east, and I believe that Trafalgar House employs almost as many—if not more—people in the north-east than Northern Electricity.

Mr. Devlin: More.

Mr. Eggar: I am sorry. I did not pick that up.

Ms Armstrong: Will the Minister confirm that the taxpayer—with whom we are supposed to be concerned—is likely to lose about £270 million if the deal goes through?

Mr. Eggar: Of all the points which I thought the scarlet lady might bring up, nothing could surprise me more than that. The new, modern Labour party is worried about the taxpayer. It might have been worried about the customer. That is the first time that the hon. Lady has mentioned the taxpayer.

What the Leader of the Opposition said about privatisation is really interesting, because he was the Opposition spokesman when electricity was privatised. The right hon. Gentleman said that there would be a dramatic upward pressure on prices when electricity was privatised. He was wrong and, what is more, the hon. Member for Clackmannan admitted that he was wrong. Opposition Members said much about the share options issue, and I thought that the great new leader of the Labour party was bound to have made a lot about the share options issue when he lead the Opposition on electricity. I read through *Hansard*, but I could find no evidence at all that the right hon. Gentleman had ever referred to share options.

I thought that my eyes might have misled me so I arranged for the new marvel, the parliamentary on-line information service, to be interrogated. We fed in the word "Blair". We added "electricity" and "share options". We gave all the relevant dates. What came back? A big round zero. In all the time that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) led on electricity for the Opposition, he never raised the issue of share options. He has the nerve to mention the golden share in his motion. Much mention has been made of share options.

Certain myths persist. When the right hon. Member for Sedgefield opposed privatisation, he said that there would be no competition between the regional electricity companies. He was wrong. Already more than half the competitive market—the over-100 kW market—is provided by companies other than the local regional electricity company. There is already extensive competition. As even the hon. Member for Clackmannan admitted, there will be full competition for domestic consumers in 1998.

The debate has not been about regulation in the electricity sector. It has been about something much more fundamental. It has been about the real priorities of the Labour party. It has been about the dispute between the hon. Members for Blyth Valley, for Tyne Bridge and for Huddersfield. It has all been about clause IV and what the Opposition will do in the future about regional electricity companies.

You might not be a regular reader of the *News of the World*, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I can recommend it to you and to all Opposition Members. There is an interesting contribution to it. The hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) said something which I recommend that all Opposition Members should take account of. He said:

"The last thing we want . . . is to start contemplating our navels with this unnecessary debate. I don't think Clause 4 should be changed."

That is not—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot see what clause IV has to do with the debate. Stick to the debate.

Mr. Eggar: But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the debate is entitled

"Future ownership, control and regulation of regional electricity companies".

If the debate is not about whether the Opposition want to renationalise the regional electricity companies and the policies that they want to introduce, what on earth is it about?

I have a word of advice for the hon. Member for Blyth Valley. When he wants to get off early in the evening one day during the week, he should not look to mosey up close to the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster). He should go along the corridor a little further

and talk to the hon. Member for Jarrow. I am sure that he will oblige. I do not think that the hon. Member for Huddersfield will be so lucky. The hon. Member for Jarrow will read his speech in the debate this evening. The hon. Member for Huddersfield will be here throughout the night and probably the next day.

We cannot get away from the fact that, despite the new label, the Labour party is a socialist party. Whenever Labour Members are confronted with a difficult issue and have to make a difficult policy choice, what do they do? They rush for central control. They really believe that the man in Whitehall knows best and that the heyday of the socialist party was the day of maximum nationalisation—

Mr. Ronnie Campbell *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) must stop bawling and control himself. I have already told him that. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr. Eggar: There we see it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Blyth Valley—

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 246, Noes 280.

Division No. 78] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike

Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Barbara Roche and Mr. George Mudie.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry

Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Derek Conway.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 275, Noes 247.

Division No. 79] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
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Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John

Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms Barbara Roche and
Mr. George Mudie.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House applauds the improvements in performance in the electricity supply industry since privatisation; welcomes the benefits which customers are receiving in terms of lower prices and improved service; supports the continuing development of competition in the electricity market and the maintenance of effective regulation where this is necessary; and notes that the Director General of Electricity Supply will continue to promote competition and protect the interests of consumers.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to statutory instruments.

Hon. Members: Object.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

DEFENCE EVALUATION AND RESEARCH AGENCY

That the draft Defence Evaluation and Research Agency Trading Fund Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 27th January, be approved.—[*Mr. Burns.*]

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

BETTING, GAMING AND LOTTERIES

That the draft Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963 (Schedule 4) (Amendment) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 23rd January, be approved.—[*Mr. Burns.*]

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (NORTHERN IRELAND)

That the draft Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 9th February, be approved.—[*Mr. Burns.*]

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees).

ISRAEL (AGREEMENT)

That this House takes note of the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 9th December 1994, relating to the conclusion of a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement with Israel; and supports the Government's view that this is a welcome development in relations between the European Union and Israel.—[*Mr. Burns.*]

Question agreed to.

SCOTTISH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Mr. George Kynoch be discharged from the Scottish Affairs Committee and Mr. Allan Stewart be added to the Committee.—[*Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

ENVIRONMENT

Ordered,

That Mr. Roland Boyes be discharged from the Environment Committee and Mr. Bill Olner be added to the Committee.—[*Sir Fergus Montgomery, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*]

Business Rates (West Suffolk)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Burns.*]

10.29 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (Bury St. Edmunds): I am most grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak this evening, and I should like to thank my hon. Friend the Minister for being here to reply.

About four weeks ago, many of my constituents who run businesses received an unwelcome notice from the district valuer. Although, of course, there were beneficiaries, overall there were increases in my constituency. In a number of instances, that caused alarm and consternation, with some increases of more than 40, 60 and even 70 per cent.

All non-domestic properties are revalued every five years. The next revaluation comes into effect this year on 1 April. Any judgment of rateable value has been based on the increase or decrease in assessed rental values in the five-year period from 1 April 1988 to 1 April 1993. In 1988, the economy was growing strongly. Obsession with the value of property was a characteristic of that period, as was a belief that the road to riches lay in bricks and mortar. Those were the heady days of boom.

In common with every industrialised country, by 1993 the position was different. Property prices and rentals had weakened, bankruptcies of both a personal and corporate nature had risen, unemployment had increased, and the atmosphere of business confidence had become considerably more negative.

During the boom years, the counties of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire enjoyed the highest levels both of economic growth and of population anywhere in Britain. It is only in the past 12 months that confidence in the business community in west Suffolk has resurfaced, and growth, albeit patchy, in the region is happily once again the highest in the nation.

With that perspective, there was widespread and firm confidence in my constituency that the district valuer would reflect that background in his rental assessments. I fear that, four weeks ago, we were to be disappointed. There are two district councils in my constituency: St. Edmundsbury and Forest Heath. Both fully share my concern at the effect of those revaluations on the business sector.

Let me deal with what I regard as the most glaring aberration—the town of Mildenhall is suffering an average increase of nearly 18 per cent. With the adjacent villages, Mildenhall has 13,500 inhabitants. Unfortunately, it does not have a large supermarket to act as a magnet for shoppers. Forest Heath district council invited the district valuer to visit Mildenhall personally. Its members showed him the obvious number of empty properties. He saw what is perfectly clear to any objective observer: that the economic base for small shopkeepers in the town is, at best, fragile. In view of his visit, the increases proposed were an enormous and unexpected shock.

Among dozens of letters, the secretary of the Mildenhall Retailers Association, Mrs. Barbara Coppeard, has written to me in these terms:

"You are aware that many shops have closed over the last few years. Some have tried to re-open with new owners, sadly failing

[Mr. Richard Spring]

again within a short time . . . indeed trading conditions have steadily declined, despite the efforts of hard working small retailers. The town centre is contracting.

If the proposed increases are imposed in April they will inevitably affect the viability of many businesses."

Bluntly, I believe that those increases will have a severe impact on the economy of the town. The district valuer, to whom I have spoken directly about this matter, has said that he will consider it sympathetically if information about vacant shops and rental levels is produced afresh. I trust that he will. As the town's Member of Parliament, I cannot stand idly by while the livelihoods of my constituents are put at risk.

I draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister to the situation of Lakenheath, which has a population of 5,500. It has a much smaller number of shops. The average increase of 23 per cent. cannot be justified. The chairman of Lakenheath parish council, Mr. Bruce Rutterford, wrote:

"With an almost universal decrease in takings, the proposed increases may well be the final straw and may well lead to closure of some shops. If these shops do close, it is most unlikely that they will ever open again, and it will be a bad day when we start losing more shops in the village. There is much concern and confusion as to just how the district valuer arrives at the figures that are provided, so there appear to be certain inconsistencies here."

The number of United States service personnel attached to RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath is steadily increasing. The direct and indirect economic contribution made by those bases to the area is enormous. However, there is a changing pattern of purchasing activity by the Americans. As they have expanded in numbers, so have base facilities. They include restaurants, sports facilities and shopping commissaries. The upshot is that the overwhelming bulk of consumer items are purchased on favourable terms on the bases, and paid for in dollars.

The overall impact is spelt out in a letter from E. Carter and Sons Ltd. of Mildenhall, a home furnishing, removal and storage business in the high street. Mr. Carter wrote:

"The proposed revaluation of my property shows an increase of 44.87 per cent. I consider this to be excessive as my shop has not had a material change since the last valuation, and indeed trading conditions in Mildenhall have declined. With my business suffering a 3.13 per cent. decrease in turnover and a net loss over the last three years, the true rentable value has in fact decreased as traders leave town. This increase places an unfair burden on my profitability and will affect my long-term viability."

My own inquiries and observations endorse Mr. Carter's comments. There is no objective basis for any general upward revaluation of properties in Mildenhall and in Lakenheath in particular, and I share my constituents' concern at the proposed increases, which will considerably damage the commercial life of those towns.

The largest town in my constituency is Bury St. Edmunds, where there is also considerable concern about a number of projected revaluations. The same sentiments have been expressed by shopkeepers in Newmarket and in a letter from Mr. Eddie Stewart, the chairman of Brandon chamber of trade, where the average increase is 13.5 per cent.

I appreciate that the overall increase in west Suffolk is modest compared with other parts of England, but I want to highlight the collection of data to assess rateable value. That process results in erratic assessments, some of which bear no reality to true rental values. With the best will in the world, the district valuer does not appear to have full information on base rental values.

In 1993, it was common for all sorts of incentives to be offered in conjunction with lettings. It may be that the district valuer was not aware of rent-free periods and even reverse premiums. Much of the district valuer's evidence comes from rent returns by individual occupiers. Local chartered surveyors informed me that some forms were inaccurately completed.

One solution would be to sub-contract the preparation of the valuation list to local estate agents, surveyors and valuers on a 100 per cent. basis or—as with the council tax—the district valuer could undertake some valuation work, supported by local surveyors and valuers. That would have a dramatic effect on reducing excessive anomalies.

I shall now examine the appeals procedure. It is true that this is free, but many small business men seek professional advice. I need only add that there is a huge number of fly-by-night so-called professional advisers. The appeals procedure is unquestionably stressful. Given that, I applaud the help and guidance being given by Forest Heath district council to potential appellants in its area.

What is particularly troublesome, however, is that the process can take a long time. In respect of the 1990 list, it took at least a year for appeals to be dealt with, and in many cases there were periods of two, three, four and even five years before appeals were considered. Such cases exist in my constituency. In practice, the district valuer is not predisposed to respond until the appeals are listed for hearing by the local valuation court.

Business ratepayers have to pay the new rates on their assessment when entered into the list, even if it is clearly incorrect, and they get a refund of overpaid rates only following negotiations with the district valuer's office. It is my understanding that the district valuer's office is paid per appeal. However, if the anomalies are substantially reduced in the first place, the considerable number of appeals will diminish too. If we can cut down on the unreasonable anomalies, we can time-limit appeals.

If patients are guaranteed national health service treatment within specific times, the principle should extend to business rate appeals. I suggest a maximum of one year. All council tax banding appeals were effectively dealt with in under one year. It can and should be done.

I fully support the principle behind the Local Government Finance Act 1988, with the uniform national non-domestic rate and the formula of rateable value multiplied by a standard rate poundage. I make it clear that I recognise the substantial help of the £500 million of transitional relief. The increase on properties with a rateable value of £10,000 will be confined to 12.4 per cent., and below £10,000, the figure is 9.9 per cent. Of course, the limits will increase until full rates liabilities are met.

In a discussion document produced by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Association of County Councils and the Association of District Councils, it was argued that business rates should be returned to local authority control. When I stood as a

parliamentary candidate at Ashton-under-Lyne, I saw for myself the appalling consequences of this. Business rates were far too high, with the result that fledgling businesses could not prosper and would often have to move out of the area to survive at all.

That was the value that a Labour-controlled authority placed on the enterprises that created jobs in the area. What I saw was a disgrace, yet it was not as bad as the ruinous anti-business policies pursued by many other Labour-controlled authorities. I for one never wish to see whole areas of our country blighted again by such destructive policies.

Is there no way in which well-managed local councils can benefit from their own sensible policies? I have two excellent Conservative-controlled district councils in my constituency. Neither St. Edmundsbury borough council nor Forest Heath district council is proposing any increase in council tax this year. Additionally, the former is debt-free. Is there not some way in which such local authorities can be rewarded, especially if they create an environment for business expansion and job creation? Is not some form of rates repatriation possible?

I very much applaud the viewpoint of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment who, being from Suffolk, is right in his desire to strengthen town centres as lively, prosperous and agreeable places in which to live and shop. At a minimum, therefore, could some part of the moneys collected in well-managed local authorities be ploughed back into town centre improvements? Better lighting and pedestrian precincts encourage people to live and shop in town centres. I believe that all the towns in my constituency—Bury St. Edmunds, Newmarket, Mildenhall, Brandon and Lakenheath—would benefit from that. Their attractiveness would be further enhanced. I believe that that course would be right and fair.

The small business sector is the engine of west Suffolk's local economy and of job creation. It is the very lifeblood of my constituency. The Government have brought forward a number of welcome measures to help the small and medium business sector. I mention in particular the substantial number of businesses which have been taken out of VAT altogether, the cut in corporation tax for small businesses, and the higher profit limits for the smaller companies' rate of 25 per cent. The abolition of inheritance tax and the abolition of capital transfer tax on lifetime gifts are to be greatly welcomed. I hope that the abolition of the statutory audit will be the first of a number of further deregulatory policy initiatives.

However, while the principle of a national non-domestic rate is correct, in practice it produces too many specific anomalies, which cause stress and anxiety to smaller businesses which are finally beginning to put the recession behind them. The Government have made a number of important and useful concessions on business rates, but more needs to be done. I hope that my hon. Friend will reflect positively on the ideas that I have put forward, which would be greatly welcomed in west Suffolk and, indeed, throughout the country as a whole.

10.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) has put the concerns of his constituents most eloquently, not only tonight but in a substantial number of representations that he has made to me and to other Ministers in recent weeks.

Let me first say that the Government think it essential that rateable values keep pace with the property market to ensure that rates fall with relative fairness on businesses everywhere. That is why we have regular revaluations and, indeed, have tied ourselves to undertake them every five years through statute. Parliament has approved that.

Rates, of course, are based on rents. Data collected by the Valuation Office Agency—I shall turn to how that is done shortly—shows that in my hon. Friend's constituency, rents rose between 1988 and 1993, the dates on which the two recent valuations are based. That has resulted in a rise in rateable values of 11 per cent. in Forest Heath, and of 13 per cent. in St. Edmunsbury. With the transitional arrangements that we have introduced to cushion the effects of the revaluation, my latest information suggests that bills will rise in those areas by, on average, 5 per cent. and 4 per cent. respectively.

The effect of the transitional arrangements will be to limit rate rises for small businesses to no more than 7.5 per cent., after allowing for inflation. For property with a new rateable value of £10,000 or more—or £15,000 or more in London—increases will be limited to a maximum of 10 per cent. after allowing for inflation. For small properties consisting of business and living accommodation, the corresponding limit will be 5 per cent. Those limits will continue to apply throughout the period up to the next revaluation in 2000.

More than 3,000 properties in my hon. Friend's constituency, and 1.25 million in England as a whole, will benefit from the scheme. In East Anglia, that is worth almost £50 million to ratepayers. Part of the cost will be met by the Exchequer and part by limiting rate reductions. Of course, the revaluation will not affect the overall yield from business rates. Statute requires us to adjust the poundage to account for any changes in the total rateable value for England.

As it happens, the 1995 revaluation will hardly change the total of rateable values. That is why, as my hon. Friend noted, we have only increased the poundage in line with inflation, from 42.3p in the pound to 43.2p. After allowing for the effects of future appeals and inflation, that ensures that the rates burden overall is unchanged.

Moving on to how data are collected, broadly speaking, valuation officers are required to assess the market rent for properties using values from April 1993. The best evidence of a market rent is the actual rent on the property itself. That is why valuation officers ask all occupiers for details of the rents they are paying. They have been collecting that information since April 1993. That evidence is used to assess the open market rent, and then the rateable value of the property.

[Mr. Robert B. Jones]

It is quite possible that, when agreeing actual rents, occupiers will receive incentives such as a lump sum payment or a period when no rent is payable. That would, of course, alter the level of rent agreed. That is why valuation officers ask for full details on those incentives and adjust the rents accordingly. Indeed, some of the information may also be incorrect. However, the valuation officer will be able to examine the rental evidence on many similar properties, and will ignore those which appear out of line.

However, I am pleased to hear that ratepayers in my hon. Friend's constituency have started to talk to the valuation officer. For the first time with this revaluation, the Valuation Office Agency has let ratepayers know their rateable values in advance of their rate bills. That notification, together with a booklet from my Department explaining the new arrangements, went to ratepayers so that they would have early notice of changes. If they think the valuation officer has not taken all the facts into account, they can provide him with more information and open a dialogue with him—the aim being to resolve matters more quickly.

I was interested to hear my hon. Friend's suggestion that there may be scope for contracting out to private firms some of the work on future revaluations. Ideas of that kind are timely, because the VOA is currently undergoing its first framework review as an agency.

My hon. Friend referred to the use of private firms in the banding of dwellings for council tax. That was indeed a success, and a practical illustration of how the private sector can contribute to valuation work. We are examining other possibilities in the framework review. However, we need to recognise that the parallel between council tax banding and valuation for rating is not an exact one.

The banding of domestic property, whatever its organisational challenges, was less difficult technically than the revaluation of non-domestic property. Information about the sale prices of houses and flats is relatively plentiful, accessible and easy to interpret. Because the task was to allocate properties to one of seven broad bands rather than to determine precise values, much of the work could be carried out at the desk, and internal inspections were not required.

Valuation for rating is different in all these respects. It requires a more specialised expertise, which normally takes a number of years of training and experience to develop. The rating profession is a small and fragmented one. Finally, detailed inspection of properties is often needed, and VOA officers have powers of entry. It would be, at least, quite a departure to give such powers to a private contractor.

I certainly do not want to suggest that there is no potential role for the private sector in future revaluations. There are, however, a number of difficulties to consider, which did not apply in the case of the council tax.

My hon. Friend suggested that there might be scope for restoring to local government, or at least to some authorities, a measure of control over the non-domestic rate. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that the logic of our 1990 reforms was extremely powerful, and remains so even now that memories of the worst excesses of local government under the earlier arrangements have started to fade. It continues, besides, to enjoy the support of the main business organisations. I take it, therefore, that he has in mind only some marginal adjustment to the new regime, rather than wholesale change.

I can well understand that authorities which had always made moderate and responsible use of their rating powers in the past may have felt frustrated by the 1990 changes. I do, however, see some difficulties with the idea of rewarding good past behaviour with some relaxation of the current regime.

First, there could be no question of simply rewarding those authorities of which my hon. Friend and I happened in our wisdom to approve, even though I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath councils: objective statistical criteria would be needed, and I doubt whether those would prove technically straightforward or uncontroversial, or could be guaranteed not to throw up perverse results.

We would need, too, to ponder rather carefully the nature of the reward. Would it, for example, consist of a power to raise a supplementary levy on the non-domestic rate to finance additional expenditure? That would seem on the face of it a rather illogical way of recognising previous restraint in budgeting. Offsetting measures would be required, too, to ensure that the selected authorities' use of their power did not add to the total of public expenditure. Clearly, the issue requires a great deal of thought, but I appreciate the spirit in which my hon. Friend has put his proposal forward, and new ideas in the area are always welcome.

My hon. Friend suggested that the appeals procedures are far from satisfactory. We would agree, which is why we have undertaken extensive consultation on the issue, and are to make changes to the system. The new procedures will allow ratepayers who disagree with their new value to appeal at any time up to 1 April 2001. In 1990, ratepayers had only six months to lodge an appeal.

After 1 April this year, if the valuation officer does not agree with the ratepayer's proposal for a new value, he must pass it to the local valuation tribunal as an appeal within three months of receiving it, not six months as is the case at present.

However, when he talks about his constituents with appeals still outstanding from 1990, my hon. Friend should bear in mind the fact that appeals can still be made against the 1990 list. If there is a change in the property, or a change in the locality, ratepayers can appeal up to six months after that change. Of the 1.25 million appeals received so far in England, nearly half have been made in the years since 1990. So it is not surprising that some cases have still to be heard.

By the end of December last year, my hon. Friend's constituents had made just over 3,000 appeals against the 1990 list. Over half of those were made after the initial appeal period. I understand that there are some 600 outstanding. Eighty per cent. have been settled—slightly better than the national average of 76 per cent. We expect that the vast majority of proposals received by the end of March 1995 will be cleared by the end of 1995-96.

We hope that our new procedures will speed the process for the next quinquennium. We also hope that the removal of time limits for initial appeals will make

it less easy for fly-by-night operators to press the unsuspecting ratepayer into parting with money to make an appeal which never happens. I am very aware of the instances of fraudulent activities, and I am greatly concerned about them. My Department's information leaflets contain warnings to ratepayers to be on their guard against those companies. The professional bodies have also issued warnings, which have been picked up by the national press as well as the trade press.

I believe that businesses are considerably better off under the new system of uniform business rates. They can now be assured that local authorities cannot increase bills from year to year to finance extra expenditure. That compares with the 1980s, when poundages rose by 37.4 per cent. more than inflation. Since 1990, increases in the poundage have been restricted to the rate of inflation. In the past four Budgets, the Chancellor has committed a considerable amount of relief to ratepayers. That has ensured that, in real terms, ratepayers now pay less in rates than they did in 1989-90.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for this opportunity to air such important issues, and I hope that I have assured him that we are looking at other ways of doing things and, in the case of appeals, are taking immediate steps to change things.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 21 February 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES (No. 2) BILL *[Lords]*
Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION

School Financing, London

1. **Mr. Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate she has made of the effect on average class sizes in London of the 1995-96 financial settlement for schools.

The Secretary of State for Education (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): London local education authorities will receive an extra £73 million for the 1995-96 settlement. Class sizes will depend on the way in which authorities and schools choose to spend their resources.

Mr. Dowd: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply. Will she confirm that the severity of the 1995-96 settlement, coupled with the systematic underfunding of the teachers' pay award, is nothing more than a shameful camouflage, by which the Government are attempting to revive interest in their flagging policy of encouraging opt-outs? Will she also confirm that it is a shameful attempt to try to put a few pennies in the bank for tax cuts, which will not work, at the next general election?

Mrs. Shephard: No, I will not confirm any such thing. Next year's settlement must be seen in the context of two years in which there have been generous settlements for local government. The settlement also allows an increase across the board and for education for all authorities. We expect local education authorities, by identifying priorities, by drawing on balances and by making sensible savings in central services, to accommodate the pay settlement.

Dame Angela Rumbold: Will my right hon. Friend comment on the content of a letter that has come into my possession, which is written by the education chairman of my local authority, the London borough of Merton, which is Labour controlled? She asks all her colleagues to unite in an effort to, as she puts it, "stir up aggro" among the governors and parents in the London borough of Merton against the council's "difficulties", so-called, in being able to fund education this year.

Mrs. Shephard: It is a great pity that the chairman of the Merton education committee should so waste her time. She would be very much better employed identifying sensible priorities within her education authority so that the children of Merton do not suffer.

Mr. Don Foster: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, in London, there are almost 100,000 primary school pupils in classes of more than 30 and that the figure is set to rise unless more money is made available from the Treasury for the education service? Will she tell the House what endeavours she has made in the past few weeks to obtain more money from the Treasury and with what success?

Mrs. Shephard: I have already explained that London local authorities will receive an extra £73 million for the 1995-96 settlement. We must also remember that over the past five years, the standard spending assessments of London authorities have increased by 25 per cent. above the rate of inflation. London authorities also receive considerably more cash per pupil in their education SSAs than do other authorities. For all those reasons, I see no reason why class sizes should rise in London.

Compulsory Sport

2. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what new initiatives she has to encourage compulsory sport within schools.

Mrs. Gillian Shepherd: The revised national curriculum for physical education places much greater emphasis on team games and competitive sport.

Mr. Townsend: Does my right hon. Friend agree with Sir Roger Bannister that we have become a nation of the contentedly unfit? Does she also agree that an element of compulsion is essential if children are to take sport seriously? What is the Department's policy on teaching cricket in schools, following our dismal and dreary performance down under?

Mrs. Shephard: I am probably one of the discontentedly unfit. My hon. Friend certainly speaks for himself. We think that competitive and team games are a very important part of a balanced PE curriculum. It will perhaps be of some comfort to my hon. Friend to learn that, in future, 14 to 16-year-olds will have to engage in two activities in the PE curriculum, one of which must be a competitive game. No doubt many of them will wish to take cricket.

Mr. Kilfoyle: How does that rhetoric square with the sales of local authority playing fields, which have been forced by the persistent cuts that the Government have made in local authority funding? What does she say also to the Dartford West high school for girls, which has had its playing fields asset-stripped and given to neighbouring grant-maintained schools for their sole use, resulting in the exclusion of 750 young girls in Dartford?

Mrs. Shephard: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is among the ranks of the contentedly unfit.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I was once a PE teacher.

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentlemen claims that he was once a PE teacher. I am glad to hear it. He should therefore know that regulations are in place which define

the amount of playing fields that schools should have. They cannot be sold if the effect would be to reduce the area below the required minimum.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if children were encouraged to take part in compulsory sport, as Conservative Members believe should be the case, they would take a serious interest in the support of our national teams and not indulge in the kind of mindless violence that we saw so appallingly exhibited in Dublin last week?

Mrs. Shephard: It is to be hoped that that might be so. Certainly, taking part in competitive and team games helps to teach young people to work together as a team, how to co-operate and how to strive towards a common goal.

Student Loans Scheme

3. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals she has to make changes in the operation of the student loans scheme.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): The Government have no current plans to introduce major changes to the loans scheme, but keep its operation under review.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that the student loans scheme is seriously flawed and very unfair? Once former students reach the threshold at which they have to begin making repayments, they soon start having to pay £70 a month, when they still have low incomes and increasing commitments. Why will not the Government recognise that the scheme is a waste of time, scrap it and introduce a fairer system?

Mr. Boswell: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is way off beam. The average repayment currently under the Student Loans Company scheme is £14 per month. Nobody need start repayments until his income has attained at least £14,600 per annum. That is a fair provision, which should be acknowledged.

Mr. Pawsey: I hope that my hon. Friend will disregard the ill-informed comments of the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), who clearly knows as much about the student loans scheme as I do about black pudding manufacturing. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the interest-free student loans scheme will remain and that we shall not go down the route of a graduate tax, as some Opposition Members advocate?

Mr. Boswell: I can tell my hon. Friend, who I am sure is a dab hand at making black puddings in his spare time, that we have no plans to charge a commercial rate of interest for student loans, nor have we any plans to impose a graduate tax. I can tell those Opposition Members who hanker after this nostrum to get them out of their intellectual difficulties that the likely rates of tax under those provisions would be sufficient to alarm them and, indeed, students considerably.

Mr. Bryan Davies: Does the Minister not recognise that the Student Loans Company was besieged by student complaints—35,000 before Christmas—because it could not provide students with the resources they need? What on earth is going on when the assessor, who is meant to adjudicate between the company and student complainants, has dealt with three cases only in the past four years, has found in favour of the company on all three occasions and has been paid more than £30,000 for his pains?

Mr. Boswell: What I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that the fact that the assessor has been called in on only a limited number of occasions in the past suggests—as our evidence suggests—that the company's performance was satisfactory at its inception. The hon. Gentleman is well aware of the fact that the performance last autumn was not satisfactory.

Thanks to hon. Members on both sides of the House, Ministers and students themselves, we said that that was not satisfactory and that the company would have to deal with the situation. It has now done so, and it has also undertaken a full review of the repeat application procedure in which it is involving representatives of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, the National Union of Students and others. That shows a responsive organisation which is anxious to help students and not the kind of caricature which the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) has already thoughtfully set out in the press release which I have.

Mr. David Martin: Does my hon. Friend recollect the scare stories that went around when the student loans scheme was introduced? It was said that the scheme would either put off students from poorer backgrounds from applying to university or prevent them staying there. That has not proved to be the case in Portsmouth. Can my hon. Friend give me some information on the national scene?

Mr. Boswell: Yes, I will readily give my hon. Friend that information. It is clear from the student income and expenditure survey which was published a year ago that, for the first time, the proportion of students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds exceeded 50 per cent. The existence of the loans scheme and the resources provided make that possible.

High School Graduation

4. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what survey she has conducted of the results of US research on the effects of the system of high school graduation on the motivation of pupils.

The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr. Eric Forth): My right hon. Friend has conducted no survey of the results of such US research.

Mr. Gunnell: Given that there remain in our system an unacceptably high number of pupils who leave school without any tangible qualifications, does the Minister not think that there are practical lessons that we might learn from the United States system, which graduates more than 80 per cent. of its pupils from high school and encourages many of them as adults to go back to school part time to complete that qualification?

Mr. Forth: I yield to none in my affection and admiration for most things American, not least Mrs. Forth. However, the implication behind the hon. Gentleman's question is not something that we can all recognise. There are many aspects of the American system that are good, but there are many which are not so good, and that is

recognised in the United States itself. I would always be prepared to look at, and to learn from, what is good in other countries, but I would be very cautious about jumping to the conclusion that we can somehow transmute that from other countries to our system, to our benefit.

Dr. Hampson: Is my hon. Friend aware that he does not need to consider research in the United States? He simply needs to consider an independent report from the university of Leeds, which showed quite clearly that, in terms of motivation of pupils, the most important aspect was the expectations that teachers had of them. Under the Leeds system, in the primary sector—this is translatable across the country—expectations were far too low. It is now 19 years since a Labour Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan, said that there had to be an end to progressive teaching techniques and that we had to serve more the needs of industry and vocational occupations. Despite that recognition, the Labour Government did absolutely nothing about it.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has put his finger on a very important matter, which has been highlighted time and time again by independent reports, not least recently by Ofsted and Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools. Too often, teachers in schools which are seen to be disadvantaged in some way, or which are in what are regarded as difficult areas, do not have sufficiently high expectations of their pupils and do not make sufficient demands on themselves—the teachers—or on their pupils. If they did, that would be a key to raising performance, expectations, staying-on rates and qualifications of the kind referred to by the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell). My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) is absolutely right.

School Leavers (Skills)

5. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what specific steps are being taken to ensure that pupils leaving school have the skills required by manufacturing industry.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The national curriculum and the new vocational qualifications all contribute to providing pupils with the skills necessary for working life.

Mr. Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend agree with John Fraser, currently president of the Chemical Industries Association Ltd. and chairman and chief executive of Ciba plc—an international company with its headquarters in Macclesfield—who states that what manufacturing industry wants is a supply of excellent theoretical and practical scientists, school leavers with a thorough grounding in science and a general public who are scientifically literate and can appreciate the benefits of science rather than being concerned about its mysteries?

Mrs. Shephard: I am interested to hear from my hon. Friend the views of the president of the Chemical Industries Association, a group in which my hon. Friend takes a keen interest. It is important that the needs of manufacturing industry and employers in general should be addressed by the national curriculum. Manufacturing needs will be met principally through design and technology, but also through rigorous standards in science and mathematics. We are also devoting resources to developing the use of information technology, which again is of clear relevance. What matters most is that standards should be rigorous.

Mr. Blunkett: Given that industry is dependent on young people being literate and numerate, is this not entirely the wrong moment to be cutting investment in our education service? Will the Secretary of State this afternoon give the House and the country a pledge that, following her statement in Leicestershire last Wednesday, she is prepared to listen to what is happening in schools and colleges and to do what her predecessor—the present Chancellor of the Exchequer—did three years ago and go to the Cabinet and argue for further investment to meet the teachers' pay increase? Would that not avoid a reduction in standards, a reduction in opportunity and a reduction in the literacy and numeracy which our industry requires for the future?

Mrs. Shephard: Perhaps I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that we are not cutting investment in education. As I made clear earlier, next year's settlement allows for an increase across the board. The total of more than £28 billion is a considerable investment in the future of our young people. It is time that the hon. Gentleman stopped scaremongering in this way, and looked at the framework for standards and rigour, which is backed by £28 billion of investment.

Grant-maintained Schools

6. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many grant-maintained schools there are in the north of England.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Robin Squire): There are 137 grant-maintained schools in the north of England.

Mr. Atkinson: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, out of the 900 schools inspected so far, just 9 per cent. are grant-maintained schools, yet out of the 52 schools identified in the "best improvers" category, 14 were grant-maintained? Does that not show that, above all, the argument is about quality? Is it not a pity that more parents in the north have not had an opportunity to vote on the issue?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend has stumbled across an interesting statistic. It is fairly well known that many of our best schools have become self-governing. What is less well known is that many of our most improving schools have also become self-governing, and the figures which my hon. Friend has given clearly underline that point. I would simply add that that will only increase the attraction of those schools to parents—including, of course, parents who are also Labour party activists.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The reorganisation in my constituency involves Keswick school. With that in mind, will the Minister tell me whether grant-maintained schools have advantages in being able to raise money for capital projects over and above other similar schools which are not grant-maintained? If they do have advantages, why, in principle, should they?

Mr. Squire: The answer is a little complex. It is not true to say that grant-maintained schools may borrow formally. They can certainly look to outside interests which may be interested in making various arrangements

with them, as indeed can an LEA school. Of course, an LEA can borrow significantly greater sums. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) would sit quietly for a moment, he might hear something useful. In 1993-94, nearly half of all capital expenditure by local authorities on schools was funded other than by Government-approved borrowing. That is why grant-maintained schools must have access to other forms of funding, including a reasonable capital allocation.

Sixth Forms

7. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the trend in the formation of sixth forms in comprehensive schools; how this compares with the development of sixth form and tertiary colleges; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Schools continue to bring forward proposals for the addition of sixth forms. All such proposals which come before my right hon. Friend are carefully considered on their merits in the light of our published criteria. Sixth form and tertiary colleges continue to thrive.

Mr. Colvin: I acknowledge that the introduction of local management of schools and grant-maintained status have greatly added to choice and diversity in education. Does my hon. Friend agree that comprehensive schools must think carefully before seeking to add sixth forms to their schools, especially when sixth form and tertiary colleges already exist locally and where those have a campus atmosphere more appropriate to sixth form education?

Mr. Boswell: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that comprehensive schools should consider carefully the importance of making such a proposal, which would be judged against our published criteria. Those include whether there is a basic need for new provision and, if not, whether the viability of existing good-quality provision would be adversely affected if the proposal were approved. A school would have to satisfy us on that criterion, among others, before we took a favourable decision.

Mr. Rooker: Does it remain part of the Government's published criteria that, in terms of value for money and educational opportunity, a sixth form should not have fewer than 150 pupils? If so, why have the Secretary of State and her predecessor continued to approve new comprehensive school sixth forms with fewer than 150 pupils, which is bound to damage choice and opportunity for those pupils?

Mr. Boswell: It may be for parents and pupils to determine whether choice and opportunity are removed. The criteria state specifically that the provision should be of sufficient size and quality to deliver a reasonably wide-ranging curriculum, and we consider the inspectorate's observations in deciding on a proposal. So the hon. Gentleman's concerns are not overlooked. However, there is no precise criterion, and we judge each case on its merits.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Given the popularity and success of the Government's recent reforms affecting further education, will my hon. Friend bear in mind, when considering the best way to fund schools in the future, the fact that the funding of further education colleges is transparent while the funding of schools in the secondary sector is not?

Mr. Boswell: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but it may interest the House to know that, over the past quinquennium, there were 267,000 pupils aged 16 to 18 in the maintained sector and 471,000 pupils in FE and sixth form colleges, so the rate of increase in further education has been markedly sharper than in sixth forms.

Discretionary Awards

8. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what monitoring she plans to undertake of the discretionary awards system.

Mr. Boswell: Discretionary awards are the responsibility of local authorities. The Department will continue to collect a range of relevant statistical and other data from them.

Mr. Hain: Is not the discretionary award system now an absolute shambles? Legal, dance and drama, music and many other categories of student have no chance whatever of getting a discretionary award because of the Government's cuts in funding. The Minister must not insult the intelligence of the House or of students by pretending that local education authorities can bridge the gap, when he and his Government are savaging local education budgets.

Mr. Boswell: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman feels that his intelligence will be insulted if I invite him to consider the facts. When the Gulbenkian Commission, which is not under Government control, considered that matter, it projected an increase of about 20 per cent. in the total number of discretionary awards between 1990-91 and 1993-94, a 32 per cent. increase in further education courses and an increase in expenditure of 14 per cent. in real terms in the same period. The fact that there is worry about local provision in some local education authorities should not be taken by the hon. Gentleman as an excuse for a diatribe against a system that we continue to fund, and which is not failing.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that many local authorities, especially Labour and Liberal Democrat controlled authorities, do not pay proper attention to the discretionary awards system, and that young people miss out as a result in terms of course, career and their future? Will he seek to do something about it?

Mr. Boswell: I do hear what my hon. Friend says and I respect his expertise in that matter. All the local authority associations with whom we have discussed the matter want very much to continue their discretion; the problem is that some of them, wilfully or for whatever reason, choose not to exercise it and thereby deprive young people of the resources that we make available with that purpose in mind.

Class Sizes

9. **Mr. Milburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement on class sizes in schools.

Mr Robin Squire: Class sizes are rising slightly, as pupil numbers increase. At the same time many schools are raising pupils' standards of achievement.

Mr. Milburn: Is the Minister aware of the substantial worries of parents, teachers and governors in County Durham schools about the impact of his funding policies on class sizes and on educational standards?

With more than 1 million primary school pupils already being taught in classes of over 30, is not teaching becoming less a means of offering children a valuable learning experience and more a matter of crowd control? What sort of future is that for our children?

Mr. Squire: First, the average class sizes for both primary and secondary schools in Durham are close to the national averages, which are certainly not too high.

Secondly, one might have thought, from listening to the hon. Gentleman's question, that the position in 1979 when the Conservatives came to power was not about 400,000 pupils greater than the figure that the hon. Gentleman gave for those in classes of over 30.

Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd: When considering class sizes in Lancashire, does my hon. Friend agree that the behaviour of the local education authority, which puts the interests of maintaining its centralised bureaucracy above that of maintaining or reducing class sizes, will only encourage more parents to consider grant-maintained status?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend echoes some of the comments of the Audit Commission about too large bureaucracies in local government, and his argument is a good one. I expect Lancashire education authority, as I do every other education authority, to review all its expenditure and to examine it closely before it considers cutting teachers at the sharp end, and to look more closely at the administrators in county hall.

Accessibility Audit

10. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what progress has been made on the accessibility audit of primary and secondary schools.

Mr. Forth: Local education authorities and the Funding Agency for Schools are required to provide the Secretary of State in May this year with information about the accessibility of schools to pupils in wheelchairs. The Department issued guidance on that exercise on 6 January.

Mr. Corbett: I thank the Minister for that reply. What plans does he have to extend that audit to further and higher education? When all those audits are completed, and they confirm what we know already—that most primary schools, most secondary schools and most colleges of further and higher education are far from accessible to people with disabilities—will this Department make new and extra money available to increase that accessibility?

Mr. Forth: What we want to do first is to consider and assess the results of the first tranche of information, which will be important in setting the scene. I hope that we shall be able to build on that in terms of discovering where we most need to ensure better accessibility.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and the House accept that we cannot and do not necessarily want every school to have wheelchair access. It is a matter of establishing priorities. I believe that a satisfactory mechanism already exists in further and higher education to tackle the problem of access, but we shall constantly look to that sector to bring forward its further proposals. I hope, some time in the near future, to be able to announce a new project to improve accessibility in our schools. There is a lot going on in that area and the survey results will be the first step in a number of successive measures to be taken.

Mr. Congdon: Given that the Spastics Society produced a report showing that many schools could provide accessibility to people with disabilities relatively cheaply, does my hon. Friend agree that it is about time that local education authorities gave accessibility of schools the priority that it so richly deserves?

Mr. Forth: Yes, and the schools themselves must make accessibility a priority. Each school must now have a published policy on its treatment of special educational needs and that, together with the special needs code of practice, makes me believe that we should see a lot of progress in this area which, in the past, has been somewhat neglected by schools and authorities alike.

Spoken and Written English

11. **Mr. Brandreth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what recent representations she has received concerning standards of spoken and written English; and if she will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regularly receive letters from parents and others concerned about standards of English. I share their concern.

Mr. Brandreth: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that English is the richest and the most versatile of all the living languages, and increasingly the world language of business and commerce? Does she further recognise that employers in my constituency are concerned that young people are coming onto the job market without a sufficient command of written and spoken English? Does she believe that that issue must be addressed not simply in schools and colleges, but by the media and by the employers themselves?

Mrs. Shephard: People are judged by whether they can express themselves clearly and employer organisations constantly say that good communication skills are important for all areas of employment. We must ensure that all pupils are equipped with the skills that they need, and the combination of the revised national curriculum with testing and regular inspection will ensure that that happens.

Ms Glenda Jackson: If the Secretary of State is concerned that the standards of spoken and written English should improve and genuinely believes that individuals are judged on their ability to use the English language well, why has she not waged a stronger defence to prevent the cutting of section 11 funding—a comparatively small amount of the overall education budget—which has shown quite extraordinary returns,

particularly in inner urban areas, where children who do not have English as a first language have improved their use of our language?

Mrs. Shephard: I certainly agree with the hon. Lady that the use of section 11 funding for the teaching of English—especially when it is a second language—has been extremely effective, particularly in many of our inner cities. That is why I am delighted that the Government announced the doubling of section 11 funding in November.

Discipline

12. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what measures she is taking to help schools enforce firm discipline.

Mr. Forth: Last May guidance on pupil behaviour and discipline was sent to all schools, as part of the "Pupils with Problems" pack. The guidance aims to help schools maintain and improve discipline. In September 1994 the Department published an anti-bullying pack to help schools combat bullying.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my hon. Friend admit that there is an awful lot of media hype about schools being out of control and does he agree that the recent report of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools gives the lie to that? Does he agree also that parents have some responsibility for helping to improve discipline in our schools?

Mr. Forth: I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. He is right to point out that all recent impartial reports by the inspectors demonstrate that the standard of behaviour in the majority of our schools is good or very good.

My hon. Friend's other point is equally valid. One of the great difficulties that teachers now face in seeking to exercise discipline in the classroom is that they do not receive sufficient support from the parents. We cannot expect teachers to do everything with regard to disciplining pupils; parents must also play a full role.

Mr. Blunkett: In the light of that reply and given the importance of discipline to a learning environment, what advice would Ministers give to a teacher who manages a class of more than 40 students? Would they give the same advice to the Prime Minister, who cannot manage a class of 22?

Mr. Forth: The list of measures and sanctions available to anyone having difficulty with disciplining a group of people include interruption of break or lunchtime privileges, detention, withholding privileges such as participation in trips, completion of assigned or additional written work and carrying out a useful task. *[Interruption.]* I hope that anyone involved in bringing discipline to bear will find my list helpful.

Truancy

13. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what action she is taking to combat truancy.

Mr. Forth: The Department is currently supporting locally-devised projects to a value of some £14 million in more than 80 English local education authorities under the truancy and disaffected pupils programme of the grants for education support and training scheme 1994-95. In December, we announced further support for some 90 projects in 1995-96 to a value of £15.6 million.

Mr. Amess: Is my hon. Friend aware that during my present tour of every school in my constituency, the subject of truancy has been mentioned, and that Basildon heads will be mentioning it to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State when they meet her on 8 March? As GEST expenditure forms a considerable investment of public funds, can my hon. Friend reassure Basildon heads that the present schemes are working?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend, as ever, raises an important point which concerns the Secretary of State and myself constantly. I hope that he agrees that our considerable investment in those projects has great potential to show enormous benefit, particularly when the team of consultants that we have asked to conduct an independent survey of the projects report to us later this year. We want them to evaluate the projects to find out how best to deal with the difficult problem of truancy and then to disseminate that as good practice to help my hon. Friend's head teachers, who I know will want to work with him in dealing with that extremely difficult problem.

Teacher-pupil Ratio

14. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the Government's policy on the optimum number of pupils per teacher in (a) primary and (b) secondary schools; and if she will make a statement as to how far this policy has been achieved.

Mr. Robin Squire: Our policy is that schools should be free to organise classes and deploy teaching staff within the resources available as they judge appropriate.

Mr. Steen: Is the Minister aware that Devon county council has told schools in my constituency and throughout Devon that they will have to cut the number of teachers, increase class sizes and get rid of the choice of subjects in schools because they can not afford to pay? Could my hon. Friend please tell me that this is part of a scurrilous campaign by the Liberal county council to terrify parents and to make people fear that cuts will be made when the money could be taken from elsewhere in the budget?

Mr. Squire: I know that my hon Friend's attention to his own LEA's detailed expenditure will be greater than mine. It is open to his local education authority and to some of the others we have already mentioned this afternoon to choose priorities in such a way that they do not damage the quality of education in the schools in their area. If his authority is not doing that, it must be judged by the standards that it sets. The Government have determined increased expenditure for education; it is up to authorities, if they so wish, to choose other priorities.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: A few weeks ago I asked a question for written answer about teacher ratios in the local education authority in Northumberland. There has been an enormous increase in teacher ratios, and last week teachers in Northumberland told me that, if the cuts go ahead and teachers are lost, there will be another

enormous increase in teacher ratios there. What will the Minister do about that, or is he just in charge of the nursery school and not education?

Mr. Squire: A good try, I suppose. The hon. Gentleman has heard successive Ministers say from the Dispatch Box that how schools organise themselves must be a matter for individual schools. He may also have heard a moment ago, in response to an earlier question, that I drew attention to the fact that while numbers of classes over 30 in primary schools are indeed rising slightly to just over a quarter, that compares with a figure of 35 per cent. when the Government that he would have supported left office.

Mr. Riddick: Following the Audit Commission report which showed that local authorities took on an extra 90,000 staff between 1987 and 1993, does my hon. Friend agree that local education authorities should be trying to reduce spending on central bureaucracies rather than spending on schools?

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend, who speaks with considerable knowledge of education matters, is absolutely right. *[Interruption.]* Although Opposition Members do not like hearing the truth, they are going to hear it. It is important for an authority to examine the whole range of its services, and in particular to try to protect its teaching force as far as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Hutton: In the light of today's announcement that the chairman of the National Westminster bank has awarded himself a 35 per cent. pay increase, and the news that the seven wise men appointed by the Confederation of British Industry to provide new guidelines on executive pay have themselves shared more than £4 million in pay and tax this year, does the Prime Minister think that it is time that he joined the British public in condemning those latest examples of executive greed in Britain's boardrooms?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman will know, when excessive and unjustified pay increases have been agreed I have condemned them—and condemned them from the Dispatch Box on a number of occasions. Where the hon. Gentleman and I disagree is on whether, in the private sector, it is right for the Government to institute a pay policy both at the top—as the hon. Gentleman would clearly like—and with minimum pay controls at the bottom, as the Labour party would like.

Q2. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Evennett: Does my right hon. Friend agree that neighbourhood noise nuisance and noise pollution are a real and growing problem in today's society? Will he urge our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to speed up his inquiry into the problem, and advance positive suggestions for its alleviation as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that noise pollution is a nuisance. I am sometimes inclined to think that it is a particular nuisance at 3.15 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: I have no doubt about the extent of nuisance that is caused to many people, and the Department of the Environment is examining that now. I hope that we shall have some proposals on which to negotiate in the next few weeks, and I shall be pleased to hear the views of not only my hon. Friend, but anyone else who has views to offer on the issue.

Mr. Blair: Will the Prime Minister confirm as a matter of fact that, since the internal market reforms in the health service, the costs of its adminstration have risen by over £1,000 million?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman will know—for the Socialist Health Association will have told him—that improved internal adminstration is necessary, not least because of the lack of financial control that existed before.

Mr. Blair: Is not the problem the difference between what Ministers say about the health service and people's experience of it? *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members would do well to listen to their constituents.

Is not the problem the fact that people who see wards, and sometimes whole hospitals, facing merger or closure would prefer that £1,000 million to be spent not on more accountants and company cars but on beds, nurses and patient care?

The Prime Minister: I am intrigued that the right hon. Gentleman has referred to what the public say. He may have seen the recent "British Social Attitudes Survey", which makes it clear that, since our reforms, the number of people satisfied with the national health service has leapt by another 20 per cent., and that nine out of 10 people think that the national health service is satisfactory or better.

He may also have seen the recent survey by doctors, which found that the overwhelming majority felt that health needs were being better met under the reforms than previously, and that a 2:1 ratio felt that competition among hospitals had improved service. That is the view of the public who use the service and of the doctors who run the service, both of whom have a greater and more in-depth knowledge of it than the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Blair: I have just one question for the Prime Minister: if the service is so good, why did the deputy chairman of the Conservative party ask before Christmas, in the interests of the Conservative party, for zero media coverage of the health service?

The Prime Minister: I want a lot of coverage and I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman why—so that we can refer to the 8 million patients in total who are treated each year, to the 119,000 cataract operations, to the 333 million free prescriptions, and to the growth of the national health

service over the past few years. I might also remind the right hon. Gentleman not only that more people are treated and that they are better treated, but that a wider range of service is available to the NHS today than ever before. Before he and his colleagues doubt the Government's commitment to the health service, they should consider the additional funding that we have provided, and recall that Labour were the only Government ever to cut resources to the NHS.

Q3. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fabricant: My right hon. Friend will know that I am a member of the Select Committee on National Heritage and that it is considering the future of the British film industry. Is my right hon. Friend aware that Mr. Ken Loach, an English director, is today premiering his new film, which champions the cause of nationalisation on behalf of Labour's Defend Clause IV group? Is my right hon. Friend aware that that film will be a nostalgic romp, looking at the nationalised car industry and the nationalised steelyards, and that it will possibly feature a romantic look at Red Robbo? Will my right hon. Friend be nominating that film for an Oscar?

The Prime Minister: I very much doubt that I will be nominating the film for an Oscar, but it seems to be the sort of film that deserves a wide circulation. There is no doubt that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is right to wish to abolish clause IV from his party's constitution. The only matter of surprise is that so many people in the 1990s still disagree with that obvious and worthy cause. The question is whether the right hon. Gentleman will succeed, and the answer is that of course he will, because he will have the support of the unreconstructed trade unions in doing so.

Mr. Salmond: May I offer the Prime Minister a chance actually to do something about fat cat salary increases? Some thousands of small shareholders in British Gas, supported by the staff, are going to the annual general meeting in two months' time with a motion to cut the outrageous pay increase of Mr. Cedric Brown. Does that motion carry the Prime Minister's support or not?

The Prime Minister: I have made it absolutely clear to the hon. Gentleman and to others that, if one puts an industry in the private sector, it must make its decisions in the private sector. That applies to British Gas, as to other companies.

Q4. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the United Kingdom livestock industry leads Europe, both in terms of the quality of meat production, and in standards of animal welfare? Will his Government continue to press for higher welfare standards across Europe and, at the same time, uphold the rule of law in Britain, so that farmers and haulage firms can go about their legitimate business, free from the constant disruption of animal rights activists?

The Prime Minister: I agree with both my hon. Friend's propositions. There is no doubt about the need to maintain law and order, whatever the cause, where the law has been broken. As I have said, legally and practically, we need to work at Community level if we seriously want to bring the standards of animal welfare across the European Union up to the standards in this country. That is what my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is seeking to do, and I hope and believe that he will be successful.

Q5. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: What advice does the Prime Minister have for the governors of schools such as St. Agnes in my constituency which has seven teachers to cover the seven age groups in the school and who are now having to decide whether to make one of those staff redundant because of the failure to meet the teachers' pay increase? Should the school engage in those redundancy procedures now, or should it wait a few weeks to see whether the Secretary of State for Education comes up with the goods in her argument with the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

The Prime Minister: I think, perhaps, the first thing the governors should do is to examine whether their education authority has its priorities right in determining where the money that has been allocated to it has gone. Then, they might look at how many surplus places there might be in that education authority. I suggest then that they look at the balances in the education authority. When and if they are absolutely satisfied that the money is being spent properly, perhaps they can assure the hon. Gentleman of that. Nothing that the hon. Gentleman has said has convinced me that that is so in this case.

Sir James Kilfedder: Is it not manifestly unfair and totally undemocratic that I was not consulted, briefed or spoken to at any stage during the drawing up of the draft document? Does not the Prime Minister feel that, in view of the involvement through Dublin of the Social Democratic and Labour party in the drafting of the document and in view of the fact that Her Majesty's Government, through their representatives, have been talking to the political wing of the terrorists, that this is a contemptuous way to deal with Unionist Members of Parliament? Surely, when the Prime Minister speaks directly to the people of Northern Ireland, they will remember this.

The Prime Minister: There has been widespread consultation. It is not the case that other parties have been involved in the drafting of the document that is to be produced. As my hon. Friend will know, the document is for consultation and consideration with my hon. Friend, with representatives from all the political parties in the House and with people right across Northern Ireland. What we are seeking to do, as we were asked to do by the political parties, is to set down some ideas for consideration, discussion and negotiation between the

political parties. When and if they are able to reach agreement, we will carry the matter forward. The objective that I have is the same as that which I know my hon. Friend has and that is to ensure that what has been thus far a ceasefire is able to be turned into a permanent peace for the well-being of all the people in Northern Ireland, including my hon. Friend's constituents, whom he represents so well.

Mr. Maginnis: Does the Prime Minister agree that a well-directed and well-planned approach towards a practical solution to Northern Ireland's problems would be better than a never-ending debate about some sort of theoretical process—the sort of debate that has gone on for 10 years since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement—which did not deliver peace, stability and reconciliation? Will the Prime Minister undertake to read and to study my party's document entitled "A Practical Approach to Problem Solving in Northern Ireland", with a view to arriving at a solution and not continuing this theoretical and futile debate for yet another 10 years?

The Prime Minister: I share with the hon. Gentleman the wish not to have a futile debate. The way to ensure a constructive debate is to come together and discuss the ideas that are about and that are on the table. Ideas have been produced at the request of the political parties. As it happens, I received the document in the hon. Gentleman's hands last evening, and I have read it this morning. I have no doubt that other documents will be produced. One has already been provided by the leader of the Democratic Unionist party. Further documents may be prepared.

What is necessary; what the obligation owed, I believe, to the people in Northern Ireland who want a permanent peace, is for all of us—the Government, the hon. Gentleman, other hon. Members and the people of Northern Ireland—to make sure that those matters are examined, discussed, considered, and decisions reached that will enable us to move forward into a permanent peace. That is what I wish to seek, and my mind is open to the right mechanism to ensure that we achieve it. But what I am determined is that we do seek to move forward to try and ensure that the chance that is in our hands—we may not be able to hold it—that the chance of peace that is in our hands should not slip away because we are not prepared to examine the matter, to talk about the matter, to consider the matter, and to reach the conclusions that the hon. Gentleman wishes to see reached.

NEW MEMBER

The following Member took and subscribed the Oath:
James Donnelly Touhig, Esq., for Islwyn.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. There are two related aspects. I am concerned that the House of Commons was seriously misled this afternoon by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), who raised a Dartford constituency matter during Education Questions without giving me notice of his intention to do so. He stated that the Dartford West secondary school for girls had been stripped of its playing fields. That issue was open for public consultation until 11 February, and no decision on it has yet been issued by the Department for Education. Will you require the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his statement and to apologise?

Secondly, may I make you aware, Madam Speaker, that the hon. Gentleman visited that school, which is in my constituency, last Thursday and did not give me any intimation or message of his intention?

Madam Speaker: These are not points of order.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): I see nothing to withdraw.

Madam Speaker: That being the case—

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. Just a moment. Let me deal with one question at a time. Hon. Members are too anxious to be heard in the House.

The hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) is telling me that there is an untruth in the allegation made here. If he would like to table an early-day motion or use the Order Paper, that is what he must do if the allegation made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) is incorrect.

As I have often said in the House, when hon. Members visit another hon. Member's constituency, it is only right that they give him or her notice of doing so. That is a common courtesy and is the way in which we behave in the House. Hon. Members inform me when they come to my constituency, and they are very welcome, but they always let me know in advance when they are going to be there.

Mr. Foulkes: I apologise for rising too soon earlier, Madam Speaker. During the first two or three Parliaments that I was a Member of the House, statements were regularly made to the House after European Council meetings, whether they were meetings of ECOFIN or the Fisheries or Agriculture Councils. The Minister who had attended the meeting made a statement and was open to question. For the past few months—indeed, for the past few years—there have not been regular statements, which means that the Government are increasingly unaccountable to the House for their actions at European Council meetings.

For example, last week I know that Baroness Chalker—

Madam Speaker: Order. The House does not have time to listen to the hon. Gentleman's examples. I understand his point. He is asking for Government statements after various meetings have taken place. As the House knows, and as the hon. Gentleman knows only too well, I have no authority to require a Minister to make a statement at the Dispatch Box. It is for the Leader of the House to determine when statements are made, and the matter can be put to him during Business Questions. The hon. Gentleman is often on his feet during Business Questions and I shall look for him on Thursday, should he care to put the matter to the Leader of the House—that is without commitment.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Further to the earlier point of order relating to—

Madam Speaker: Order. There is no further point of order once I have dealt with a matter. We could go on for ever. If it is a new point of order, I shall listen to it.

Mr. Devlin: It is a separate matter, Madam Speaker. Is it not the convention of the House that, if an hon. Member intends to refer to another in a debate, he should let that hon. Member know? That was not the case last night, as you will see from column 82 of *Hansard*.

Madam Speaker: I have in my office a sheaf of statements that hon. Members can collect. I am weary of making statements about the way in which hon. Members should behave towards each other. I have made two or three such statements in the past six months. Hon. Members should know how to behave with common sense and courtesy, but, if they need reminding, let them come to my office, where I shall give them a file of the statements that I have made to the House.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you seen a report in today's *Daily Mirror* on the misnamed "Commissioner for the Protection of Trade Union Rights"? It appears that £1.9 million of taxpayers' money has been spent on 16 cases of trade union bashing. Has the Secretary of State for Employment, or even the Prime Minister, said that he intends to explain to the House that abuse of public money?

Madam Speaker: I have had no indication that any Minister is seeking to make a statement today on any matter.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am grateful for your having told us about the sheaf of statements in your office. What power do you have to act when hon. Members ignore your advice by not informing other hon. Members when they go to their constituencies, especially if they are going in an official capacity such as that of Front Bench spokesmen? It seems that your advice is being ignored despite your having warned us about this previously.

Madam Speaker: I expect hon. Members to behave with a degree of common sense. I am the servant of the House, and the House gives me authority to carry out various instructions. If the hon. Member would care to refer the matter to the Procedure Committee, the Committee may make a recommendation giving me some authority in these matters, and it might not be a bad idea if it did just that.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Your rulings on such points of order are clearly of great importance because they set precedents. I hold many Labour party meetings around the country. Are you in effect saying that, if an hon.

Member is going to hold a party political meeting in another hon. Member's constituency, he should give notice to that hon. Member about that fact?

Madam Speaker: I should have thought that that was pretty reasonable. Only this week I had a letter from a Member of the Government Bench, telling me that he is coming to my constituency for a political meeting. I doubt that his party will win the seat from me, but I said that I would be delighted to see him. I think that hon. Members should be informed, irrespective of what the visit is for.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Notwithstanding your point about courtesy, it could be a mistake to take the matter to the wrong conclusion. Members of Parliament do not have proprietorial rights over their constituencies. We do not own our constituencies and there must be no barriers to prevent Members of the United Kingdom Parliament from going on fact-finding missions anywhere in the country. They should not require permission from any other Member of Parliament to do so.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman and the House must not run away with the idea that permission is required. It is simply a matter of courtesy to tell the hon. Member concerned. It is right that a Conservative Member who comes to my constituency to hold a political meeting should let me know about it. The hon. Gentleman might feel the same. There is nothing wrong with that; it is common sense and courtesy. I would do the same if I visited another hon. Member's constituency.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I hesitate to raise this point of order. Apparently, you have upset one of my constituents who is one of your greatest fans. I have had a letter from Mr. Paul Cooper of Swanage telling me that you told us last Thursday—you have confirmed this in a letter to us today—that we would commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of world war two. Mr. Cooper tells me in his letter that his war did not end until August and that this May, we shall celebrate the victory in Europe—

Madam Speaker: Order. This is not a point of order for me. I made a comprehensive statement last week and questions were raised during Business Questions with the Leader of the House. Everyone knows precisely what we are commemorating—the ending of both wars—and it will be done properly.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Can you give me some advice? Given that I come down to Westminster every week, should I write to the right hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) before I come here?

Madam Speaker: I find that a totally ridiculous waste of the House's time. There is no common sense in that ludicrous point of order.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am taking no more points of order now. We have business to do here.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Has the hon. Gentleman just decided that he has a point of order?

Mr. Steen: No. I wanted to be helpful to you, Madam Speaker, because I have listened for some weeks to the exchanges between you and Opposition Members about what should happen when an hon. Member visits another hon. Member's constituency. I chose not to raise a point of order because I did not want to trouble the House or take up time. However, having heard the exchanges today, I want to ask for your help.

When the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) came to my constituency two weeks ago, he held a public meeting in the civic centre in Totnes which attracted 700 or 800 people—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]—which is the entire membership of the Labour party in South Hams. He did not have the courtesy either to write to me or to tell me about his visit beforehand or afterwards. Could you, Madam Speaker, do more than just criticise hon. Members? Could you do something to prevent hon. Members who misbehave in this way from attending the House?

Madam Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening to my earlier response, he would know that I suggested to the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) that he might like to refer to the Procedure Committee whether I might have some authority to take action. I am surprised about the incident to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I have always found that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has very good parliamentary manners. The hon. Gentleman may be rather sorry that he has raised the matter today, because he has given the meeting greater publicity than he may think it deserves.

Television Sport (Public Access)

3.43 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Broadcasting Act 1990 to provide that listed national sporting events, namely the F.I.F.A. World Cup Finals, the F.A. Cup Final, the Scottish F.A. Cup Final, the Wimbledon Finals, the Olympic Games, the Derby, the Grand National and Test Matches in England continue to be available on terrestrial television, and for connected purposes.

My Bill will provide for major sporting events to continue to be available on the main television channels. Millions of people—I freely admit to being one of them—enjoy watching sport on television. If viewing figures are anything to go by, sporting events are very popular. Last year, the grand national attracted 17 million viewers, the World cup finals were watched by 13.5 million people, the F.A. cup was watched by 12 million people, 11 million people watched the Olympics and perhaps the most spectacular viewing figure of all—I am not sure that everyone would call it a sport, but many fellow citizens do—was 24 million people, getting on for half the adult population, who watched Torvill and Dean at the winter Olympics.

The appeal of sport on television, lest I be accused of simply pleading sporting interest, goes far beyond people who are sports enthusiasts. When the grand national is on television, it is discussed before the race, during the race and after the race in pubs, clubs and households everywhere. Indeed, major sporting events of the past are often remembered even generations after they occurred. Who could forget the 1953 Stanley Matthews cup final, which is remembered 42 years afterwards? Whether one supported Bolton or Blackpool, the memories are strong.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): What was the score?

Mr. Grocott: Three-two. [HON. MEMBERS: "No, it wasn't."] It was 4:3. *[Laughter.]* Who could fail to remember the last moments of the 1966 World Cup final? Even the words of the commentator, "They think it's all over—it is now", are almost part of national memory. Such events are more than just sporting events, as are other triumphs in sport, whether by Coe, of whom some hon. Members may have heard, Ovett or Daley Thompson.

More recently, although people do not always describe it as a major sport—it has been popularised by television—who could forget the match between Dennis Taylor and Steve Davis, when Dennis Taylor won in the early hours of the morning on the last ball of the last frame? Millions of people stayed up to watch that event. Those events are part of our national life, they enrich our national life, they sometimes give us unforgettable memories, they amuse us and they entertain us.

What has been happening recently? In practice, there has been a steady loss of events from the main terrestrial channels. It makes a petty long list. In golf, for example, the Ryder cup, ironically having been popularised by the BBC, is being lost, as is the United States PGA tournament, one of the four major golf tournaments. One-day cricket internationals in the United Kingdom are going and the Benson and Hedges cricket matches are going. We cannot even see the highlights of test matches overseas, let alone any live coverage. Most important of all, from our national sport with its huge popularity football at its highest level—the Premier league—was lost to ITV and has now gone to Sky.

Rumours abound about further losses of sporting events from terrestrial channels. It is no secret that Sky has been interested in acquiring the finals of Wimbledon, and there are rumours that cable television wants to take over coverage of the Endsleigh league. There is no doubt that the cable and satellite companies are interested in acquiring major sporting events and, obviously, increasing their number of subscribers by so doing.

People may criticise my Bill by saying that free-market forces somehow act in the magical interests of all viewers, or they may ask why we should worry because it is only a matter of time before satellite and cable channels are available to everyone. There is a short answer to such an allegation—those suggestions are rubbish.

Let us be clear about how many people watch major events once they are transferred to satellite and cable channels. The truth is that only a fraction of viewers watch them. The penetration, if I may use an advertising man's word, of terrestrial television—the number of people who can receive it—is 99 per cent. of the population, or 23 million households. The penetration of satellite and cable is 18 per cent., or 4 million households. When a major event is transferred from one format to the other, most of our constituents cannot see it. The viewing figures speak for themselves. Earlier this year, as any football supporter will know, one of the major events of the season—the game between Manchester United and Blackburn Rovers—easily achieved Sky's largest viewing figure of 1.2 million.

When ITV had the contract for First Division football four years ago, a game between Manchester United and Leeds United in 1991 attracted 9.3 million viewers. The simple averages are as follows: on average, under 1 million watch games on Sky, but when games were available on the terrestrial channels, the averages were between 7.5 million and 8 million viewers.

The net effect has been the loss of millions of potential viewers of major sporting events. We must be clear that recorded highlights are no substitute. Any sports enthusiast would agree with that. Indeed, shrewd television company managers are not interested in the sporting highlights. They are aware that if they want to get the viewers, they must show sport live.

Some people will say, "Don't worry; it will not be long before everyone has satellite and cable." Even the most optimistic estimates are that there is no possibility of that happening in the foreseeable future. There is no chance of anything like half the population of this country having access to such stations before the turn of the century. In the lifetime of any hon. Member in the Chamber, there is no chance of satellite and cable having the same level of access as the terrestrial television companies.

We must also consider the cost. If someone wants to watch major sporting events on satellite or cable, that will cost about £180 a year. From the viewers' point of view, what was previously part of their normal television service is now something that they have to pay large sums of money to have the privilege to watch. As Michael Grade, the head of Channel 4, said:

"Sky's main contribution to choice has been the opportunity for the public to pay more for what they have already."

No one believes that there is any chance of those sporting events coming back to terrestrial stations once they are lost. All the executives of the television companies that I know anything about admit that they cannot compete, with their overall obligations for programming in financial terms, with a dedicated sports channel with a high subscription.

There is also a loss to sport. If young people, in particular, cannot see major sporting events, it is bad news for the future of the sport. It may be all right for the heads of the major sporting authorities such as the Football League or the Football Association to say that they will make money in the short term by selling exclusive rights to certain sporting events. However, that is a very short-term view. Although money may be available in the short term, people will not have the opportunity to see those sports in the long run and, one hopes, be encouraged to play them. We are all aware of the impact of television on the interests of people and their likelihood of playing sports.

In the short time left to me, I want to explain that my Bill is an attempt to stop the rot in respect of the loss of major sporting events from the major channels. The recommendation in my Bill is in line with the recommendation of the National Heritage Select Committee, which stated in its report last year that the major listed events—the English and Scottish cup finals, the World cup finals, the Wimbledon finals, test cricket in England, the grand national and the Derby—should not be available exclusively on subscription channels. That would effectively protect them for the main terrestrial channels.

For that to happen, there would have to be a change in the Broadcasting Act 1990, but I believe that that change would have overwhelming popular support. I would go much further: I would like to see many more major sporting events included in the list so that they are protected for the enjoyment of all of us and not just retained for a few.

The members of the National Heritage Select Committee and many other hon. Members can be under no illusion that there is overwhelming public support for my proposal. In far too many areas of our national life, good things that we have grown up with have been steadily eroded and we are poorer as a result. The spectacle and drama of sport at the highest level brings pleasure to millions for all of us to see. In the past, due to our democratically regulated broadcasting system, we were able to see those events. I commend my Bill to the House.

3.54 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): I oppose the motion in a qualified way. I have written to the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) to say that I support the broad thrust of what he seeks to do; but, as the chairman of the Conservative Back-Bench sports committee, I simply ask him to bear in mind something that he mentioned towards the end of his remarks. There is a substantial responsibility on the part of the national sporting bodies not to go for short-term profit, but to ensure that national sporting occasions are, as he suggested, available to all.

I hold no brief for the cable television channels, and I support the broad thrust of what the hon. Gentleman is seeking to do. *[Interruption.]* I hope that he will concentrate on encouraging—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should be aware that he must raise his voice in opposition.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Bruce Grocott, Ms Hilary Armstrong, Mr. Ronnie Campbell, Mr. Robin Corbett, Mr. Bryan Davies, Mr. Don Dixon, Mr. John Evans, Mr. John Maxton, Ms Estelle Morris, Mr. Chris Mullin, Mr. Ken Purchase and Mr. Dennis Turner.

TELEVISION SPORT (PUBLIC ACCESS)

Mr. Bruce Grocott accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Broadcasting Act 1990 to provide that listed national sporting events, namely the F.I.F.A. World Cup Finals, the F.A. Cup Final, the Scottish F.A. Cup Final, the Wimbledon Finals, the Olympic Games, the Derby, the Grand National and Test Matches in England continue to be available on terrestrial television, and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 21 April, and to be printed. [Bill 53.]

Orders of the Day

Health Authorities Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

ANNUAL REPORT TO PARLIAMENT ON ACTIVITIES OF REGIONAL OFFICES OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

'After section 8 of the National Health Service Act 1977 there shall be inserted—

Annual report on activities of regional offices of NHS executive

9.—(1) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to lay before both Houses of Parliament an annual report on the activities of the regional offices of the National Health Service Management Executive in respect of the discharge of all duties and functions transferred to those offices from Regional Health Authorities with effect from 1st April 1996.

(2) In this section, 'regional office' means any office of the National Health Service for the time being designated by the Secretary of State to have responsibility for the "oversight of the finances and activities of National Health Service purchasing authorities and trusts on a regional basis.'.—*[Mrs. Beckett.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.56 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss new clause 2—*Duty of Secretary of State to publish accounts relating to projected expenditure savings*—

'The Secretary of State shall, no later than 1st April 1997, lay before the House of Commons a statement of accounts giving—

(a) the level of expenditure on National Health Service administration in the financial year ending on 31st March 1996, excluding any expenditure attributable to the costs of implementing this Act,

(b) the estimated outturn of expenditure on National Health Service administration for the financial year ending on 31st March 1997, and

(c) an explanation of the factors to which any differences between the figures provided under paragraphs (a) and (b) above are attributed.'.

Mrs. Beckett: New clauses 1 and 2 go to the heart of the Government's purpose, or what we believe to be their purpose, in enacting the Bill, although new clause 2 relates principally to the financial consequences of the Bill. New clause 1 creates a mechanism by which Parliament can be informed of the outcome of the legislation, and can monitor its effects in practice as opposed to in claimed intent.

If the Government's real intention is what they claim—to remove unnecessary bureaucracy, to increase efficiency and create savings—the new clause will present them with no problems whatever. It creates an opportunity for the Government to parade their achievements. If, on the other hand, the Government's real intention is not what they claim but what we fear—to prevent public and parliamentary scrutiny of an operation which is to be carried out for the purposes of sheer dogma without regard for its potential and considerable practical difficulties and which might seriously inhibit the future smooth running of the national health service—new clause 1, calling as it does for an annual report to Parliament, will be the last thing they want.

Although the logic of new clause 1 is impeccable and its case irresistible, if the Government's primary purpose in moving the Bill was to draw a cloak of secrecy across the operation of the NHS, new clause 1—with its adherence to the principle of accountability to Parliament and to the public—strikes at that purpose itself. The logic of and the case for the new clause are irresistible, because the Bill is not just half-baked, it is not baked at all.

In 1991, as part of the Government's so-called reforms, regional health authorities were given greater powers because it was judged that a strategic authority at regional level was required. On Second Reading, we highlighted some of the major responsibilities of the existing regional authorities, and our wish to explore in Committee how they would be addressed in future. We have had the Committee, but—in all too many cases—we have not had the answers. It is bad enough that, as usual, the Government have left so much to later regulation. But not only is there no detail as to what those regulations might contain, it seems all too often that the decisions have not even been made. Issue after issue is "to be decided" or is "being discussed", including the key issues of how future doctors and nurses will be trained and by whom they will be employed.

A Government who embark on such a major structural change without working out how its consequences will be dealt with are a Government of crass irresponsibility. Incidentally, it casts an interesting light on the demands of Conservative Members for details of policies which the Labour party might pursue after the next election that this Bill is on its way to the statute book without the details having been worked out.

Two matters are crystal clear: first, the Bill will allow infinitely greater secrecy and concealment in hospitals and trusts; and, secondly, it will ensure that all roads lead back to the Secretary of State. At present, regional directors of public health have a duty to produce an annual public report on health care in their region. Historically, the role of practitioners of public health medicine as potential whistle blowers for public safety is one of the glories of British medicine and British public service. At regional level, they will become civil servants, bound by the Official Secrets Act 1911, their duty not to the public but to the Secretary of State.

The only remotely independent voice in the new structure that the Bill creates is that of the community health councils. Their chief executives—full-time salaried public servants—are presently employed by regional health authorities. We asked what will become of them and whether they, too, would become not public servants in the employment of regional offices but civil servants whose duty is to the Secretary of State. No answer came.

At present, regional health authorities collect statistics at regional level and, as public servants, make much of that information public if requested. The only information that we can currently get about matters such as hospital closures comes from those regional health authorities. The Department of Health does not know about such matters and does not want to know. It tells us that, in future, regional offices will collect only the statistics that the Department wants for its own purposes in administering the system. On precedent, that would presumably not include information about hospital closures, the closure of

accident and emergency departments or other such decisions, which impinge directly on the pattern of available health care across a region and which are certainly of public interest, whether the Department wants to know them or not.

Apart from the information that the regional health authorities will no longer collect, any requests for information, for example from Members of Parliament, will in future be referred to individual authorities or trusts. So there will not be the same responsibility for the flow of information to the public or their representatives for the use of public money.

The mechanism in new clause 1 would allow Parliament to explore how those and other functions of existing regional health authorities are being carried out under the new structure or, if they are not being carried out, to consider the effects of the change. Vital responsibilities of the present regional health authorities are to stay at regional office level, including oversight of the cancer screening programme and maintenance of cancer registers—at least until what the Minister called "other arrangements" can be made, whatever that may mean. National confidential inquiries may still be handled at that level. Existing ethnic health units will be "centralised" in the NHS, whatever that may mean for their future and role.

When we inquired about the training and education of clinical staff, we were told that it was "to be decided", although later the Minister of State said that it might remain "at regional level", as will the training of some junior doctors. However, the arrangements for such training and how they can take account of the role of universities and the dual academic-clinical role of postgraduate deans is, again, far from clear—if it has been decided at all.

That group of issues is vital to the future of Britain's health care. The training of doctors, nurses and other health service staff, such as physiotherapists, and the holding of employment contracts for junior doctors impinge directly on whether the terms of their employment facilitate or even permit their continuing education.

On all those matters, practitioners and their representatives express deep concern. They are alarmed at the prospect that those matters might be decided, in practice if not in theory, at the level of the individual trust, whose purpose, laid on it by the Government, is to secure its own future as a profitable health business, competing with other such businesses—not to co-operate in a general endeavour of training and employment, from which it can derive, as an individual trust, only partial benefit.

We recognise that the Government have spoken of the possibility of consortiums, variously of trusts or authorities, but the fact that they continued to discuss in Committee an issue of such relevance and importance as the holding of junior doctors' contracts, highlights the recklessness of the endeavour behind the Bill and the irresponsibility with which those fundamental decisions have been approached.

There remain severe doubts, including among health professionals, whether the new authorities that the Bill creates in place of regions will have the expertise to plan and co-ordinate the existing activities of those regional health authorities.

All that shows that, whether at regional office level or away from that level, there is a continuing and important role to be played by those charged with carrying out duties that are currently the responsibility of regional health authorities. Parliament must have the chance to scrutinise the effects of the legislation, not only by discussing regulations when they are proposed, but by exploring, year by year, the cumulative practical changes to which the Bill will give effect.

It is useless to pretend that, under the new structure, even our present access to information will be maintained. Members of Parliament and other people with queries about the running of the health service will be referred to the individual authority or institution. Those are institutions in which staff at every level have gagging clauses in their contracts and local—no doubt soon performance-related—pay, to encourage them to remember where their loyalties are supposed to lie: not, as Mr. Roy Lilley recently remarked, to the patient, but to the organisation.

The position that appears likely to exist after the passage of the Bill reminds me strongly of the famous quote from Henry IV Part I, in which Glendower says that he can

"call spirits from the vasty deep",

only for Hotspur to reply,

"Why, so can I, or so can any man,
But will they come when you do call for them?"

Will the information come from the authorities or trusts when Members of Parliament or other people call for it?

A classic example from proceedings in Committee illustrates why we doubt that the answer might come when we call for it; it is a classic example of the way in which that process works now, even before the Bill reaches the statute book.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) told the Committee that she had been so impertinent as to ask the chief executive of her local trust exactly how the trust had spent £215,000 of taxpayer's money on the costs of setting up that trust. That was a small part of the £120 million or so devoted to that purpose throughout Britain, but a substantial sum of taxpayer's money none the less. When she spoke in Committee—and, as far as I am aware, to this day—the chief executive had declined to reply, thinking it, presumably, none of her business how he chooses to spend what the previous Prime Minister used to call "our money".

What advice did my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport receive from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), that staunch tribune of the people, the defender of the public purse? He advised her to

"work to improve her relationship with the chief executive of her local trust"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 26 January 1995; c. 54.]—

in the hope, presumably, that if she did so he might condescend to answer her letter and her queries on behalf of her constituents.

No doubt Ministers will dispute whether the further concealment of the truth about the national health service is part of the purpose of the Bill. They cannot dispute, because they themselves acknowledge it, that the effect of the Bill will be the removal of information now in the public domain. New clause 1 would go some way to redressing the balance; I therefore commend it to the House.

[Mrs. Beckett]

The Minister for Health (Mr. Gerald Malone): I am pleased to be able to respond to what has been a short debate on an important matter. It is obvious that those of my colleagues who were sitting, hanging on my every word in Committee, have been entirely convinced by the debates that we had on that occasion.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) talked about the "cloak of secrecy" which will be introduced with the passage of the Bill. I reiterate what I said in Committee: nothing could be further from the truth, and I welcome this opportunity to set out how the arrangements will work.

The regional offices will be an integral part of the NHS executive and, therefore, part of the reporting arrangements which are already in place for the Department of Health through the departmental annual report. That is not simply a report which is issued to the public; it is a Command Paper which is laid before Parliament and is available to the public. It describes in detail the Department's activities and expenditure across all its responsibilities. The right hon. Lady said that information would be concealed, but the opposite is the case. The Department remains accountable to the House through its annual report and I cannot think of any stronger accountability than that.

The right hon. Lady also said rather curiously, in an antithetical way, that all roads lead back to the Secretary of State under the new structure. They do, but the right hon. Lady cannot have it both ways. She argues one day that the national health service structure is not accountable either to the Secretary of State or to Parliament because the Government have fragmented it and sent it off in all sorts of directions, ending up in institutions which act on their own initiative and are accountable to no one. We sometimes hear that speech on a Monday afternoon, only to hear the right hon. Lady say on a Tuesday—as she has today—that all roads in the health service lead back to the Secretary of State.

Ultimately, all roads lead back not just to the Secretary of State but to the House, to whom Ministers are accountable. During that part of the Committee proceedings which I was fit and well enough to attend, I was at pains to emphasise the fact that that responsibility is extremely important and is taken very seriously.

Further information about NHS executive activities is made public through a wide range of publications, such as the NHS annual report. Further reports are planned, including a series of quarterly reviews which will start in May this year, an NHS quarterly magazine which will replace "NHS News" from June 1995 and, as the right hon. Lady knows, a range of statistical bulletins and issues-based newsletters concerning the performance of the service.

It is entirely wrong for the right hon. Lady to suggest that a "cloak of secrecy" surrounds the NHS. I think that there is more like a blizzard of information which is published directly either for the purposes of the House or for those who are keen to research those matters in their or the public interest, as well as for the general public. That approach is right and proper and it will continue under the new structure.

Mrs. Beckett: In making his remarks, I think that the Minister should address who controls the information that is supplied. He says, quite correctly, that a blizzard of information is coming from the Department; but if one is so unwise as to request information which is not couched in precisely the form in which the Secretary of State chooses to release it, that information is not forthcoming.

I do not think that anyone—except perhaps a Minister in this Government—could defend the fact that the Department of Health does not, for example, collect statistics about the current number of hospitals, how many accident and emergency units are threatened with closure, or what the pattern of provision of such health care should be across the nation. That is exactly the kind of information that is collected by regional offices because, as regional health authorities, they have a separate duty to the public. All that information will now be controlled by the Secretary of State, and precedent suggests that she does not tell anyone anything that does not suit her purposes.

Mr. Malone: The right hon. Lady is entirely wrong about that issue. Information must be collected for statutory purposes—for example, to fulfil the requirements of the Public Accounts Committee and the Audit Commission and to report to the House through the departmental annual report. I regret that the right hon. Lady and her hon. Friends sometimes table questions in a way that does not allow me to answer them, simply because information is not available in the form requested. There are occasions when we puzzle over the questions, and only after conversations with the right hon. Lady's researchers are we able to guess at the purpose of a question.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East) *rose—*

Mr. Malone: We do what we can to answer and to be as full and frank as possible on every occasion. In that spirit, I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

4.15 pm

Mr. Brown: The whole House has obviously caught the Minister in a good mood and that is to be welcomed. If he is saying, as he has on countless occasions, that information is not held centrally and, therefore, the questions that we table seeking factual information are not properly worded, perhaps he will assist the whole House by telling us in plain English how we could table a question to find out how many hospitals there currently are, how many his Department has closed and how many his Department plans to close.

Mr. Malone: To answer the hon. Gentleman's last point first, we do not keep statistics on hypothetical questions. The other points that he raises relate to matters of definition—for example, what one defines as a hospital. There are many institutions that he may define as a hospital, that perhaps a member of the public might not define as a hospital, where information is held. The Government would never mislead the hon. Gentleman in any way by giving him any information that could not be precisely defined.

While I have the opportunity to engage the hon. Gentleman's attention on this point, I hope that he will recollect that when questions are tabled, perhaps some regard could be had for the public expense incurred in answering them. I say that not about questions that seek

genuine information but about those that repeat what has been asked, sometimes a week previously, by his hon. Friends, and answered.

I should also mention questions which are clearly trawling exercises for the purpose of basic research and on which published information is readily available. On one occasion, 155 questions were tabled in one day, at huge public expense and involving huge consumption of management time. I hope that we can use the debate to achieve a modus operandi so that public cash is not wasted on consuming health resources, which could otherwise be spent on patient care, by littering the Order Paper with what is essentially unnecessary.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): Is the Minister saying that, in future, he will not be able to answer questions about hospital closures because his Department no longer has a definition of a hospital? If so, that will be an interesting debate.

Mr. Malone: I shall be guided by better information than the hon. Lady suggests. Certainly that would not apply to matters which are ultimately the Department's responsibility and in which regional offices are involved, especially where such matters are referred directly to Ministers. Of course we shall continue to answer questions on those matters.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North) *rose—*

Mr. Malone: Before I move on, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, as I am in an extremely good mood this afternoon.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and even more grateful for his good mood. How does he define a hospital? It is interesting that the definition of a hospital is no longer what it used to be. I would be grateful if the Minister would say what he means by a hospital, so that not only Opposition Members but everybody else can be clear about just what it is.

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman's uncertainty underlines my point that it may not be sensible to try to hit on a precise definition.

Opposition Members have often said—the right hon. Member for Derby, South repeated it this afternoon—that the move from regional health authorities to NHS executive regional offices, which will be part of the service, will mean a loss of openness. The right hon. Lady asked specifically what would happen to reports from directors of public health. As I believe I said in Committee, regional directors of public health will not publish reports, for the simple reason that the function that they currently exercise will be devolved nearer the population, to health authorities. They will continue to make reports, but in the context of the health authorities. I hope that I have finally got the point across to the right hon. Lady.

I hope to persuade the right hon. Lady that, as directors' reports will be made at health authority level, they will be far more relevant to smaller population groups. That is important when we are trying to identify and address health needs on an authority-by-authority basis. In any event, regional offices are not the bodies that need to be independent, as the right hon. Lady suggested. They will not make the decisions that will affect local people directly—the new health authorities will make those decisions. They will be independent in the same way as regional health authorities and, in addition—under the codes of conduct and accountability issued in April 1994, which we discussed a good deal in Committee—will be expected to produce and publish annual reports.

The regional offices will have a monitoring role. They will contribute to the development of central policies for the NHS, influencing the policy-making process by offering advice to Ministers. It is entirely appropriate for such tasks—including any that involve the collation of reports from health authority public health directors—to be performed by civil servants, who will be part of the process that requires direct accountability to Ministers.

As for centralisation, as a result of the 1990 reforms responsibility has already been successfully devolved from regional health authorities to a level that is closer to patients. The Bill will devolve it still further by moving vital functions, such as non-medical work force planning and many public health functions, down from RHAs to the new health authorities.

The right hon. Member for Derby, South said that the reforms had not been thought through. In Committee, we did not discuss which functions would reside where after the enactment of the Bill. I shall not detain the House by repeating the lengthy statement of functions that I made in Committee, but I draw it to the right hon. Lady's attention. It seemed, if not to satisfy the Committee, certainly to silence it—which, at the time, I may have interpreted as something rather different.

The right hon. Lady referred specifically to training and employment contracts. The Committee dealt with that in some detail, but for the sake of certainty I shall reiterate the position. The education contracts of registrars and senior registrars will be held at regional level by postgraduate deans; in Committee it was widely conceded that that was by far the most important aspect of the contracts, and the main source of concern.

Future arrangements for the holding of contracts are still under discussion, but, as I said in Committee, that is more a technical matter. The fundamental issues were what would happen to education and who would guarantee that doctors could move around the system to secure proper training. I welcome this opportunity to tell the whole House that postgraduate deans will have that responsibility.

I simply do not accept the premise from which the right hon. Lady starts—that this addition to the Bill is necessary. It is not true that less information is available on the service than before. Under the new national health service, far more information is available than ever before. Trusts are accountable to their patients and must publish annual reports. Across the country, more information exists about the performance of the health service in terms of waiting lists and of the quality of institutions that deliver health care, and it is much more widely available than in the past. Much of the debate that we have in the House and elsewhere about how the health service is performing involves information that is used by Opposition right hon. and hon. Members. In years past, under the old NHS, the lack of information would not have allowed such a debate to take place.

The combination of annual reports, accounts and league tables—vital information that tells us how public money is accounted for, and how it is translated into patient care—is accessible not only to hon. Members but to a wider public. The new clause is not necessary. The service

[Mr. Malone]

will ultimately remain accountable in a proper way to the House. Perhaps, although I fear that this is a forlorn hope, the right hon. Lady will seek to withdraw the motion.

Ms Coffey: The new clause seeks to make information available. I note the Minister's comment that he thinks that information is already freely available. He mentioned that the information will be available in the annual accounts of trusts, but I understand that the trusts' annual reports will be late this year. I have no clear idea of when my local trust's annual report, which will make all this information available to me, will be published.

In Committee, I raised the issue of the £215,000 that has been spent by my health care trust on set-up costs. I have failed to obtain information from the trust's chief executive on how that money was spent. That is clearly symptomatic of the problem that Members of Parliament have in obtaining information from trusts. In a letter to me, the chairperson of the local acute services trust, said:

"As far as accountability is concerned I am directly accountable to the Minister who is of course accountable to Parliament for the trust's action".

Why is it then that, when I write to the Minister about some aspect of my local trust, he refers me back to the trust? Somehow, this wonderful circle of accountability does not go the circle.

The £215,000 is public money, and was given to the trust for set-up costs. I have consistently asked the simple question: can the chief executive tell me how that £215,000 was spent? He has refused to tell me. He has referred me to the annual report. That seems illogical: if the information will be available in the annual report, why cannot the information be available to me now?

Mr. Malone *rose—*

Ms Coffey: The Minister is going to tell me.

Mr. Malone: I ran through an analysis of start-up costs in Committee. I cannot give the hon. Lady a breakdown of the figures precisely in relation to her own hospital, but I will be delighted to consider that matter and to give her whatever information is available. I will write to her on that point.

I have no idea where she gets the suggestion that reports will be published late—that is news to me. When those reports are published, more information will be available, for example, on management costs. That is an important step forward, which she would doubtless welcome, because Opposition Members question the service about the proportion of funding that is being spent on those costs. I hope that that underpins the serious intention of the Government to disclose, wherever possible, as much information as possible, so that the true performance of trusts will be publicly visible beyond the service itself.

Ms Coffey: I was told that the annual accounts were to be late in a letter from one of the Ministers in reply to my letter asking why the information about the £215,000 was not being given to me. He referred me to the annual report, and said that it would be late. I should be happy to show the Minister the letter.

I welcome the fact that the Minister intends to give me a breakdown of the £215,000 set-up costs. I should be happy if the Minister would tell the chief executive of my local health care trust that the information should be made available to Members of Parliament. That would be a great step forward. I am sure that the chief executive believes that, by not giving me the information, he is in some way carrying out the Government's wishes. Clearly that is not right, and he must be made aware of that, as must all chief executives of trusts.

4.30 pm

The main issue I wish to raise with the Minister deals with the monitoring of the programme to discharge mentally handicapped people into the local community once the regional health authorities have been abolished. As the Minister is aware, the programme has been going on for several years and involves closing down institutions such as Cranage or Offerton house in my constituency, which for years nursed mentally handicapped people in an institutional setting.

Over the years, that programme has been the subject of some financial dispute and argument between local authorities, district health authorities and regional health authorities. The arguments involved the money for those patients—it has been referred to in the past as dowries—as well as arrangements for financing the entire programme, including complicated deals about the notional value of regional health authority land and the selling off of that land.

The programme is almost complete: effectively, the regional health authority programme has transferred to the health authorities, and people with mental handicaps are living in houses in the community. Financially, they are living as normal people, entitled to housing benefit and other benefits. Care is being provided by the health authorities and, in my locality, staff employed by the health care trust go in on a daily basis to care for those people.

The patients are highly dependent; some of them have been living in institutions for many years. Therefore, transferring to the community can be difficult. The care they need must be of the highest quality, because, however much we talk about them living as normal people, their needs make them special. They are a risk to themselves: unfortunately, in Stockport recently a mentally handicapped person died in one of those homes.

The care provided is paid for by the local health care trust, which also employs the staff. As far as I can see, this has nothing to do with the Stockport health commission, and there is no commissioning role in buying the care. It is provided through the money from the regional health authority, and has ended up with the health care trust.

I can see several problems with this. If the Government felt able to accept the new clause, I believe that some of the inherent difficulties and conflicts might be resolved. A local health care trust should not be responsible for employing staff and providing care, because the cost of that care and the staff come out of the same budget.

I was quite concerned to see an advert in my local paper, which asked for staff and said that experience with mentally handicapped people was desirable but not necessary. A cynical thought passed through my head—of course, it costs less to employ unqualified people than qualified people. The ratio of unqualified to qualified people in Stockport is on a balance with the unqualified people who are employed part-time on a bank staff basis, where at the beginning of the week they are sent here,

there and everywhere, depending on where the need is. That, obviously, is cheaper than employing full-time or fully trained staff.

There is an inherent conflict, because if there is pressure on the budget—and there was last year—what better way of saving money is there than by employing less qualified staff on a lower rate of pay? That is not right, because mentally handicapped people who come into those homes have care plans, and the same authority that supplies and employs the staff monitors that care plan.

That cannot be right. There seems to be no independent inspection. There are no targets laid down by the Government about the quality of care. The homes are not subject to inspection, because they are not considered to be residential homes. The health and safety regulations do not apply. The homes are, in fact, operated as mini-institutions.

I am concerned about the quality of life for people in those mini-institutions. I have always supported the ideology behind community care—that institutions are not homes for people, and that it is better for people to be in a home and for care to be put into that home—but surely quality must be addressed. If mentally handicapped people in those homes are not provided with day care or stimulus outside the home, and if day care simply means providing them with Sky Television 24 hours a day, I am concerned about the quality of care, because that is not what community care is supposed to be about.

Who assesses whether the quality of care for those people is better than that in the hospital in which they were previously resident? Community care is supposed to be about improving the quality of people's lives. Where, and by whom, is that judgment made? I am concerned, because of the abolition of the regional health authorities, and the duties of the new regional offices not being clear by any means, about how the programme is being monitored across the country. Monitored it must be, and properly inspected. Mentally handicapped people need protection. They cannot speak for themselves. There must be some independent inspection of their needs and the quality of their lives.

I am not sure how the Minister will address that question and what input the regional offices will have. If there is a commissioning body—a health commission—and a provider unit, as in the trusts, in a sense there is some inspection by the health commission, because it purchases care and can demand to see the quality of that care.

But if the provision and purchasing of the care happens within the same organisation—for example, the trust—which appears to be the case in the care of mentally handicapped people, I suggest to the Minister that will stack up problems for the future. There must be some way in which to provide some independent inspection, whether that means, when the regional health offices go, placing that role back into the health commission and giving it the responsibility of commissioning care for mentally handicapped people. Perhaps that is a way round it. I am sure that it is not the only issue that needs to be dealt with, but it is in my thoughts, as this is happening in my constituency. No doubt other hon. Members could think of a number of other issues to be raised in this context.

The problem is that it is not clear what the regional offices will be monitoring, and what their responsibilities will be. At one level, this important Bill may seem uncontroversial, but I suspect that it will have far-reaching consequences for the delivery of health care. It therefore seems especially regrettable that it does not contain sufficient clarity. As we have discovered, we sometimes pass legislation without paying sufficient attention to its consequences.

The new clause offers a safety net by ensuring that proper monitoring takes place and that appropriate information is available to the public. The Government claim to be in favour of access to information, so I do not understand why they do not support the new clause and ensure that information is open to the public.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): I apologise to the Minister of State for having missed the beginning of his speech, but I was upstairs at a meeting of the Carers National Association, listening to the trials and tribulations experienced by its members because of Government policies.

My remarks all relate to accountability, or the lack of it. There is going to be no accountability in the national health service. The regional health authorities are to be kicked into obscurity, and their replacements will mean an absence of accountability. Brian Edwards, who used to be the secretary of Trent Regional health authority, has moved up into the money markets, and we have heard a great deal recently about people who have done extremely well.

Let us consider the appointment of the chairman of the trust in Doncaster and of the people who sit on the board. It is remarkable that those people do not represent a cross-section of the community; it seems that only people from a certain clique are wanted. The Minister and the Secretary of State must take responsibility for such appointments. For there to be accountability, the people who sit on trusts should be under no obligation to the Conservative party. Due consideration should be given to the secretaries and chairmen of the community health care councils sitting, as of right, on trust boards.

In the old days of the area health authorities, the press were invited to attend meetings, and the only matters from which they were excluded were those that required patient confidentiality. That is the only way to be open and above board, and avoid the sort of scandals about which we have recently heard so much. I am all for reform and progress, but making progress means going forward, not back to Victorian days.

I have been to hospital in the past couple of years, and have been fortunate enough to receive excellent treatment from nurses and doctors. Indeed, were it not for their skills, I should not be here now. I have much to be grateful for, and I am sad to see the health service, which I love, being dismantled because of the Conservative party's political dogma.

The Doncaster health authority used to spend about 3.5 per cent. of its budget on administration costs. I suspect that, were the Minister to do a similar calculation of the trusts' administration costs, he would find that the figure was more like 8 per cent. I am guessing, but it is an educated guess. In any event, it means that a tremendous percentage of available funds is not being spent on patient care.

4.45 pm

I believe that there is more accountability and openness among the Freemasons than in the health service. [HON. MEMBERS: "How do you know?"] I live in the real

[Mr. Martin Redmond]

world of the doctors and nurses. I hear the Minister, the Secretary of State and Conservative Members expound the benefits of the new arrangements and talk about money in "real terms", but I lie in bed at night adding up the hours that junior doctors spend on the wards, and they are unacceptable.

The general waste and handouts to get rid of bad appointees as chairmen of authorities all adds to the lack of accountability. Conservative Members should go out into the real world and talk to nurses and doctors, not the lackeys appointed by the Secretary of State. Patients praise the dedication of the nurses but condemn the money wasted on administration. Accountability is important, and the Conservatives need to understand what is really going on.

Mrs. Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): Once again, I stress the need for a strategic health authority for London but the Bill as drafted does not allow for the accountability that Londoners need in terms of their health care.

My remarks are intended as an act of kindness. In London, as elsewhere, the Government are singularly unpopular and have wholly misunderstood what people in London want. We are giving them the opportunity to rectify that. I hope that the Minister will accept the new clause as a measure of good will and take it as an opportunity for the Government to join us in seeking to provide a strategic health authority for London. It would be a popular decision among Londoners and would go some way to meeting London's health care needs. The chances are that my words will fall on deaf ears yet again, but I live in hope that one day even the Government might listen to Londoners.

Yesterday, I listened carefully to the Secretary of State's speech on the health crisis in London. She talked at length about what was happening in London as a whole. I should have thought that even her comments made it clear that there is a need for strategic thinking when planning health care and health provision across London. It is not just that the capital city needs strategic planning—it does fundamentally. Strategic planning is important because the needs within London as a whole and within inner London in particular are so much greater than they are elsewhere.

The Government often like to divide London from the rest of the country on the ground that London is over-resourced compared with the rest of the country. A number of the reports that have come out in the past year or two—certainly since the Secretary of State began her reforms in London—show that the Tomlinson report, on which the Secretary of State has based her slashing of services in London, was flawed because it was based on a great deal of misinformation, inaccurate statistics and unfounded dogma.

Not only Professor Jarman but others have shown that the acute bed need in London is great, that waiting lists are now rising rapidly and that the health needs in London are significant compared with those elsewhere. London obviously has the highest level of homelessness in the country. I use the word "obviously" because people are attracted to the capital city, which is one reason why homelessness is so bad in the capital. There is also more pressure on housing to rent in London than there is elsewhere. Young people in particular have no opportunity to get decent housing. Every medical expert tells us that homelessness has an effect on people's health. The level of homelessness is one way in which London is unique compared with the rest of the country.

As a number of my hon. Friends have mentioned in other debates, London has the highest level of people who are HIV positive or who have Aids-related diseases which require specialist care in hospitals, in people's homes and in community care facilities. Such specialisation is costly, but it is necessary and we must do all that we can to ensure that whatever the resources available for people who are HIV positive or who have AIDS, they are made available to people when they need them.

The capital also has the highest level of drug dependency in the country. This is a specialist area and we need to consider how to get resources to people as quickly as possible so that we can help them to survive. The amount of poor housing in London, the extent of homelessness and a series of other factors mean that other debilitating diseases are more prevalent in the capital city than elsewhere.

The comments of the Secretary of State suggest that a strategic health authority for our capital city is vital. It is extremely sad that the Government have ruled against any possibility of such an authority being set up. Instead of setting up that strategic authority, as they could have done under the Bill, they have removed the present level of accountability, small though it is, to the regional offices. That will not reflect the needs of people in London.

The Bill will have an especially dire effect on two areas. The Secretary of State has talked a great deal about care for the elderly and she appears to be terribly proud of her community care policy. In my experience and in the experience of many colleagues on both sides of the House, care in the community is simply not working in London.

When elderly people are discharged from hospital and sent back to their homes, often with only an elderly, frail relative to care for them, there is little back-up and little thought is given to the resources and resource management that are needed to ensure that people can recover properly from whatever illness put them in hospital in the first place. Some people have to go back to hospital for a second or third time and others, sadly, do not survive the experience at all. Unless we have a strategic overview of what happens in our hospitals in London and of what happens when people are discharged from hospital into their local community, we shall not serve the people of London well.

I now turn to mental health. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) mentioned mental health and spoke about the needs in her area. London has a greater need for mental health services than elsewhere. There are examples, right across the capital city, of people being discharged from institutions into the community without any resources to back them up. There have been a number of tragic instances.

A few weeks ago, a woman, who was not a constituent, came to my surgery. A relatively young person with a mental illness, who had been discharged into the community, attacked her when she had three children under five with her. Although she was not badly injured, it was a frightening experience and one that neither she nor anyone else would want to have. She recognises, as

the rest of us do, that the reason why such incidents happen is that there is no proper resourcing of community care in the city.

People should be discharged from institutions only if the Government are prepared to put resources into the local community to enable care to be given properly. Some time ago, there was the tragic affair of the Clunis report, with which the Guy's and Lewisham health trust had to deal. There have been many other cases which hon. Members can cite.

There is growing concern in the capital city that although people who have mental illnesses and those who are drug dependent or have some other specialist problems are more prevalent in London than elsewhere, they are not being properly looked after. The hospitals are totally under-resourced and we need to find a strategic way in which they can be resourced. Just before Christmas, there were examples of people with mental illness being shipped 50, 60 or 70 miles away because there were no beds in London in which they could be cared for.

The Government seem to be committed to ignoring what Londoners want. The new clause would enable the health service in London to become more accountable. That would go some way towards alleviating many of the fears of people in London about the state of the health service here.

I now touch on another aspect of accountability which I raised in Committee and which still concerns me because I do not believe that the Government have recognised the seriousness of the situation. I refer to the universities having a place on the health authorities. At present, they have a place on the existing health authorities as of right under a statutory provision. Under the Bill, that statutory place will be removed.

That will be a tragedy not just for the universities, which are well aware of the problems that will arise, but for the new health authorities. They will not have the direct expertise of the medical practitioners and the academics in the universities who know about their teaching methods and about their teaching programmes, and who can influence and support the health authorities to ensure that they dovetail their programmes of work with that of the universities.

Listening to the Secretary of State yesterday, I found it rather strange that she spoke eloquently about the centres of excellence and about the importance of our educational and academic training for doctors, in London in particular. The Secretary of State said:

"I am also strongly committed to our international position and centres of excellence."

She said later in the debate, when talking about the importance of education and research:

"Those are fundamental to the reputation of London as a world leader in medical teaching and research."—[*Official Report*, 20 February 1995; Vol. 255, c. 37-41.]

In that case, it strikes me that we ought to acknowledge teaching and research by ensuring that those academics are involved in the process of decision making in the hospital service.

Mr. Malone: I would not like the hon. Lady to give the House the impression that this matter has been disregarded and was not discussed in Committee. Of course it was and I pointed out in Committee that, if a medical school is in the area of the health authority, there would be a medical school representative, a university representative, on the board. I made that absolutely clear. However, like every other board position of that sort, it will be prescribed in regulation. Perhaps the hon. Lady's debate is over whether those positions should be in regulation or in the Bill. She is giving the impression that there may not be representation at all. It is certainly the Government's intention—I gave an undertaking to that effect in Committee—that there will be such representation.

Mrs. Prentice: I am grateful to the Minister for making that clear. I was not clear about that in Committee. Although, as the Minister would expect, I disagree with him over the provision being prescribed in regulation; it should be in the Bill, but one step at a time is perhaps as much as we can hope to take with this Government.

I believe such representation to be important. I have a special interest in training in general and, in this context, in medical training in particular. The fact that it will be purely under regulation and not a statutory requirement evokes fear for two practical reasons. First, when hospitals are being rationalised—closed, to those of us who understand the term—it is very important that universities are centrally involved in decision making because the costs involved of moving staff and medical students from one hospital to another can be enormous, as some hospitals elsewhere in the country have found.

Secondly, universities fear, and justifiably so, that the Department for Education, which presently funds the moving of the medical training and therefore funds part of the health service, will say that it will not fund such future moves. Yet we must feel confident that universities are aware right from the start were such funding to cease, so that they can participate in the process and be party to events.

As I said, the costs of changes can be enormous. It cost £15 million in Oxford, £20 million in Glasgow and Edinburgh—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order, I was hoping that the hon. Lady was coming to the end of that part of her speech. Frankly, the new clause does not apply to matters concerning the Department for Education.

5 pm

Mrs. Prentice: I am trying to establish the fact that the Department for Education funds part of the health service through the university medical schools, which is why accountability is so important. University medical schools need to be able to speak directly to the Department of Health about what is happening—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I was listening to the hon. Lady and I was well aware of the point that she was making. It is perfectly proper to make an aside, but she is developing the argument. I hope that she will now desist from that and return to the main thrust of her speech.

Mrs. Prentice: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall move on, because the Minister has responded, to some extent, to my point.

I hope that, in responding to the debate, the Minister will remember that that aspect of accountability is centrally important if we are to ensure that those centres of excellence, which the Secretary of State discussed

[Mrs. Prentice]

yesterday, remain. I hope that there is accountability in medical education, and especially as an hon. Member who represents a London constituency which suffers great deprivation and has large demands, I hope that we consider again the need for a strategic authority in London to provide the accountability in their health service that Londoners want.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): The two new clauses are excellent, and I urge the Minister to look at them carefully and to consider accepting them. They would strengthen the health service and provide the Department of Health with a much better defence against the proposed reforms than they have been able to put up against the reforms which have already been implemented.

The new clauses are strongly linked and deal specifically with accountability, as most hon. Members who have spoken said. Accountability is very important. We recognise that there is an automatic lessening of accountability in moving from an authority that has some external features to a regional office of government. We recognise that that implies a loss of accountability, and we must establish how that accountability will be made good in the arrangements under the new plan.

Financial accountability is also very important. Projected expenditure savings have been made. However, my interpretation of the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), on the day of the Committee's last sitting, was incorrect. When I looked back at what he said, I realised that he had been consistent in suggesting that he had projected savings of £150 million which applied to the whole country. However, it is fair to say that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), purloined £60 million of that overall amount for Wales, which left £90 million for England.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Rod Richards) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Gunnell: It was said in Committee, and I urge the Under-Secretary to look at the relevant proceedings of the Committee sitting. We are talking about global figures, to which I shall return.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that if savings are projected and Ministers have any confidence in them at all, they will obviously welcome not only the duty to publish accounts but the opportunity to publish them, to demonstrate how right they were in their projections. If they do not publish accounts and are not able to accept new clause 2, it suggests that they are not so confident about their projected figures. I shall return to that point.

The annual report is an extremely valuable feature of the Bill. In response to questions which several hon. Members and I asked in Committee, the Minister said that he intended to make clear at some point where every responsibility of the present regional health authorities would lie in future. He indicated that they could all be dealt with and that all current responsibilities of regional health authorities would go somewhere to a specific responsibility—to a health authority or the regional offices which are being set up or to an even higher responsibility. It is important that that indication is followed up—not merely by a statement from Ministers but by putting it into effect, so that the annual report clearly demonstrates how each function, if it has been necessary, is carried out.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) said, we are dealing with the removal of a strategic tier. Many of us believe that strategic matters are best handled by an authority that takes an overall perspective of the issues as they affect the region. A regional perspective is therefore important in several respects.

Hon. Members have already referred to mental health. We must ensure that strategic facilities are available. The region plays an important role in that regard at the moment. I was a member of the health authority that contemplated the eventual closure of High Royds, a mental institution on the outskirts of Leeds. That institution is interesting as it sits on a large plot of land which, if suitable planning permission were given, would be extremely valuable. The institution was important to the region from a resource point of view. It was the region's job to allocate resources on a strategic basis throughout Yorkshire; therefore, the enormous accumulation of resources at Menston was an important potential asset, the use of which would have been determined strategically on a regional basis.

I come from the Yorkshire region. Even though the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Bolton, West—who is not in the Chamber at the moment—has described me as a foreigner—

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Disgraceful.

Mr. Gunnell: Yes, but one understands that, in Yorkshire, the definition of a foreigner is very precise. Under the Yorkshire county cricket club's former rules, I would certainly be regarded as a foreigner. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) would also be regarded as a foreigner.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): What about as a KGB agent?

Mr. Gunnell: No, such accusations have not been levelled at me. I would have to wait a long time and have a more august position than I have at present in order for it to be worth while to make such suggestions.

From Yorkshire's point of view, the division of the large sum of money to which I have referred, and how it is allocated, is very important. Would it be allocated to mental illness, because mental illness requires huge resources? If we abolished the region and there were a great deal of income from a land sale, could we be sure that that money would be used in the area from which it came or, in the absence of regional authorities, would it go into a national pot?

From the allocation of resources we know how much can be done within the health service. The allocation of resources is currently a regional function. How will resources be allocated in the health service in future? Will they be allocated through the national health service executive? Will regional policy board members argue for resources for their regions in an executive that considers all the resources and distributes them on a national basis? If savings are made in a particular region, will those resources be allocated within that region?

Ministers must have already decided what will happen. They must know how they intend to distribute resources. In the absence of regional health authorities, how will resources be distributed? That point could be covered in an annual report which states how that function of the region is determined. Only if we know how the resources will be allocated can we be sure that they will be distributed with roughly the same results as now.

I know that you take an interest in such matters, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I recall the reception that you gave downstairs. You are obviously concerned about the care of those who suffer mental handicap or mental illness. Yesterday, I launched a report by the Matthew Trust which showed how the trust funded, with very small amounts of money, care for people who were mentally ill and had suffered some other hardship.

5.15 pm

The trust was concerned with very small amounts of money, but it was clear that a section of people had somehow fallen through the net of our social welfare system. One might say that it is the health authority's job to ensure that those individuals do not fall through the net. However, one might also say that there is a responsibility at every level to ensure that the safety net that we believe exists—hon. Members on both sides of the House believe that it exists in the welfare state—is made seamless so that fewer casualties fall through it.

Many of the people whom I learned of yesterday suffered from mental illness. Many of them had other handicaps—for example, they had been victims of crime. Those people were falling through the net and they clearly needed help. We must ensure that our strategy is right. If the strategy used to be determined in part at regional level, how will it operate in future?

Regions currently carry out many functions in respect of which we would like a report. When there are local disputes, the arbitration procedures are provided by the region. As we said in Committee, with regard to "The Health of the Nation", regions were given a specific function. Who will carry out that specific task of setting a health promotion strategy in future? Will there be a regional health promotion strategy or will it simply be a strategy set out by the Secretary of State here in the House?

There are clearly regional factors at play if we consider disease across the nation. I believe that there should be regional health promotion. What will happen in that respect? Although I did not attend yesterday's debate on health care in London, I am pleased to hear that the Secretary of State was concerned about centres of excellence. I wrote about the destruction of such centres of excellence and received a letter from the Minister for Health this week. I believe that we can learn lessons from the United States about the preservation of centres of excellence.

The regions have responsibility for research and development. Where has that responsibility gone or where is it going? What about a region's responsibility for registration? Responsibility for fundholders and their registration is going to the district health authorities. We have already discussed that, so it is not quite at issue now; if, however, there were an annual report, it could have been made plain that that responsibility had been transferred.

The responsibility for the appointment of community health council chairs currently rests with the region. Who will have that responsibility in future? The appointment of the chairs of community health councils and of those connected with the councils is very important, especially to local communities. When we come to talk about other health service appointments, we will have the benefit of a paper produced by the Secretary of State only this month which says that responsibility lies specifically with individual regional policy board members. We do not know whether responsibility for appointments to community health councils will also lie with regional policy board members.

A number of questions need to be answered. I would expect that an annual report would be able to say not just what was suggested by the Minister in Committee but where responsibility was exercised and who was exercising it. We need to know what will happen to those people who are working in the regional authority for the north and Yorkshire. We are told that there will be 135 people working initially in Harrogate, with some working in Durham and others elsewhere.

No doubt, some people will be transferred to the civil service. We need to know where those people are and what tasks they will carry out. We also need to know what tasks will be given to those people who have been transferred elsewhere. What will be done at Durham when the building is built? What will be done at Quarry house? Which matters will be dealt with in Whitehall for which the region is currently responsible?

In addition, we need to know about savings. My experience of savings brought about by abolition goes back to my time as leader of West Yorkshire metropolitan county council, when it was abolished. I was told that the abolition of my county, and five other metropolitan counties, would save £50 million. That does not souhd much when it is compared with the £150 million that the Government claim will be saved by this change. It was claimed that the saving was one of the motivating factors for removing democracy and abolishing those authorities.

A study carried out three years after the abolition of those councils stated that, although it was not possible to say that the abolition had cost a great deal of money, it was certainly not possible to say that it had saved money. The report, produced by the university of Birmingham, suggested that the change had been financially neutral. I want there to be agreement that the forecasts that the Ministers make will be quantified. We must know where they think the savings will come from, as it is not enough to project a global figure of £150 million.

I can understand that there will be fewer appointments to health boards following the merging of authorities, and therefore I can see where some specific savings will be quantified. I do not believe that those savings will come anything near £150 million, and Ministers must state from where the other savings will come. New clause 2 says that a statement of accounts must be produced before 1 April 1997. that might be a significant month for the Government. They will not be able to last here any longer than that without public approval, but I believe that the public will approve the presence of the Conservative party on the Opposition Benches.

We know that health service reforms are a costly business. It is now a year and a half since the controller of the Audit Commission said that whether the NHS got value for money from its was a "very legitimate question".

[Mr. Gunnell]

I asked whether the Audit Commission had been allowed to look at the savings projected in the Bill, because that might have thrown an interesting light on the issue. That question was not answered, so I suspect that the Audit Commission has not been brought into the matter.

It would be helpful to look at some aspects of management in the NHS. We know that the management of the introduction of the reforms has already cost the best part of £1 billion. Have we had value for money for that amount? I doubt whether many patients would think that we have; I am quite sure that they would have preferred much less to be spent on management changes and much more spent on patient care.

We are talking about the future, and the Bill will bring about changes in the future. We are told the Bill will save £150 million. Hon. Members should ask for that to be demonstrated after the event so that, even if the changes are not justified in any other way, the Government can show that they have produced the forecast savings.

The examples which I have been able to raise do not fill me with confidence. I understand the Minister's reluctance to put the new team working for Yorkshire and Humberside in Quarry house. We are told that Quarry house, which is near the centre of Leeds, is not in the middle of the region. I accept that. Harrogate may be a bit better, but that is not the centre of gravity of the region either. That, no doubt, is the argument for going to Durham; but the costs of going there must be regarded in the light of the fact that there is space in the £55 million Quarry house building in Leeds and there is also a building in Harrogate which, for the particular reasons we gave in Committee, will not get the best price in the market at the moment.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The situation is even worse than my hon. Friend outlines. There is, of course, a fourth building—the northern regional headquarters at Walkergate in Newcastle. Instead of having one headquarters per region, the Government—in their great push for efficiency and savings—are giving us four.

Mr. Gunnell: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. It was remiss of me to have had such a Yorkshire-biased point of view. I ignored the building in Newcastle. *[Interruption.]* The Speaker admonished Members for going from one constituency to another. I was wondering whether the sacred turf of the Hawthorns in West Bromwich was in her patch, because hon. Members go there from time to time.

The questions about the costs of change and why there must be an increase in expenditure for a new building in Durham have been unanswered. Thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), I can say that there are three buildings which are being neglected while a new one is built. That is the antithesis of the suggestions which Ministers usually come up with. There is a strong case to ask Ministers to accept new clause 2, and to be prepared to publish the financial results of their activity.

5.30 pm

Mr. Kevin Hughes: I have the feeling that I have been here before. The two new clauses are about accountability, and we explored the Bill's lack of accountability in Committee. We talked about democracy, openness, accountability and consultation but we have not yet had a proper answer from the Minister of State on any of those issues. That does not surprise me, given his response when asked to define a hospital. If he cannot define what he means by a hospital, how on earth can we expect him to give us straight answers about democracy, openness, accountability and consultation? Is it really too much to ask a Minister what the Bill means and what the Government mean by accountability, openness and democracy?

The two new clauses are basically no different from what we have discussed in the past. My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) referred to the secret service that operates in Doncaster. He and I share the same regional health authority and trusts, so we can both speak with experience about the lack of openness in our area. Other colleagues have a similar experience in their areas. We have the Doncaster Health Care trust; the district health authority, which is being merged with the family health service authority, piloting what the Bill is about; and the Doncaster Royal and Montagu Hospital trust. Of the three, the Doncaster Royal and Montagu Hospital trust— *[Interruption.]*

The Minister might like to listen to what I am about to say because Opposition Members do not often sing the praises of a trust. Of the three, the Doncaster Royal and Montagu trust is the most open and accountable, and invites local Members of Parliament to talk about what it is doing and proposes to do. That is significantly different from the other trust and certainly different from the district health authority.

New clause 1 seeks to have a report laid before the House. It says:

"It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to lay before both Houses of Parliament an annual report on the activities of the regional offices of the National Health Service Management Executive".

Those reports must be a valuable feature. What possible harm could they do? Do not we need to know what is happening in our health service? Do not we need to know about the overview of the new regional bodies? Let us not forget that people employed in those bodies will be civil servants. Will the Minister come to the Dispatch Box and justify why we should not have such a report? I see no reason whatever.

The Minister said earlier that hon. Members table too many parliamentary questions and waste public funds. If we had those reports and could find out what was happening, hon. Members might not need to table so many parliamentary questions. Who knows, the reports may even contain a definition of a hospital. If the Ministers do not know, somebody in the national health service executive may know what constitutes a hospital. I might table a parliamentary question later today asking the Minister to define a hospital, because he did not answer that question in the Chamber this afternoon. I find it incredible.

Let us not forget that the new bodies, which will be made up of civil servants, will still have a strategic role to play in overviewing their regions. It is important that we have that overview and a report on what is happening. Without a report, how will we know what those people are doing? Although they will report back to the Secretary of State, if a report is not laid before Parliament, we shall not know what is happening in our regions.

Apart from the Secretary of State, who will monitor the new regional bodies? Will they monitor themselves? A lot of self-monitoring seems to go on in the health service. After all, to be appointed to one of those bodies, it takes

just a nudge and a wink. My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley mentioned the Freemasons and he may not have been too far from the truth, because the new trust boards and the district health authorities are like secret societies. No one seems to know how people are appointed to them. A nudge and a wink, a word here or there, and suddenly someone with no experience whatever in the health service is appointed. So long as they are a friend of a friend—they just happen to be a friend of the Tory party or a friend or relative of a Tory Member—they are appointed. We have been round that circle before.

New clause 2 is about accountability for expenditure in the health service. Again, I see no good reason why we should not have such accountability and why we cannot be told how taxpayers' money is being spent. How on earth are we to scrutinise whether taxpayers are getting value for money? Is the health service to be left to monitor itself?

My hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) discussed the £150 million—or is it £60 million?—of savings that the Bill will make. Nobody seems to know whether savings of £150 million, £60 million or somewhere in between will be made. One reason why the Minister does not want us to have the financial report proposed in new clause 2 is because he does not want us to see that somebody somewhere—perhaps him—got the figure wrong along the way. If we have that report we may discover the truth, which I suspect is that savings of neither £150 million nor even £60 million will be made.

It is hard to keep a straight face when the Government say that they will save money when they have been responsible for increasing spending on administration in the health service to figures as long as telephone numbers. It is unbelievable how spending on administration has risen.

The two new clauses are about accountability and openness. We have been round that circle many times and will undoubtedly be round it again because we never get straight answers and Ministers seek to avoid the issue. In my opinion, the Government do not want openness, they do not want democracy and they certainly do not want accountability.

Let me tell the Minister that people such as those whom I represent want openness, accountability and democracy in the health service; they want to know how their money is spent. The two new clauses will give the power to their Members of Parliament to obtain the answer to that question for them.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Rather perceptively, my notes are headed "NCI", which I assume must stand for "No Conservative in sight". The British public are entitled to draw the pretty obvious conclusion from the fact that not a single member of the Conservative party has come here today to take part in an important debate to defend the Minister's point of view, except for the Minister himself.

I acknowledge that the Minister is here. He is ever present—apart from during the opening stages of the Bill, when he was unable to take part, and was helpfully described by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) as being ill-tempered and plague-ridden. It is not a description that I recognise of the Minister but, in fairness, his hon. Friend obviously knows him better.

The Minister no doubt hopes to cut an heroic figure among his parliamentary colleagues, standing alone at the Dispatch Box, holding back the forces of socialism, but the only nationalisation that is being undertaken here today has been undertaken by him, as he nationalises the functions of the regional health authorities by taking them in-house, under the direct control of the state, centralised under his direct personal control, inasmuch as the Secretary of State will allow him to exercise such control.

Our amendments are modest. They merely seek to hold the Minister accountable for his actions. Specifically, our new clause 2 seeks to hold the Minister accountable for the public money that he spends. That appears to me to be a perfectly reasonable proposition to put before the House. It has not originated in the ranks of the parliamentary Labour party alone. As my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) rightly said: it is a perfectly sensible suggestion of the Audit Commission.

If the Government claim value for money, they have at least a duty to prove the point. Our new clause 2 would require them to do exactly that, no later than April 1997. We might not have felt it necessary to bring new clause 2 before the House had the Minister been more candid in Committee. Not only did he not appear to know the answers to the questions about the amount that he was spending, the amount that he was saving and the ultimate cost or saving to the taxpayer, but he offered us a moving feast of different figures.

In the first week—I accept that it was not the Minister's fault but that of the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Bolton, West—we were told that the savings would be £150 million, but the Committee was treated to that figure without any context. No doubt we were all supposed to be overawed by it and to think that it represented good value for money. We then discovered that the figure for savings in Wales was to be £3 million. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) calculated that, if one took the figure for Wales and applied a population factor to obtain an equivalent figure for England, one would obtain a figure of £50 million.

The Minister then told us that the true figure that the Government anticipated for eventual savings for England was £60 million. Therefore, more money was to be saved from England, per head of the population, than was to be saved in Wales.

The Minister knew enough about the figures to treat us to that information, but he was unable to tell us how the figures were calculated. He may have made them up, which is always a possibility, I suppose, or perhaps he had no intention of being candid with the Committee—he wished to keep the information to himself. I hesitate to suggest that his reasoning might have been that the information was commercially confidential, but nowadays, given the direction in which the national health service is going, frankly, one never knows. The Minister has not shared the information with the Committee. Labour Members believe that he should be required to share it with the House.

The Minister boasts about a saving. On Second Reading, the Bill was accompanied by a money resolution. That money resolution was permissive; its purpose was not to facilitate the saving of money but to facilitate the spending of money, so the Minister is effectively saying to the House that he will need to spend money on implementing the legislation.

[Mr. Nicholas Brown]

No doubt the Minister's argument is that he spends money now to save it later. That is a perfectly reasonable argument to make; we simply require him to justify it, and we are entitled, as is the country, to draw our own conclusions from the fact that the Minister cannot justify it, or at least has not done so so far.

5.45pm

If the Minister is unwilling to justify that argument, are we not entitled to draw some conclusions from the fact that he wishes that information to remain secret? Whatever it is, it is not good conduct; it is not good public administration; it is not parliamentary accountability. Indeed, the Minister is not even able to outline which functions will remain at the regional level, which will be devolved to local level and what the costs will be. If savings are to be made, I think that we are entitled to assume that some functions will be performed less well, perhaps not even performed at all. What functions? So far, the Minister has not said.

The case for new clause 2 appears to be well made in terms of parliamentary accountability and the good management of public finances alone. There is, however, an even stronger case to explore further—as we seek to do in new clause 1—the strength of the arguments that lie behind the Minister's nationalisation of the functions of regional health authorities.

The purpose of our new clause is to place on the Secretary of State a duty to lay before Parliament an annual report on the activities of the regional offices of the national health service executive in respect of the duties that will be transferred to them from the abolished regional health authorities. We are simply saying that the Secretary of State should be accountable to Parliament.

If the Government think that they are justified in proceeding in the way they suggest, let them explain their actions to the House. That appears to me to be a perfectly reasonable stance for any publicly elected representative to take. I am surprised that the Minister does not embrace the opportunity to boast about his achievements, instead of running away from the opportunity. That fills me with doubts and uncertainties about his true motivations.

Worries have been expressed by my hon. Friends. There are anxieties that the regional offices of the national health service executive will not have the resources or the expertise required to exercise effectively a range of functions—a subject that we explored in Committee, but which it is right to explore again with the Minister, as we received no satisfactory answers. Our fears are more deeply felt because, although staffing levels for those regions are to be similar, the size of the regions are not to be similar.

My hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South cited the specific case of the North and Yorkshire region, as the Minister likes to think of two regions that have been added together. The Minister speaks to the House about efficiency savings. Those efficiency savings will not be found easily in the headquarters building.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South said, there is spare space in Quarry house in Leeds. The region has as an objective the sale of the existing headquarters at Harrogate. There is also an existing headquarters building at Walkergate in Newcastle, and, as if three headquarters were not enough for one region, the region intends to build a fourth new building in Durham city to add to its property holdings. I think that people would like the regional health authority to add to the primary and secondary health care it provides, not to its steadily burgeoning portfolio of office buildings.

We believe that the strategic regional overview of providing and purchasing decisions made by health authorities, GP fundholders and NHS trusts will be carried out in a thin and an episodic manner. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) raised concerns about services which may not be purchased enthusiastically as priority services in the Government's new marketplace, but which are nevertheless important. My hon. Friend referred to HIV/AIDS and drug dependency units, and my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South made a similar point about mental health care. Those important areas may be downgraded rather than given the attention that they rightly deserve in the Government's new structure.

Although the argument stands true across the country, as we debated yesterday, I believe that there is a special and specific case for a region-wide overview of health care services in London. That case is extraordinarily well made, and the structures we will be invited to put in place later today will do absolutely nothing to help achieve it—although the Government seem to acknowledge the case for regional structures, albeit nationalised ones, elsewhere in the country.

Our proposed new clause requires the Minister to report to the House about the outcome of the structural reorganisation. We want to know about the savings, the safety nets and the important functions that are perhaps not being monitored and carried out as well as they should be. I think that it is perfectly reasonable for Members of Parliament from London to draw certain conclusions about a structure which is perfectly all right for regional planning areas but which is not all right for the nation's capital. The Minister's report—if there were to be one—would provide hon. Members with useful evidence for any case that they may wish to make.

There is a separate issue about training, including the co-ordination and strategic planning of nurses' training. In any market with a purchaser-provider split, it is often difficult to see what driving force will require the purchasing—that is the language that we must use these days—of nurses' training. The Royal College of Nursing has expressed some concerns. It believes that the ever-increasing demand for trained nurses will not be met, and it has pointed out that, since 1987, the number of training places for nurses in the national health service has been cut by 33 per cent. If that trend is being driven not by planning but by the marketplace, it is likely to continue.

Similar fears have been expressed about the operation of cancer registries and the organisation of cancer screening programmes. That important regional function will be nationalised by the Minister and carried out directly by his Department. It will be supervised by him personally, but I am not sure how reassuring that will be for those who expect the programme to be provided by a regional health authority with clinical decision-making and health care priorities—not driven by the political imperatives which drive Ministers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) drew attention to very important regional level public health initiatives. Where will they figure in the Government's marketplace? The Minister is effectively nationalising the people in charge, as the Bill transfers regional directors of public health from the employment of the NHS to the civil service. Regional directors will be not officials with a duty of responsibility to the general public but civil servants with a duty of responsibility to the Minister which, as we have discovered time and again in this place, is quite a different matter.

The British Medical Association has written to all hon. Members who served on the Committee expressing its concern that the resulting restrictions will curb the necessary freedom of public health officials to speak out, even if it is inconvenient to the Government. It is very difficult for civil servants to do that, because it constitutes a breach of the Official Secrets Act. I suspect that the Minister would be the first to invoke such legislation if it were in his interests to do so.

That is the sort of behaviour that one would expect of a former vice-chairman of the Conservative party. I see that the Minister is flinching; I thought that he would take it as a compliment, but he obviously considers it an insult to be accused of being an official of the Conservative party.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): Deputy chairman.

Mr. Brown: I am reminded by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, who graces us with his presence, that the Minister was a deputy chairman of the Conservative party. The hon. Gentleman is clearly taking a close interest in health care provision, and I will move on to facilities for the elderly later. The hon. Gentleman has told me that he has reached the age of retirement, and I for one will miss him very much, because he is my pair. I think that the laws of supply and demand may work against me in the next Parliament, so I will miss him more than he thinks.

Before turning to those important considerations, I raise again the question of the siting of junior doctors' contracts. As the Minister would be the first to acknowledge, junior doctors are the cornerstone of secondary health care. The Committee spent some time trying to explore with the Minister where the contracts of junior doctors would be located—would they be held by individual trust hospitals or by a consortia of trust hospitals, or would they be nationalised along with other regional functions and held by the state?

It was clear to me at the beginning of the Committee process that the Minister did not know the answer to that question. By the end of the process, he had told us that the contracts would be held at a regional level for the time being, and that the situation would be considered further. The BMA was concerned that, if the contracts were held at trust level, the necessary rotation of junior doctors would be affected, and training might not be completed.

It was clear to Committee members that the Government toyed with the idea of having a consortia of hospital trusts—a consortia of providers—hold the contracts. From the Government's point of view, it is perfectly rational to consider that proposal. Junior doctors are providers of health care, and it fits with the Government's purchaser-provider philosophy that the contracts should be held by the provider. When the Government wish to sell off the hospitals to the private sector, the doctors and their contracts will go with them. Having the state hold the contracts at a regional level cuts across the market-based philosophy which is behind the rest of the Government's health care reforms.

The Government may be retreating from the original structures that constituted their great vision in the mid-1980s when they embarked on this stupidity. That is one possible explanation for their change in approach. We require the Secretary of State to come back to Parliament with a report which sets out whether the restructuring has succeeded. That is the key proposition in new clause 1.

My hon. Friends have raised correctly—although I accept that it is tangential to the main thrust of the argument—the question of involving universities and medical schools in planning decisions. Moneys are transferred from the Department of Education to the Department of Health. The Bill removes the statutory position which was enacted only recently.

The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 enabled universities and medical schools to participate in planning and decision-making at regional level. It is perfectly right that we should seek from the Government an explanation as to how the new interface is to work and to require, as we do in new clause 1, the Government to report to Parliament about the effectiveness of the new arrangements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East raised the separate issue of membership of health authorities and the Minister repeated the assurance which I understood him to have given in Committee: that, if a medical school or a dental school was involved, the appropriate person would be considered for membership of the health authority.

6 pm

The Minister told us something about the structures of the health authorities and the nature of the people who are to serve upon them, but from my point of view and that of other members of the Committee, that was not enough. He did not tell us about the rest of the composition of the health authority.

Which other professionals are to be involved and how are the laity to be chosen? Who are they to be? Perhaps Conservative Members are absent from the debate because they are encouraging their friends and relatives and people of equal virtue to fill in their application forms to apply for the new lay posts. Perhaps they have a head start on the rest of the nation, and are trying to get in before the Nolan committee reports. Who knows? I would accept any explanation that the Minister was willing to give the House—perhaps "accept" is putting it too strongly: I would at least listen to it charitably.

In any event, new clause 1 would require the Minister to report to Parliament on how the structures were working and to defend his decisions when they turned out to be perhaps politically motivated or even sordid.

The Committee was worried about the co-ordination of vocational training for general practitioners—again that is not easily purchased in the marketplace—and who would undertake responsibility for GP fundholders. We did not think it right that that function should be handed over to health authorities. That could not be done easily, as health authorities are responsible for the non-fundholders, and in the Secretary of State's new quasi-market, fundholders

[Mr. Brown]

and health authorities are supposed to be competing purchasers, no longer co-operating but fighting over patients—presumably the ones who are not ill, as they are the ones who are worth having in the new marketplace.

Finally, the question has been raised and not satisfactorily answered as to how on earth hon. Members are to get parliamentary questions answered. The Minister already says that information is not held centrally, and hints that it is available somewhere. We have welters of answers saying exactly that. He suggests that we are not getting answers because we are not framing the questions properly.

In the spirit of all-party co-operation, I sought from the Minister advice as to how to phrase questions. The example I cited was, how should I phrase a question to discover how many hospitals there were in the country—hospitals for which he is directly responsible to the House? I asked the Minister how many hospitals there are, how many had closed and how many he is planning to close. He said that planning to close a hospital was a hypothetical question. One assumes that there is still some planning in the Department of Health, and that not everything has been thrown to the market.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: Perhaps, when he is tabling questions, my hon. Friend ought to go back to basics and ask the question, what is a hospital? *[Interruption.]* If he starts from there and he gets an answer to that question, he may be able to progress to other questions to which he would like answers.

Mr. Brown: My right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) advises me that the answer to such a question would probably be that the information is not held centrally. The perfectly reasonable information that I was trying to extract from the Minister was: how many hospitals are there in Britain, how many have closed, and how many is he planning to close?

Perhaps, in a certain sense, planning is hypothetical, but Ministers have shared their plans with the House before in a candid way and in a spirit of openness and willingness to discuss, perhaps even learn and to listen to suggestions from others. In my experience, however, whenever the Minister suggests closing a hospital, the local halls fill up with citizens who are worried that their hospital will be taken away and most people are against it, which seems more rational that the Minister might expect.

Not only is he unwilling to share information with us about which hospitals he is planning to close: he goes further in trying to conceal information by saying, as my hon. Friend for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) has just pointed out, that he cannot answer the question, "What is a hospital?" That is Jesuitical in the extreme.

The Minister gave us no definition of a hospital. The Minister of State is supposed to hold an important office in the national health service, and he does not know what a hospital is. If the Minister does not know what a hospital is, how much confidence can we have in the rest of his legislation? Surely the Minister's lack of knowledge on a pretty fundamental and elementary point cannot reassure my hon. Friends or, indeed, Conservative Members.

How reassured is the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) that the Minister of State does not know what a hospital is? I have heard the hon. Gentleman speak eloquently about hospitals in his constituency. The hon. Gentleman has never had any difficulty in defining what he wanted kept open and wanted the Department to support rather than do down. The same is true of many Conservative Members. Surely they should join us in the Lobby tonight and support our proposition, which at least holds the Minister of State to account, and might even in future require him to explain what a hospital is.

Mr. Malone: We had an admission from the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) that we had run round the same course many times before during the debate. That was two hours ago. He said that we had already run round the course 47 times. Let me say to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) that we gave up running round it and started to ramble across it at will during the past 30 minutes or so.

I shall concentrate on new clause 2, which I did not deal with in my opening remarks, as it was not touched on by the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mr. Beckett). If Opposition Members were looking for proof that the savings from the Bill will actually be delivered, I am sorry to tell them from a reading of their amendment they will not get it from that.

The amendment seeks to compare spending in 1995-96 and 1996-97. As I made clear in Committee, the savings will be made over a slightly longer time scale into 1997-98. We made all the figures perfectly clear in Committee, but I shall return to them for the purpose of absolute clarity during my short wind-up speech.

Savings are already being made from slimming down regional health authorities in preparation for the transition to regional offices. For example, RHA core staffing has already fallen from nearly 7,900 in July 1992 to about 2,600 in March 1994. Savings are also being made from the integration of the work of DHAs and FHSAs, and in total we expect savings approaching £60 million to be made in 1995-96. There is no great mystery about what will happen thereafter. By 1997-98, when the new structure is fully implemented, the savings will rise to nearly £150 million net per year.

Opposition Members asked how those savings are to be broken down. More than £100 million-worth of the total saving results from the abolition of RHAs and the consequent reduction and overlap of work between the central Department and the regions. The remainder is due to the replacement of DHAs and FHSAs with health authorities. As for savings in departmental running costs, savings secured from the elimination of functions that currenty overlap between regional health authorities and the NHS executive will also contribute to the saving of some £50 million in the running costs of the Department of Health to be made by 1997-98.

The hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) raised a point that was also raised in Committee, asking whether savings would stay in the region concerned. In the case of certain savings, the answer is yes. All RHA spending, except the amount to be transferred to the Department of Health administration vote for the running costs of the regional offices, will have been devolved to the districts in the region, and will form part of their baselines before decisions are made about allocations to health authorities for 1996-97.

That relates to the direct part of the spending; as I said in Committee, any other savings that accrue will be available for general health needs. They will be spent on patients, and will be allocated in the normal way.

New clause 2 is intended to ensure that savings are delivered. The annual departmental report—which, as I said earlier, is a Command Paper and is laid before Parliament—describes in detail the Department's expenditure and activities, including all its responsibilities and all major developments during the previous year. In future, it will also include the effects of the abolition of RHAs. It will be possible to quantify savings, and the House will have an opportunity to consider them in detail.

The hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) apologised for not having been present at the beginning of the debate; no doubt, if he ever returns to the Chamber, he will apologise again for not having been present at the end.

The hon. Gentleman referred to his own experience of the health service, and described it as extremely good. Let me point out that it is no use Opposition Members always saying that the health service in general is useless—as they do in the House—and then, when narrating their own experiences, saying that it is good. I hope that their experience of the service is coloured by what happens to them when they have to use it.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mrs. Prentice) made a point about London planning. Health care in London—which was debated at length yesterday—is currently changing: the existence of the London implementation group, which was created to serve a time-limited purpose, is drawing to its conclusion. The hon. Lady feared that there might not be enough drive to ensure proper provision and a proper strategy for London's health care, but I assure her that there will.

I should point out to the hon. Lady that the organisational structure of London's health service is now much simpler than it was; its former complexity led to the establishment of the implementation group. The four regional health authorities have become two, and, as part of the move to the new, streamlined regional structure, they now incorporate the work of the former outposts.

All but one or two providers of health care will be trusts by 1 April, including most of the former special health authorities. The health authorities have been brought together to form commissioning agencies, responsible for assessing needs and ensuring that the right balance of services is available in both hospital and community in each area. We also expect a considerable increase in the number of GP fundholders in inner London, with an extension of the 14 per cent. of the population who are already covered to some 24 per cent. by 1 April.

The role of the London implementation group is now largely completed, except in the case of primary health care: the primary care support force and the primary care forum will remain. There is, indeed, a proper London perspective on health matters, and a much simpler structure which will enable that perspective to be implemented.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Malone: The hon. Gentleman has not participated so far, and I was on the point of finishing the speech.

Mr. Hughes: I was not a member of the Standing Committee.

Mr. Malone: As the hon. Gentleman points out, he did not participate in the Committee stage, either.

Mr. Hughes: Why?

Mr. Malone: I shall not go into that, but we missed the presence of the hon. Gentleman's party. I understand that its members were not very excited about making an appearance.

Mr. Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. *[Interruption.]* It is a genuine point of order for the Chair. Is it correct for the Minister to assert that members of my party were not represented in the Standing Committee, given that we were not nominated?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): That is nothing to do with the Chair.

Mr. Malone: I am obliged to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My understanding is that, if members of the hon. Gentleman's party had wished to secure a place on the Committee, they would have been entitled to do so; but they did not take advantage of that entitlement. No doubt the hon. Gentleman can complain to those who manage his party's business affairs, but it is a bit late for him to raise the matter on Report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already made it clear that this has nothing to do with either the Chair or the debate.

Mr. Malone: You are quite right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall speak to the hon. Gentleman privately after the debate, so that he is certain about the position.

I think that we have made it clear that there will be sufficient means of examining the savings generated by the reforms. The information will be available in the normal departmental report, which will be discussed in Parliament. Both new clauses are unnecessary, and if the Opposition choose to press them to a vote, I shall ask the House to reject them.

6.15 pm

Ms Coffey: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that the Minister has already sat down. Unless the hon. Lady wishes to make a speech—

Ms Coffey: I simply wish to ask, with the House's permission—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must resume her seat. She may make another speech if she

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

wishes to do so, but the Minister has finished his speech, and she therefore cannot intervene. Perhaps she will wait until a bit later.

Ms Coffey *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Lady is to speak, she will need the leave of the House.

Hon. Members: No.

Ms Coffey: I rise to speak because—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Did I hear a no? Has the hon. Lady the leave of the House? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] I think she has.

Ms Coffey: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must be addressed as "Mr. Deputy Speaker", or referred to as the Chair.

Ms Coffey: My apologies, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In my earlier speech, I asked some specific questions. I asked, for instance, who would inspect and monitor the community programme for the mentally handicapped. That is a serious issue, and I am deeply disappointed that the Minister did not refer to it: given that the RHAs are to be abolished, it is very pertinent.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 242, Noes 283.

Division No. 80] **[6.17 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'heim Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David

Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Warsing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Mandelson and
Mr. Joe Benton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'ldford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow West)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walden, George
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*

Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. David Willetts.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule 1

AMENDMENTS

Mr. Malone: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 6, line 13, leave out from beginning to 'for' in line 14 and insert—

'3. Section 12 (supplementary provisions about health authorities) shall be renumbered as subsection (2) of that section and—

(a) before that subsection as so renumbered insert—

"(1) Every Health Authority shall make arrangements for securing that they receive from—

(a) medical practitioners, registered nurses and registered midwives; and

(b) other persons with professional expertise in and experience of health care,

advice appropriate for enabling the Health Authority effectively to exercise the functions conferred or imposed on them under or by virtue of this or any other Act.",

(b) in that subsection as so renumbered,'.

The amendment arises from a commitment that I made in Committee. I made it because of a general concern felt across the professions involved with medicine that their involvement in health authority decisions should not be left simply as a matter of good practice.

In response to a full debate in Committee, I made it clear that the amendment would not set out a rigid system of professional advisory committees, because that would simply mean rebuilding the existing structure, which has already proved to be inflexible and which does not encourage arrangements to be tailored to local needs. I made it clear that we would be introducing something new. The existing structure does not take account of the full range of health care professions that need to contribute to a health authority's work. Therefore, the Bill removes the existing regional and district committee structure.

The amendment will add force to draft health service guidelines entitled, "Professional Involvement in Health Authority Work", on which the Government are consulting. I referred to that in Committee and I am pleased to tell the House that there has been an excellent response to that consultation exercise. The Department has written to 92 organisations asking for their comments and it has circulated the draft guidance widely within the NHS community. A total of 57 responses have so far been received, the vast majority of which have been supportive. For example, the vice-president of the Royal College of Anaesthetists said:

"The Royal College of Anaesthetists welcomes the guidance . . . The involvement of doctors and other professionals is essential for the proper planning, development and delivery of optimum health care for patients."

The executive secretary of the British Orthoptic Society welcomed the fact that

"the importance of professional input into Health Authority work is recognised."

The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy said:

"Broadly, we think the guidance is very helpful."

A consultant in old-age psychiatry from Southampton community health said:

"I thought I should write and say how encouraged I was by this Executive Letter . . . We look forward to the implementation of this letter."

Several professional bodies, notwithstanding their welcome for the Government's guidance, have said that it is important to secure effective professional involvement over and above the guidance. It is to provide that force, which I recognised in Committee and which was referred to by many hon. Members on the Committee, that we tabled this amendment.

The guidelines are not rigid. They stress that models should be considered carefully but not copied unquestioningly. They do not prescribe in detail how professional involvement is to be achieved, but they leave in no doubt the importance of that involvement. The amendment will give additional authority to the guidelines by placing on each health authority a duty to make arrangements to ensure that appropriate professional advice is available to them at every stage. Exactly how that advice is obtained is left to individual health authorities to decide. That is where they need flexibility to adapt to local needs.

A general feeling was expressed that advice must come not just from doctors and nurses but from a range of professions associated with medicine such as physiotherapists, ophthalmic opticians, dentists, pharmacists and dietitians. That point is stressed in the draft guidelines and is made clear in the amendment.

Hon. Members will wish to know what arrangements will be made to ensure compliance with the new legislation and with the guidelines. Regional offices of the NHS executive will monitor individual health authorities closely, especially in the important early stage when arrangements are being set up. They will require that arrangements have a real impact on health authority work and that health authority employees can be confident of easy access to professional input as necessary for their work.

I hope that hon. Members will be reassured that the Secretary of State has powers under section 17 of the National Health Service Act 1977 to give directions to health authorities with which they must comply. The Government will be willing to use those powers if it becomes necessary to ensure that all health authorities implement the new duty effectively. I make that point specifically to underpin the Government's view and to ensure that our commitment to professional advice is not just written into statute but will become an effective and living element of the way in which health authorities work from day to day.

There is one further point, which is made clear in the guidelines but which I should like to take the opportunity to emphasise. The arrangements made must command the confidence of professions locally. In the Government's view, that will not be achieved if health authority management seek to control the agenda too tightly. Some concern has been expressed on that point, and it is that concern which I wish to answer.

It is important that arrangements are flexible enough to allow professionals to initiate discussion on issues of concern to them. One of the representations made by a number of people on the guidelines was: could only the health authority initiate such discussion, or could professional advice be offered if the professional

organisation wished to take that initiative? I can assure the House that all professionals will have the opportunity to initiate discussions on issues of concern to them. Arrangements will be firmly in place, supported by the amendment, to ensure that such concerns are seriously and carefully considered.

I am convinced that the amendment will give hon. Members and, more important, professions outside the reassurance that they need and have sought. Its purpose is to ensure that every authority does its work, and is seen properly to do so, by seeking professional advice. I give the House an undertaking that any authority that does not seek such advice or does not listen to it when it is volunteered and discussions are initiated will not be complying with the new statutory duty under the Bill.

I commend the amendment to the House. It fulfils a number of the concerns that were expressed by hon. Members in Committee. I hope that hon. Members who spoke on the matter will feel that it also fulfils the commitment that I gave in Committee to table a substantive amendment on Report to deal with those matters.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: The Government plan under the Bill to abolish local and regional advisory committees in England, but are leaving the national advisory framework for Wales in place. In Committee, we challenged the Government on that proposal. In response, they tabled the amendment.

The Government are making a clear statement in statute about the duty to recognise the importance of involving clinicians in the decision-making process. They apparently accept the importance of clinicians' involvement in the decision-making process in the NHS.

The Secretary of State was explicit on the point on Second Reading, when she said:

> "Sitting on boards is not the only way for professionals to be involved, nor is it sufficient."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 642.]

In spite of those words, however, the Bill still contains a provision that abolishes the local advisory machinery. Therefore, although I welcome the Government's amendment, I can give it only a partial welcome. I am happy that the Government have given the consultation of clinicians a force in statute, which may offer health professionals some reassurance, but I cannot understand the decision to proceed with the abolition of the advisory machinery, which facilitates that consultation and which is proposed under the Bill.

6.45 pm

The local advisory machinery has wide support. The British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing have expressed concern about the proposed abolition. The alternative arrangements are still not totally clear. It is only one month since the NHS executive issued its draft guidelines on the matter. Health professionals and their associations have had little chance to consider the guidelines, which were issued well after the legislation abolishing the current machinery. Consultation on the draft is still continuing, so we may not have the final guidelines for some time. Indeed, the Minister told us earlier that he has received only 57 responses so far.

Although the Secretary of State talks about wanting an integral place for professional advice in the NHS structure, she cannot tell us what that structure might be. She has hived off policy making to the NHS executive, and it is the executive, not the Secretary of State, that is making decisions.

The Secretary of State, therefore, is asking the House to abolish something, yet we are not clear what will replace it. That has been typical of the Government's approach throughout the passage of the Bill, which is vague and lacking in detail. The Royal College of Nursing has described the duty in the amendment as welcome, but a "poor replacement" for the present statutory advisory machinery because it does not specify how or at what level in an organisation such advice should be maintained. There must therefore be reservations about the amendment. Welcome though it is as a small move in the right direction, Labour Members feel that it does not go far enough.

The Government tabled the amendment to try to reassure professional organisations, but, as the BMA has made clear, without a formal structure to put before the House for consideration, opposition to the changes will inevitably remain.

The Government appear to justify the abolition of the current machinery on the grounds that, somehow, it is peripheral. Professional associations do not share that view. They have been very supportive of the machinery and are alarmed at the Government's decision to abolish it. We need an alternative if we are to be able to judge the merits of change. To proceed with the abolition of the current arrangements without providing an alternative does not appear to fit in with the Secretary of State's apparent commitment to the importance of professional involvement.

The amendment goes some way to ensuring compulsion to involve professionals, but Labour Members will want to be sure that the consultation is effective and real and that it is certain to be available to all levels in the NHS—locally, regionally and nationally. In that sense, the Government's proposals are a real disappointment.

Proper consultation is the only way to ensure effective allocation of resources. Health care purchasers will need to know which treatments are clinically effective and proven. They will need to know a good deal about new treatments before deciding to proceed with the development of those services locally. Members of the medical profession must be involved in the purchasing and development of health services if purchasing is to be effective.

Without the involvement of the professions in decision making, the efficiency that the Government claim to be pursuing will be difficult to achieve. Purchasing of services can be effective only if managers are aware of the clinical effectiveness of treatments, the difficulties that exist with services or units, the maintenance of quality standards and advice on new procedures and drugs that are available.

The amendment may go some way to reassuring health care professionals of the Government's intentions, and Labour Members are pleased with the Government's decision to move it, but health care professionals have also stressed the need for a formal mechanism for advice to ensure that the views of clinicians are heard at all levels in the NHS.

I very much regret that the Government, in spite of their fine words, do not think the matter sufficiently important to introduce it in statute, but I look forward to seeing the final guidelines from the NHS executive.

Mr. Gunnell: I shall add just a few comments to those that have been made.

The Minister will recall that I moved amendments in Committee that would have retained the present advisory system, which is working.

In Committee, the Minister said:

"The guidelines make it absolutely clear that professional involvement is not an optional extra . . . Will this be a sticking plaster over a commitment or will it be something real that works on a practical, day-to-day level. I can assure him that it is the latter and that it is something that Ministers understand to be fundamental to health authority work."

He went on to say that another important point was that

"the arrangements that are in place are not just tokenism. They do not just go through the motions .. Those professional arrangements will have a real impact on health authority work and decision making. On some issues, professional input may be needed which covers several purchasers."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A* , 7 February 1995; c. 152-3.]

The Minister gave some commitments, and my reaction is similar to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes). The Minister has honoured his commitment but the amendment contains words that need to be firmed up. The consultation period on the draft guidelines, entitled "Professional Involvement in the Health Authority Work", is to end on 28 February. He has so far received 57 responses but I am sure that he will have more by that date, although it is not too far away. The BMA has told me that it has yet to send the Minister its response. That is probably true for nurses, too. Both groups welcome the amendment and are correct to commend it, but some words need further clarification.

The amendment refers to

"advice appropriate for enabling the Health Authority effectively to exercise the functions conferred or imposed on them".

The question that must be asked is who decides the advice to be appropriate? Under the old system, medical advisory groups and other advisory committees representing various groups in the health service decided when they thought advice from them was appropriate. The committees would advise health authorities and, further up the scale, the Secretary of State on what they thought appropriate. In this instance, it is not clear who is to judge the appropriateness. If the Minister wishes to clarify the point, I should be pleased to give way.

Mr. Malone: I am glad to oblige the hon. Gentleman with a little textual analysis so that his mind may be set at rest. I am grateful to him for reporting to the House at such length the speech that I made in Committee. It would not be sensible to have written all that into the amendment, which I know he is not suggesting should have been done.

I direct the hon. Gentleman's attention specifically to the amendment. Proposed subsection (1) states:

"Every Health Authority shall make arrangements for securing that they receive . . . appropriate advice"

from various persons and groups. The reasonable interpretation is that health authorities have a statutory obligation to make arrangements "for securing" such advice. The fact that they shall "make arrangements" gives force to the amendment. The amendment goes on to state what health authorities will get once they have made the arrangements. It includes in proposed subsection (1)(a) and (b) those to whom the health authority will look for the

"advice appropriate for enabling the Health Authority effectively to exercise the functions conferred or imposed on them".

That goes to the heart of what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

The point is that health authorities must receive advice; it is not simply a matter of their seeking advice. It can be a two-way process: if the professions believe that they have advice that is appropriate, they will be able to tender it to the health authority. I hope that that helps the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Gunnell: It is helpful, and the professionals involved will have to examine in detail what has been said. The amendment could have been interpreted to mean the subjects where the health authority felt that it was appropriate to have advice. If it in fact refers to when the profession feels that it is appropriate to have advice, the question that arises is what steps will the health authority take to get that advice? Will it set up something akin to an advisory committee? There is certainly a good number of advisory committees at the moment. We still seem to be at a flexible stage in deciding exactly what structure will prove acceptable.

The Minister has ensured that there is a statutory responsibility to get advice, but what structure within the medical profession will provide that advice? Will it, in a sense, be open season and that anyone who wants to give advice can do so? That would probably not be the most efficient way to proceed but, if a more limited structure were set up, we should need a model for involving the right professionals and professional groupings in the giving of advice. I am seeking merely to ensure that the professions are comfortable with the way in which advice can be offered. Let me cite a specific example.

We shortly expect the Secretary of State to make a statement on long-term care, about which there has been considerable speculation recently. She might be able to tell us tonight when we can expect it. We do not know whether her guidelines will leave a specific role for health authorities but, in commenting on what has so far emerged from the Department of Health, some people have said that health authorities will have a role in determining what they consider to be appropriate conditions for long-term care. I should have thought it was an issue in which some medical input was necessary. Such cases are often expensive so doctors might want to comment on individual cases as well as the category of people entitled to long-term care under the NHS. It is a very important issue, which is why we await the Secretary of State's statement with some interest.

I feel that the new arrangements mean that we might be getting closer to the position in the United States, where I lived and where it is essential to have medical insurance offering some hope of long-term care should one be struck with some dreadful, long-term, paralysing illness. However, very few people have a foolproof insurance policy. If we take the view that the health service will in future provide long-term care only if there is some hope of medical improvement or mediation, people will be in a very difficult position if they ever need life-long nursing care.

We await the Secretary of State's guidance with great interest, but this is just the sort of issue in which the medical profession will want to have an input, for individual cases or in terms of policy for an individual health authority. The question is, at what level should that input be? The Secretary of State might take the view that her guidance is sufficiently clear for there to be no need for medical input, but some matters still need to be clarified. If further clarification is forthcoming, I assume that it will be after the conclusion of the consultation period with the professionals on 28 February.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North in welcoming the proposals. The professionals also welcome them but there are blurred edges which need to be clarified. We hope that when the full views of the professionals are known, the Minister will clarify the position. Perhaps there will be advice on structures for consultation. Perhaps he will make it clear that "appropriate advice" is advice that the professionals feel is appropriate, just as much as it is advice that the health authority or the regional office thinks is appropriate.

7 pm

Mr. John Heppell (Nottingham, East): In some ways, I am reassured that the amendment has no more clarity than most of the other proposals in the Bill. One of the things that has characterised the passage of the Bill is that the Minister has been unable to give us answers. It is always a case of, "Things will evolve", or, "You will hear about that in the future." In the same way, the amendment lacks clarity. It does not describe the mechanism or structure that will enable professional advice to be given to health authorities.

Like some of my hon. Friends, I have thought about the way in which advice should be given. I thought that it would be wrong if the health authority just picked a doctor whom it knew would go along with whatever view it decided. We would need to get together a number of doctors at local and at regional level so that they could offer their advice. I then thought, "What would we call the groups?" In the end, I thought that the groups could be called, as they are now, local advisory committees and regional advisory committees. If the Minister has other plans, perhaps he will spell them out to us.

The Minister gives the House a wrong perception when he talks about the people who have responded to his notice about guidelines. He talked about "a consultant". Throughout the Bill's passage, there has always been "a consultant in Newcastle" or "a doctor in Birmingham" to prove the Minister's point. The doctor says that whatever the Government are doing is right. I would like to read in detail all the responses from all the professional bodies. I suspect that they are saying, "Yes, we welcome the amendment, but we welcome it only because it is better than nothing." When the Bill began its passage through the House, the advisory committees were disappearing and nothing had been suggested to take their place.

I have here a briefing from the Royal College of Nursing, which says:

> "This amendment is being proposed in response to concerns about the Bill's abolition of professional advisory committees at district and regional levels . . . Whilst this improves the legislation, it does not specify how, or at what level within the organisation, such advice should be obtained. It is a poor replacement for the professional advisory machinery that currently exists."

That is fairly unambiguous. The Royal College of Nursing welcomes the fact that the Government are doing something in response to their concerns, but it does not welcome the changes. It would much prefer the old system to be in operation.

Nurses provide 80 per cent. of patient care, so there is a real case for saying that they should have some involvement in decisions about purchasing. Should they not have some involvement in determining how the money is spent? They probably have far more involvement than Members of Parliament and far more involvement than many of the people who sit on the boards. On Second Reading, the Secretary of State said:

> "We want professional advice to be integral in the new structure, and we want professional advice to become professional involvement."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1994; Vol. 251, c. 643.]

I would welcome that; I would love to see professional involvement, because it does not happen at the moment.

On Second Reading and in Committee, I quoted the fact that of the 240 chairs of family health service authorities and district health authorities, more than half had interests in business, consultancy or finance. That was their background. Of the 240 chairs, only 15 have any sort of medical background. We must ask ourselves whether we are picking the right people. If we do not have on the boards people who have medical experience, we need to ensure that the advisory system is toughened up an awful lot more than would be the case under the amendment.

I know that the British Medical Association has not responded yet to the Minister. A BMA briefing makes the position clear. It says:

> "There should be comprehensive arrangements for medical advice and it is essential that some formal mechanism should be in place so that the views of doctors can be heard."

The word "formal" is underlined. We cannot leave it to the health authorities to make their own arrangements. As well as saying that advice should be sought, the mechanism and structure by which advice is sought should be spelt out in statute. If we do not have that mechanism and structure, there will be different systems across the country. Some of them may be adequate, but many will be bad.

I now turn to the factors that health authorities should take into account when they seek advice. If a health authority intended to purchase obstetric care, the consultant would advise on whether antenatal care, postnatal care and the delivery should be built into the contract. If a health authority was thinking of closing a hospital for the elderly, the GP should advise on the support services that would be needed to allow the elderly patients to live in the community.

When considering the transfer of prescribing responsibilities, the health authority would need advice on the interface between what should be prescribed by the hospital and what should be prescribed by the GP. Obviously, health authorities need advice on such matters. When considering a contract for prostate surgery, there would be discussions on whether use specialist urology surgeons or general surgeons with an interest in urology.

It is almost certain that medical advice would have an impact on every business and financial decision—every decision—made in a hospital. The Minister has missed an opportunity here, as he has missed so many opportunities in the Bill, to do something positive in terms of trying to ensure that the medical advice is adequate and available

[Mr. John Heppell]

to the health authorities. He could have taken such action, but he has not done so. With this amendment, as with the Bill generally, he has failed to grasp the opportunity in front of him.

Ms Coffey: What interests me about the amendment is proposed subsection (1), which says that health authorities shall make arrangements to ensure that they receive advice from

"other persons with professional expertise in and experience of health care."

I wonder what that means. I welcome the fact that advice will be sought from medical practitioners, registered nurses and registered midwives, as is right and proper. However, some of my hon. Friends feel that if the Government had wanted the advice of such people to have a big impact, having them as full members of the health authority, with a vote, might have been a better way in which to achieve that aim.

Leaving that aside, the category covering

"other persons with professional expertise in and experience of health care"

is not very explicit. In fact, it is extremely vague. I wonder whether the Minister is considering involving users of health care at some point. Although I have a great deal of admiration and respect for professionals, they do not always know what is best. Sometimes, health care user groups have a perfectly valid and important point of view. If the Minister's intention is that

"other persons with professional expertise in and experience of health care"—

Mr. Malone: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Coffey: Of course.

Mr. Malone: Let me prick the hon. Lady's bubble, if I may, before we go too far down that line. The answer to her question, in general terms, is probably no. Proposed subsection 1(b) is drafted as widely as it is to take in the whole range of professionals. The Government did not wish to make an exclusive list. We were faced with the problem of certain professions and specialties emerging from time to time and describing themselves in different ways; so it would not have been wise to have been prescriptive. However, I would not try to suggest to the hon. Lady that the amendment would go beyond what it states to another area and cover, for example, areas which are perhaps already covered by community health councils, which are important for the user group to which she refers.

Ms Coffey: The amendment should cover other areas because although community health councils represent user groups, they do not represent every user group. User groups often change depending on the issues that arise, as I shall illustrate for the Minister.

The health commission in Stockport and—I think—the health care trust as well, which is the provider of the service, decided to change speech therapy from a school-based service to a clinic-based service. Since then, there have been horrendous difficulties in maintaining even a clinic-based service because of a certain underfunding of speech therapy and when speech therapists have gone on maternity leave, there has been no provision.

That move from a school to a clinic-based service has had enormous repercussions in the screening of children at nursery level, which, as Minister will be aware, is the best time for screening for possible speech difficulties which impact on children's educational needs. The service relies on parents to take children to clinics for appointments. I may add that, after two appointments, a parent is not offered a further appointment.

The difficulty that arises, as I am sure the Minister will acknowledge, is that a child with well-motivated parents will receive that speech therapy service, but a child whose parents have difficulties, sometimes with transport, because not every clinic which has a speech therapist is accessible to every parent, will not receive that service. In fact, in one of the most deprived areas of my constituency, there is no speech therapy provision at all in the local clinic. Essentially, that policy has caused difficulties for those children who are perhaps in most need of speech therapy.

If there had been an obligation on the health authority to consult a user group, parents and, indeed, nursery and primary school teachers, particular problems with that change in policy would have become evident. Since the health authority saw the change from its point of view—it is a cost-saving exercise because, obviously, it is easier and cheaper to provide services in a clinic than to pay for speech therapists to visit schools—the policy was changed, which was unfortunate.

I put part of the problem down to the fact that the appropriate user group—teachers—was not consulted extensively, nor, probably, did the health authority see any reason to consult it extensively. I am not saying that the health authority did not take on board some of the comments made by head teachers, but because it had only to ask, the advice given was not viewed as statutory, and perhaps the health authority evaluated it differently.

7.15 pm

Another user group which will become increasingly important is that of carers, especially those who care for people who are mentally handicapped or mentally ill or, indeed, elderly parents at home. As my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) pointed out, many aspects of health care are yet unresolved. One of the biggest unresolved issues is the separate responsibilities of the health authority and the local social services department to purchase health care for the elderly. There are no clear guidelines on that.

At the moment, the situation is manageable because the social services have money in their community care budgets to enable the purchase of that health care—although at the expense of other community care—and the health authorities are quite happy for that to continue. The carers, the users of that health care, are not currently involved in any part of the consultation process. The tension exists merely between the health authority and the local social services.

I am very concerned that, when that tension is resolved and local guidelines are drawn up—it is the Secretary of State's intention that local guidelines should be drawn up, issued and transparent—carers will not have any input. Often, the recipients of health care can tell professionals what will work and what will not work. In giving that advice, they can help to ensure that the available resources are effectively spent. History is littered with examples of professionals having good intentions of achieving a

certain objective which was not achieved because they failed to take into account something which could have been pointed out by the person who was supposed to receive the service.

It is most disappointing that the Minister does not feel that the health authority should be asked to make arrangements for securing advice from the users of health care. The community health council has an important role and a different experience from the people who use health care.

To give yet another example, the most difficult health care to deliver is in the most deprived areas where unemployment is high. It is a major challenge in health promotion to establish structures and strategies that will improve health in those areas. Indeed, health promotion in deprived areas all over the country is disappointing. If it is to be successful, health promotion must involve local people to find out how best screening can be provided or how best people may be persuaded to take advantage of health promotion programmes.

I would not want the Minister to think for an instant that I think that such promotion would permanently improve health, because it is related to poverty. There will be ill health as long as there is poverty. However, within the remit of health promotion, it is obviously important to ensure that it is used effectively among groups that do not currently take advantage of it, for whatever reason. The health professionals need to consult more extensively and understand why that is happening. Whether as users of health care or not, the health professionals must be consulted.

I am concerned about the fact that the Minister has not included that important user group. To use that over-used word "partnership", the professionals are part of the partnership for delivering a health strategy in a locality. Health authorities, trusts, local authorities and the users of health care are all involved in that partnership.

I was also surprised that the Minister said nothing about consulting local social services departments. Although such consultation occurs at officer level to a large extent, there is an enormous variation across the country. The local authority has a prime role in delivering health care through the public services and as an employer. In addition, with the health authority, it is a joint health care purchaser of services for elderly people.

Although the Government have made some welcome gestures towards consultation, it would have been more welcome if they had included the users of health care, and perhaps local authorities, to underline that partnership and the value of the role of health users and of the local authority as a health provider.

Mr. Malone: I shall address briefly some of the points that have been raised during the debate. I am grateful even for the grudging response from several Opposition Members who I thought looked at me sceptically in Committee and probably thought, "He'll never bring a detailed amendment before the House on Report." However, I am delighted to honour the undertaking that I gave in Committee.

I understand that the amendment does not go far enough. It was not designed to address concerns about board membership and making that prescriptive. It is therefore hardly surprising that I am going to fail the expectations or wishes of the hon. Members for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) and for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) on those points.

Opposition Members raised several important points about the detail and structure and I draw their attention to the draft guidelines which have been issued for consultation. No fewer than seven principles should inform local arrangements by health authorities for involving professionals. These will vary widely across the range. It is not right to say that the rather rigid and formalistic structure which is not going to be reiterated in the Bill means that it will be a case of come one, come all, and a loose arrangement.

According to the principles, there must be an emphasis on outputs in the arrangements. They must be timely, relevant and authoritative, and they must improve patient-client care. That is a very important area for professionals to be involved with. There must be clarity about who is to be involved and what is expected of them. There will be an agenda for professionals to follow. The system will not be haphazard.

There must also be a strong personal commitment to the intended outcomes by those involved. The professionals involved must accept the need for their input to be firmly based on research evidence where that is appropriate. Any old point of view will not do. There will have to be the clearest indication that soundly based evidence is brought to bear.

There is an underlying principle that those involved must be given access to all relevant available information, including any relevant research-based evidence which may be needed to underpin discussions. It will not be a case of the uninformed talking to the well-informed. There must be a proper sharing of information with professionals. I am sure that the House will welcome that.

I now come to the real change between those arrangements and the uni-professional activities that were undertaken before. There must be multi-professional, multi-disciplinary teamwork which addresses both the primary and secondary care aspects of any issue.

That part of the guidance is the nub of what is intended. Teams must be brought together for specific purposes and they must look across the board at the implications of what they are discussing. There must be good communication between those working on an issue and any other related work by the health authority.

That covers a broad spectrum of what the professionals should consider. It is right to set those points out in guidance and guidelines instead of being entirely prescriptive. It would be wrong to do anything other from the centre than lay out the principles. We do not want to place the health authorities in a straitjacket. We must address the important principles that will underlie the vital matter of consulting professionals.

I hope that I have gone some way towards convincing Opposition Members that, although the guidelines are not as prescriptive as former arrangements, the principles are very firmly in place and I am sure that they will be broadly welcomed on both sides of the House.

Mr. Gunnell: The seven principles are set out in the document relating to the involvement of the professionals. That document is out for consultation. The principles

[Mr. Gunnell]

appear to be sensible, but there will presumably be a response to those principles and thoughts about how one involves the 17 different professional groups identified.

Mr. Malone: That is right. The principles are not set in concrete. As I said in Committee, and I repeat it tonight, we are talking about draft guidelines. However, the general thrust of the guidelines is clear. While there may be some modification around them, they are very important principles to which we will adhere. There is no suggestion that, as a result of consultation, we will suddenly say, "All these principles should simply be scrapped and we will set this out on a half-page of A4." That is not the Government's intention.

I was keen to come to the House on Report to honour the commitment that, whatever guidelines are agreed after consultation, they will be give statutory force in the sense of the general obligation to take professional advice. It was right to do that at this stage.

The hon. Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) said that the amendment should be extended to take account of user groups. I said in an intervention that the interests of user groups are partly catered for by CHCs which do extremely important work. I again confirm to the House, as I explained in Committee, that that work will continue under the new arrangements.

However, that is not all that happens when we take account of the views of consumers and carers. The hon. Member for Stockport specifically and rightly referred to that point. I remind her that the national users and carers monitoring group advises the Department, particularly with regard to the implementation of community care. The Department listens to that very important group, and the interests in that area to which the hon. Lady specifically referred are brought directly to the Department's attention.

Ms Coffey: I understand that, but surely the Minister is aware that the problem is that there are no national criteria for the delivery of community care locally. There is an enormous variation in terms of criteria in respect of who is going to be accepted for care by a health authority and who is going to be paid for by a social services department. Although a national monitoring group is welcome, it does not address the problem of the local issue and the particular local criteria.

Mr. Malone: As the hon Lady might anticipate, the purpose of informing nationally is not so that that can be done, everyone goes home and nothing happens. What happens on the ground is influenced in the new structure set out in the Bill. That will involve the regional officers who will ensure that best advice is given through health authorities and so on. There is a flow down from such national advice and, as I said in Committee, guidelines to be published in due course will clarify a number of matters to which the hon. Lady referred.

In conclusion, I am delighted to be able to bring the amendment to the House on Report. There has been much discussion outside the House about increasing the weight of professional involvement from a range of people whose advice perhaps was previously honoured more in the breach than in the observance. A combination of the statutory power with the guidelines which we will issue once the consultation has been concluded will put that right, and will assure all those who are concerned with the best possible delivery of health care and with the performance of health authorities that their voice will be heard, and heard effectively. I commend the amendment to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Schedule 1

AMENDMENTS

7.30 pm

Mr. Morgan: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 6, line 27, at end insert—

'(2) The Secretary of State shall be under a duty to give directions to such Health Authorities as may be established in Wales, requiring them to act so as to secure—

(a) the promotion of common standards in the purchasing of equipment for, and design of capital works by, those authorities,

(b) the publication from time to time of such information, including annual performance targets and details of defective or deficient work by contractors, as is necessary to enable progress towards the achievement of such common standards to be evaluated, and

(c) the organisation of clinical and non-clinical services on an all-Wales basis where that represents the most efficient and cost-effective means of providing such services.'.

I am pleased to be able to speak to an amendment that deals specifically with some of the problems pertaining to the application of the Bill in Wales. When one thinks of past major political figures from Wales such as Lloyd George and Aneurin Bevan and the contributions which they made to the development of the NHS, it is right that we should have a debate on Wales. No doubt *The Sunday Times* will run a story next week alleging that Lloyd George and Aneurin Bevan were Soviet agents with the code names of "Snow White" and "Taffy", or some such invention in which it specialises.

There are areas where we are somewhat dissatisfied with the application of the Bill to Wales. The Bill should probably have solved more problems than it does. It comes forward with a raft of measures which try to bridge the long-standing gap between the purchasing of secondary and primary health care. It tries to reflect in statute the equalisation of status between GPs and the primary health care which they represent on the one hand, and the consultants and hospitals on the other—the historic prima donna-shopkeeper split within the medical profession—by merging the health authorities and the family health service authorities. That is okay as far as it goes.

The Bill gives power to the Secretary of State to come back later and to merge those authorities geographically as well, and that is also okay as far as it goes. It would have been better to have some way of debating that now. The amendment attempts to tie down the duties of the Secretary of State further, because there is a plain failure in the way in which the Bill has been drafted, to cover a lot of things which would have been covered had this been proper, competent and timely legislation.

There should have been coverage of a unified complaints authority, and we try to deal with some aspects of that in the amendment. There should have been some reference to the future of the two special health authorities in Wales. Either merging them or doing whatever it is that the Secretary of State intends to do would at least mean

that we could debate the authorities. We have also covered that issue in the amendment in the best way we can to ensure that there is some form of debate on the issue.

Finally, we need to clarify the role of the newly merged health authorities in relation to GP fundholders and other providers, hospital providers and the Welsh Office. It is an eternal triangle between the Department allocating the budget, the GP fundholders and health authorities as purchasers and finally the provider units such as trusts or directly managed hospital and community health care units. Those involved in that eternal triangle—in which the Secretary of State is the hypotenuse—must work out their relationship in an entirely new ball game.

We have attempted to clarify that matter by giving the Secretary of State a set of duties. The Bill gives the Secretary of State all of the fun, and none of the duties. The fun is that he can decide without much debate after the Bill has reached the statute book how many health authorities there will be in Wales and what their function should be. Of course, he can announce the annual allocation of the budget, but he will not have any duties. We have injected duties into the amendment, so that the Secretary of State can impose duties on the purchasers and providers in the new health care system.

The Bill, as has been often emphasised by Ministers, is a part of the final piece in the jigsaw of the health care reforms of 1990 and the establishment of trusts and GP fundholders. The effect of all that has been to break up the NHS in Wales into some 200 small businesses, which can buy their own equipment and services and manage their cash flow and capital expenditure, and which are able to save money by more astute purchasing. We have to decide—as taxpayers—what leeway those units will have to deal with that money.

The Secretary of State must decide how much leeway he wants those 200 small businesses to have in how they spend their money, particularly when they can squeeze some cost savings out of the providers of health care and not spend all of the money that they been given through their capping formula. It is a difficult area for hon. Members. We are responsible to the taxpayers for the way in which the money has been raised, but we must assure taxpayers back in our constituencies that we are sure what has happened to their money.

The breaking up of the NHS in Wales has led to the creation of 200 small businesses. If we apply that across Britain, we would be talking about several thousand small businesses. We cannot be sure what is happening to all of the money, and that is why we are trying to establish a set of duties for the Secretary of State to try to co-ordinate a system after the Government have broken the NHS into pieces.

I shall give a simple example of the duties which we want to establish. The Welsh Office has produced documents relating to the general practitioner fundholders steering committee—there is an oxymoron if ever I heard one. The whole purpose of fundholding is to break up the system and allow GPs to do their best to buy health care with their own money; but, as soon as they set up as fundholders, they almost immediately form a steering committee to bring them back together again and to tell them what they ought to be doing.

From the documents it is obvious that, in the coming financial year, GP fundholders are expected to make savings of some £10 million, and that will be free money for them. If we gross that up for the whole of Great Britain, we are talking about £200 million of free money for GP fundholders to spend in ways which we cannot account for. That is why fundholders buying equipment should do so under a direction from the Secretary of State.

If GP fundholders next year—when they will only be responsible for some 40 per cent. of the patients in Wales—have £10 million to spare, they will have made what is known as efficiency savings, although I do not think the word "efficiency" is used. That is free money, available to GPs to spend as they wish on capital equipment. They can extend their surgeries or buy additional physiotherapy or chiropody equipment. We have no way of registering the equipment, or of telling them that some forms of capital expenditure may benefit their pensions. When a GP retires at 65 or 70 and sells out his share of a practice, his pension may be enhanced by taxpayers' money.

We need control over the process by which money which we have approved as taxpayers becomes eligible for savings simply by prescribing cheaper drugs or by forcing a harder bargain out of providers. We all want them to try to do that, but not necessarily in such a way that benefits their pension when they, as GPs and self-employed contractors to the health service, retire and sell out to a younger partner. If the practice has been extended three or four times, it will be worth a lot more when the GP sells up at 65 than it would have been if the taxpayer had not enabled him to have the ability to spend on capital equipment.

The fact that the matter has perplexed the Government is shown in the general practitioners steering group documents. The matter is obviously causing the Government considerable problems in terms of the accountability of GP fundholders for the money that they draw out of the system by extracting "savings". Strangely, non-fundholders make the same savings but do not have the right to spend the money as they want on improved services. That money still belongs to the family health services authorities and is part of the traditional allocation from taxpayers' money. If it is not spent, it returns to the Treasury; if it is spent, the same amount plus an allowance for inflation is allocated the following year.

The difference in treatment of fundholders and non-fundholders is not logical as there is no evidence that GP fundholders gain more in efficiency than GP non-fundholders. But they are given the benefit of spending taxpayers' money as though it were their own. I admit that they must spend it on patient care but it can be spent in a way that makes a considerable capital gain throughout a GP's career.

Given that, next year, "free money" will amount to £10 million in Wales and £200 million in Great Britain, we must know what the Minister has to say about it, particularly in the light of all the questions that have been asked in the general practitioners steering group, which was set up by the Welsh Office to try to restore order to the chaos that it created. It is totally bewildering that the Government never foresaw that problem when they proudly set up the GP fundholders scheme in 1990 and announced the creation of those wild cards, which would float freely and be able to negotiate their own bargains.

The amendment also seeks to provide that, as well as enabling powers that determine how many authorities we need, health authorities should have annual performance targets for themselves and suppliers of equipment, buildings or whatever. That links with the point about the

[Mr. Morgan]

need for health professionals to be involved, through local medical committees, in advising on the purchase of X-ray equipment, sterilisers and various aspects of the health services' purchasing functions. There should be a professional input, and we hope that annual performance targets will help.

In that process, a function exists for at least one all-Wales special health authority. We have tried to frame the amendment to fit in with the enabling pattern of the Bill. Sub-section (c) implies that, ultimately, the Secretary of State has discretion in that matter. It would be nice to have the whole Bill before us so that we could see the detail of all the practical implications. The enabling style of legislation that is becoming increasingly common makes debate at this stage far more difficult than in the past.

The amendment seeks to oblige the Secretary of State to set out clearly for those in the health service what the performance of an all-Wales health authority should be. There are two such authorities at the moment, but we do not say whether there should be one or two. We say that, where the benefit of having an all-Wales health authority is evident, the Secretary of State should not be held back by a dogmatic aversion to an all-Wales health authority such as we have now. At present, dogma seems to drive the exercise.

At the last Welsh Grand Committee but one in June last year, the Secretary of State told the Committee that he did not like the structure of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, which has clinical and non-clinical aspects. At that time, 1,000 people worked in the non-clinical part at the new headquarters building at Cardiff bay. The Secretary of State said that he would market test the non-clinical part of that outfit.

Market testing is Government policy, and the Government do not require the House's authority to carry it out. But having announced that he would market-test the authority, the Secretary of State engaged not in market testing but in his own version of market testing—a game of "heads I win, tails you lose". The aspects of the authority which he wants offered up to the private sector are not allowed to compete against the private sector. People in those jobs have been told that it is not market testing in the usual sense. It is a new phoney version of market testing in which they are not allowed to make an in-house bid.

The staff are extremely upset about that, because they were led to believe that the authority would be market-tested. A subsequent ministerial instruction appears to have been given to the Welsh Health Common Services Authority that there can be no in-house bids. That has not happened with the authority of this House. We have not come across that framework or any legislative backing for a "market testing exercise"—those are not my words but the words of the Secretary of State in the Welsh Grand Committee last year when that policy was announced—but it has subsequently been introduced by the actions of the Secretary of State, who says that his version of market testing involves no in-house bids.

7.45 pm

The staff are wondering what they should do. Should they simply resign and just give up? They have suggested that, if they cannot engage in a classic in-house bid, as would normally be the case in market testing, they could try to privatise themselves so that they could bid for their jobs against outside contractors. But they have been told that they can have no assistance for doing that.

Normally, the civil service and public agencies are allowed to employ accountants and legal advisers, but in this case they are being denied assistance and have been told that it will be strictly private contractors bidding for their jobs. That could result in no more than 100 people working at the Welsh Health Common Services Authority in 18 months' time. Indeed, I am told that that is the Government's estimate.

Another oddity that I should draw to the attention of the House, as it is relevant to subsection (c), is that among the people who have inquired about bidding for a large part of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority is W.S. Atkins and Partners, a company that is on a cautionary list published by the Department. The Welsh Office has told the authority that, except in exception circumstances for small jobs, it cannot use the company for hospital design work because it is responsible for the two major hospital design disasters of the modern Welsh health service, in Gwynedd and, before that, at the University Hospital of Wales, and it was required to make out-of-court settlements to the Welsh Health Common Services Authority with respect to those design disasters. Although it is on a cautionary list, sent on the Department's instructions to the authority, it is allowed to make an inquiry into buying the whole service and could take over hospital design services. That is the height of absurdity.

As we said earlier, we need a clear list of the minimum standards required within the health service. Contractors are used by health authorities throughout Wales, and they must abide by a minimum standard set by the Department. Nowhere is the need for standards more clearly illustrated than by the appalling case of the stillborn baby who was transported from Wrexham Maelor hospital to the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff for pathological examination. It took sixteen and a half hours to travel by private courier from Wrexham to Cardiff. The firm did not say how long it would take to reach Cardiff or whether it would go direct, and the package containing the stillborn baby appeared to have been left outside in the rain. That is why the package partly broke open when it arrived in Cardiff.

How can it take 16 and a half hours for a package of that sensitivity to travel a journey that most of us know takes only four hours these days? That courier firm should not be on any private contractor list for any health trust, hospital or health authority anywhere in Wales. We need common standards and we need a clear complaints and public inquiry procedure to ensure that those matters are brought out into the open and not squashed.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): My hon. Friend referred to the incident concerning the stillborn baby in Wrexham. The health authority produced a good report, in which it admitted that it was at fault, but of course it did not explain the length of time that it took for the baby to reach Cardiff, how it went and the instructions that were given to the private courier firm. However, the health authority has said that it will not use private courier firms in future, which is a good thing.

I asked the Welsh Office whether it would issue guidelines and at the time it said that it would not. Will the Minister reconsider that? If there is a case for issuing guidelines to hospitals in Wales, that surely must be it, and it is also a recommendation for amendment No. 5.

Mr. Morgan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) for using that argument, as the hospital is in his constituency and he has drawn attention to the need to set minimum guidelines. When one has an awful story of that type—

Mr. Richards: I wish to clear up that matter, as it obviously was a ghastly incident, which I am sure everyone in the House regrets. The trust has prepared a report about that unfortunate incident. That report is with my Department and we are examining it carefully. If anything can or should be done or needs to be done, obviously we will do it. I do not think that we want to go much further on that point.

Mr. Morgan: Obviously, something must be done; but it is not adequate for the Minister to say that he is considering it in the Department to discover whether anything needs to be done. Obviously something must be done; it is merely a matter of trying to decide exactly what it is.

From the point of view of amendment No. 5, it is obvious that it is now up to the Welsh Office to set minimum standards and not simply to leave the setting of standards to each hospital. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham said, the Wrexham Maelor trust itself prepared a report. It was an internal report, but it has been placed in the Library of the House and we have been able to read it. It is evident that the report tends to skip the critical facts—the exact way in which the package got rained on and the exact way in which a package of that sensitivity could possibly be transported to Cardiff in such a way that it took sixteen and a half hours to do a four-hour journey.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda):I accept that the issue is extremely important, but I caution my hon. Friend not to labour the Welsh Office with tackling issues that would perhaps best be tackled at trust level. As long as the trusts exist, I should have thought that we should say to them, "Carry out your job properly."

I would hate to think that in future the Welsh Office, which has great difficulties in coping with its job at present, a fact of which we are manifestly aware, will start laying down standards for everything. That is one of the big problems that we should consider as regards the distribution of effort throughout Wales and the level at which it is carried out.

Mr. Morgan: That is the most backhanded compliment to the Welsh Office that I have heard in my time.

We have mentioned the question of the way that one provides a form of health service in Wales in which we try to give people incentives to improve their efficiency but not necessarily resulting in those people doing much better out of it financially than before. The Government have converted people into quasi small businesses in a quasi-market. We are not happy with that.

I think that some sort of warning system is being given to me, but I am not quite sure how it has been worked out. A new form of mathematics is being used in the timing mechanism here.

The contrast could not be wider than on the issue of the blood transfusion service in Wales—an all-Wales service, which is run by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority. Uncertainty remains as to what will happen to it. The Secretary of State has said that, for the time being, it will remain under the care of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, but when we are engaged in the process of primary legislation of that type, we do not want references to what the Secretary of State will do for the time being; we want to know what the Secretary of State will do.

The donor donates free of charge to the blood transfusion service. The costs that arise are simply the on-costs of the blood transfusion service itself, which governs what happens when the blood is passed on and processed or otherwise for use in operations. However, it is a free service. That is in total contrast with the increasing business and quasi market climate that the Government have created—a broken-up health service with everyone acting as their own business managers in a way that contrasts starkly with the ideas that Lloyd George and Aneurin Bevan originally had when they made a great contribution to the social system of the country by setting up the national health service.

That is why people in Wales feel especially strongly that the health service should remain a unified national health service, and that is why we have tabled the amendment. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Richards: First, I should like to reply to one or two of the arguments of the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan). The Bill does not deal with special health authorities, as those are established by order and are not affected by the measure that we are discussing.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Richards: If I must.

Mr. Rowlands: As we are in Committee, would it not be a better idea for the Minister to listen to the debate first and listen to an expansion of the case by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) before trying to reply to it?

Mr. Richards: No; we are on Report. If I feel that I need to speak after the hon. Member for Cardiff, West makes a unique contribution to the Bill, I shall decide to do so at that time if it is appropriate.

Fresh powers are not needed to deal with the special health authorities, the Welsh Health Common Services Authority or the Health Promotion Authority for Wales. Indeed, I am fascinated that the hon. Member for Cardiff, West, who has a distaste for quangos, should wish to create what would, in effect, be a super health quango for Wales. It is not in keeping with his general distaste for health authorities.

Mr. Morgan: Can the Minister confirm that it would result in the saving of one quango, with all the board expenses that that involves?

Mr. Richards: It would not at all result in the saving of one quango. It would create a quango at least three times as large as the quango that we have already.

The proposals on the relationship between health authorities and GP fundholders will be worked up in the next few months in consultations among those involved.

[Mr. Richards]

That work will consider accountability issues in detail, and the general practitioners steering group, to which the hon. Member for Cardiff, West referred, is part of that process.

The amendment is unnecessary to achieve the efficient and effective delivery of services. In the case of capital works, it would, in any event, not secure what the hon. Member for Cardiff, West seeks, as it does not acknowledge that the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, which is a special health authority, and NHS trusts have the key roles in contracts on capital works. In the case of capital works, it would add to the activities of health authorities and create a further tier of responsibilities, with additional bureaucratic costs cutting across the functions of NHS trusts. The design and implementation of capital works are subject to the law governing contracts between the NHS organisation concerned and the firm carrying out the work.

Standards for the design of health buildings are published by NHS Estates and the Welsh Office and are common to England and Wales. Those include health building notes, health technical memoranda and health facility notes, which are used by designers, whether in the public or the private sector.

Mr. Rogers: With the health trusts themselves being responsible for the placing of contracts for capital works, is the Minister now saying that they are bound to stick to the designs and specifications as laid down in the standards that he has just said are appropriate for Wales and England?

Mr. Richards: The hon. Gentleman clearly did not listen to my first sentence. Standards are published by NHS Estates and the Welsh Office and are common to England and Wales. They include health building notes, health technical memoranda and health facility notes.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Minister give way?

8 pm

Mr. Richards: No, I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman; I think that I have made that point perfectly clear.

The documents are all available through Her Majesty's Stationery Office. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to study them, he is welcome to do so. Each development is project managed carefully. An evaluation is required for all capital projects which should identify important lessons in the planning, design, cost control and procurement of schemes, as well as in the use of the facilities.

The private sector undertook 30 per cent. of the contracts placed for design over the past five years. The vast majority comply with all conditions and, where performance of contractors is considered unsatisfactory, any failures are pursued in line with the contract in the first instance; that would include action to remedy defective or deficient work by contractors.

The Welsh Office is made aware of the conclusions of evaluations of all projects. That will continue whatever the outcome of the review of the EstateCare Group within the Welsh Health Common Services Authority. What the amendment seeks to achieve is already undertaken and, therefore, it is unnecessary.

Mr. Morgan: I think that the Minister has covered only hospital works. The departmental GP fundholders steering group refers in its document to the savings that GP fundholders can make. In paragraph 16, it says:

"Savings must be used for the benefit of the patients of the practice. This statutory requirement allows the purchase of equipment and improvement of practice premises."

The question of what happens to the "free money" that GP fundholders have—it was £4.7 million in the last financial year, it is about £7 million this year and it will be about £10 million next year, and it can be spent on premises—applies also but, unfortunately, it is not covered by what the Minister has said.

Mr. Richards: I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman should speak in that way about savings that can be, and are, made by GP fundholders. He has said that any savings made—considerable savings can be made—should be used for the benefit of patients. Surely the hon. Gentleman welcomes any development whereby more resources are made available to patients. I know how the hon. Gentleman will reply; but before he says that premises should or should not be included, I remind him that even the development of premises can be beneficial to patients—particularly if it means that consultants can visit GP fundholding practices to consult patients.

Mr. Morgan: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. The amendment covers the way in which general practitioners extend their practices with the "free money". Unfortunately, there is nothing to oblige them to use the "free money". The departmental GP fundholders steering group document says:

"Holding large cash balances is seen by some as an unproductive use of resources".

They are the words of the Welsh Office. The document continues:

"Is this the case and, if so, is there a risk that if this continues it will lead to criticism because it denies patients treatment?"

They are not my words; they are the words of the GP fundholders steering group.

Mr. Richards: With respect to the hon. Gentleman—I do not intend to pursue the point any further with him—I believe that that was a rhetorical question within the steering group document; it was not a statement.

The Welsh Office is currently consulting on proposals for the future management of three clinical services—the blood transfusion service, the artificial limb and appliance service and Breast Test Wales—currently managed by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority. The consultation document makes it clear that the proposals are aimed at ensuring that the services develop in response to patients' needs, and that improvements in efficiency are reinvested in patient care.

They also indicate that long-term programmes such as Breast Test Wales's contribution to the UK evaluation programme of screening as a means of treating cancer will be fully protected and that Wales will continue to co-operate with sister organisations elsewhere in the UK, for example, the blood transfusion service with the National Blood Authority. Assurances have been given about the continuing all-Wales requirements of the artificial limb and appliance service.

No final decisions have been taken on the proposals or the detailed issues which are out for consultation. We will take final decisions in the light of comments received. A reasonable period has been allowed for consultation and comments have been invited by 23 February. I reject the suggestion from some quarters that, because it took some months to work up proposals, a similar amount of time must be spent on consultation.

I do not wish to anticipate decisions on the three clinical services delivered by the common services authority. Clearly there is merit in placing them in NHS organisations with relevant clinical expertise, although we do not propose any change in the current arrangement for the blood transfusion service for the time being. As the House is aware, their location within the common services authority is for management purposes only.

Finally, it might be helpful if I set out the approach to the provision of clinical and non-clinical services generally. In the case of clinical services, decisions will be taken with a view to securing the most efficient and cost-effective results. Health authorities will commission services on that basis, and where it is appropriate for more than one to purchase together for a particular service, they will do so. With only five authorities in place from April 1996, subject to the passing of the Bill it will be possible for them to establish an all-Wales consortia to do so if that is appropriate.

I am glad to say that progress is being made on the work which has been under way within the common services authority to bring about market testing and the possible privatisation of non-clinical services. I wish to bring matters to a conclusion, and I am grateful for the support of the hon. Member for Cardiff, West, so that NHS trusts have the opportunity to purchase support services—information technology, supplies, estate design and maintenance—in the most cost-effective manner.

The establishment of NHS trusts means that decisions should be taken at the hospital level. Where it can be shown that there is an essential need to deliver services on an all-Wales basis, one option would be for authorities and trusts to create consortia. The common services authority accumulated a number of services before trusts were established and, therefore, there is no criticism intended of the staff concerned. We are now placing responsibility on trusts to obtain their services in a cost-effective manner.

Options for handling IT, supplies, estates design and maintenance will be ready for consideration in the next two months or so and, following that, tenders will be invited, as appropriate, for elements of activity. Until those exercises are completed, I cannot speculate on the outcome. However, I can assure the House that the whole exercise will be completed in the next financial year. The common services authority has already told its staff that my right hon. Friend wishes to have a small organisation in place by April 1997.

The hon. Gentleman was quite wrong when he said that my Department had sent instructions to the common services authority to say that in-house bids would not be entertained. That is quite untrue: in-house bids will be allowed. I must stress that the April 1997 date has been set to allow for all detailed implementation arrangements to be carried through.

Mr. Morgan: Will the Minister clarify what kind of in-house bid he means? I illustrated two kinds in my remarks. Is he referring to the conventional kind of market-testing approach, whereby an in-house bid from within the civil service or a public agency is allowed; or does he mean a situation where the in-house team is allowed to buy itself out in a management-employee buy-out? If that is so, why has it not been given the legal and accountancy assistance which is normal in those circumstances to permit it to make a viable in-house bid outside involving the same people?

Mr. Richards: I was responding to the hon. Gentleman's comments because he asserted that the people already working within the common services authority would be excluded from making any form of bid. Without prescribing one form or another, they will not be excluded in the way that the hon. Gentleman implied.

There may be a need to consider with health authorities and NHS trusts how consortia can be established to run some of the services now located within the common services authority, and I would not wish at this stage to give an indication of the ultimate size of that organisation.

I share many of the points made by the hon. Gentleman. In particular, I was delighted that at the start of his remarks he welcomed the principle of the Bill of merging the district health authorities and the family health services authorities in Wales. There is agreement between us that delivering services in an efficient and cost-effective way is of paramount importance. I have outlined how we intend to achieve that for the reasons I stated. It is not necessary, however, to include such provision in the Bill, and I urge the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Rogers: I shall be brief. The Minister ended his speech on a note of critical importance to any part of the reorganisation that is to take place, with his reference to efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The Opposition accept that that is necessary, but quality standards and clinical effectiveness are also necessary in a national health service. A drive simply for efficiency and cost-effectiveness by a group of accountants, politicians or bureaucrats is losing sight of what the national health service is all about. Quality standards and clinical effectiveness are equally important. I am glad to see that the Secretary of State has arrived to hear my pearls of wisdom this evening. *[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) says, she came back especially to listen to me.

I have a little problem with the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West, in that I am always concerned about over-centralisation. As I said earlier, the Welsh Office has great difficulty in coping with its functions and on occasions it appears to be breaking down. I hesitate to transfer willy-nilly all sorts of functions to the Welsh Office.

If there is to be a centrally imposed direction on the trusts, whether it be at health authority level or from the Welsh Office, it ought to be consistent, coherent and agreed generally with those who have to provide the services to the patients. The measure is not about good order in the Welsh Office, in health authorities or in the management of trusts, but about delivering services to patients.

Lastly, in addition to being consistent, coherent and generally agreed, decisions must be made swiftly. One of the problems that practitioners face now, particularly in

[Mr. Rogers]

relation to standards being set across the board, is that the time taken to set those standards and implement them is quite inordinate.

There is no doubt at all that all-Wales services are appropriate—for instance, in genetics and national screening programmes. Breast Test Wales is a classic example of where it is necessary to carry out comparative epidemiological examinations of the facilities that are provided. Of course we have a special point—as I am sure the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) is aware—in carrying out certain clinical facilities, but north Wales is often far better served from Mersey, the north-west and the west midlands.

I would hate us to continue talking about all-Wales provision of services on a nationalistic basis when services would be better provided from across the border in a much more efficient and coherent way. Perhaps the hon. Member for Ynys Môn has a different perspective on the delivery of national services as such, but I am quite sure that the patients in north Wales, who are more crucial than any artificial boundaries, would appreciate the maintenance of the high-quality service often given by hospitals in Liverpool and Manchester to north-east Wales.

My hon. Friend was right to have tabled the amendment because there is enormous concern among health service providers in Wales about the size of the common services authority. I was pleased to hear the Minister saying that he was seeking to make sophisticated or to streamline the functions of that organisation. We have witnessed central management costs spiralling upwards, while at the same time there has been much pressure on reducing management costs in the NHS in Wales.

8.15 pm

I have been given to understand that there has been little consultation with NHS Wales on the future of the common services authority, but I take hope from what the Minister has said. If he carries out what he has promised, I am sure that some of the present fears will be overcome.

I said a little earlier that the problem of long time scales—for instance, in respect of the design of capital works by the CSA—could be resolved if there were proper dispersion of work to the appropriate level. There is evidence that the private sector could reduce those time scales without necessarily reducing the quality or the standard of the work, but I am concerned that certain standards are set.

I tried to intervene during the Minister's speech when he spoke about the standards that are evidently relevant for England and Wales in respect of designs and specifications. If he made those standards mandatory on trusts, as they will be drawing up the designs and contracting out capital works, that is the best level at which to implement them; on the other hand, if a trust feels that it can aim for a lower standard and lower specifications simply to save money, we shall again reduce the service to patients.

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): I can think of no better example of his point than the siting of the Prince Phillip hospital in Llanelli, which was built on the site of two former coal shafts. As a consequence, it cost the trust and/or the Welsh Office some £800,000 to ensure that the site was safe before the hospital could be built.

Mr. Rogers: As an engineer and geologist by profession, when I had a proper job, I fully appreciate the problems that the designer might have had. I am still waiting for the Dungeness power station to fall down.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Unless standards are given and specifications followed, once they are diluted or are brought down to the level of health trusts, the in-house design capability will be inadequate to ensure that problems such as the incident that my hon. Friend has outlined do not take place.

Mr. Wardell: Does my hon. Friend agree that, because the Government have taken some rather stupid decisions—such as the transfer of all the coal records from south Wales to Bretby—when hospital trusts or any other trusts wish to establish new buildings, the cost of finding those records and seeing what they say adds enormously to the costs and poses difficulties, not only to the health service in Wales but, indeed, to everyone else?

Mr. Rogers: I entirely agree. That is why I hesitate to support the offloading of functions to the Welsh Office. The present Minister, of course, is faultless; but before he entered his post, some very dubious decisions were made.

We may talk of cost, efficiency, effectiveness, structures and the specification of contracts, but ultimately those who use the national health service will be affected by our decisions. We have a duty to deliver the best possible service. If that can be done better at Welsh Office level, fine, but it would be better still for it to be done at trust level. I have serious doubts about the advisability of establishing too many decision makers: one may end up simply passing the buck to the others.

I shall support the amendment, but I consider it deficient in some respects. It refers, for instance, to

"a duty to give directions to such Health Authorities as may be established".

Will those health authorities have common standards, or will they decide individually on different standards, thus creating a patchwork quilt of provision in Wales?

Mr. Morgan: Both.

Mr. Rogers: If that is so, and order will be maintained, I shall be quite happy; but if direction is to be centrally imposed, it must be consistent, coherent and generally agreed, and decisions must be made swiftly.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I am pleased to be able to speak in a debate that gives us a rare opportunity to consider some aspects of the health service in Wales. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) for drawing our attention to a number of important issues.

I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) for giving me an opportunity to respond to some of the points that he made. He seemed to suggest that I would not welcome cross-border co-operation; it may come as a nice surprise to him that I have always welcomed the fact that many of my constituents—and, indeed, members of my family—have benefited from the specialty services that exist in Merseyside—at the Clatterbridge centre, the Christie hospital and elsewhere. Long may that continue.

The hon. Gentleman may also be interested to learn that my wife received an excellent training at the royal infirmary in Liverpool. I have no problem with the idea of cross-border movements, in terms of either specialties or staff. Let me go a little further than the hon. Member for Rhondda, and suggest that we need to adopt a strategic approach to both clinical and non-clinical health matters in Wales.

The decision of the Welsh Office to market-test the Welsh Health Common Services Authority has caused great problems in Gwynedd. In preparation for the market-testing exercise, the authority decided to provide the Welsh Office with some examples of ways in which it could cut costs. It suggested, for instance, that the stores provision at Ysbyty Gwynedd should be closed, and that medical and other supplies should be provided from a store in Denbigh in the Vale of Clwyd. I have no problems with that; I know the area well, having lived there for many years, and my wife's family originated there.

Mr. Morgan: Before she went to Liverpool.

Mr. Jones: And since she went to Liverpool. I hope that the hon. Gentleman realises that I support his amendment. If he wants me to attack it, however, he is going the right way about it—particularly if he says some nasty things about my better half.

If medical and other supplies are transferred from Ysbyty Gwynedd in Bangor to Denbigh, it will not be possible to provide the same standard of service or to do so more efficiently. When Ysbyty Gwynedd was built in 1970, the stores were built alongside it. That meant that the wards were built without sufficient capacity to take on-site medical supplies. If the move takes place, there will not be enough space in the wards at Ysbyty Gwynedd to maintain sufficient supplies from time to time. Supplies will have to be transferred from the Vale of Clwyd by road, which will mean increased road traffic and increased costs.

That is the sort of decision that the Welsh Health Common Services Authority has already made, in an attempt to demonstrate to the Welsh Office that it can save money. But what will be the cost to the people of Gwynedd, who need a health service that is properly resourced and has sufficient capacity within the county to deliver medical and other supplies?

During the summer months in particular, it may be difficult for supplies to be brought quickly from the Vale of Clwyd to Bangor and other Gwynedd hospitals at times of emergency. We disapprove of the kind of decisions that are now being made, but if the amendment were accepted we could deal with the position, because the Welsh Office would have to give the authority guidelines on how it should discharge its responsibilities.

It is, after all, the responsibility of Government to ensure that medical and other supplies are available to hospitals when they need them. What will happen under market testing? If a private firm says that it will provide the services that the common health services authority currently operates, what comeback will there be if it proves unable to deliver those services?

The Minister said that the Government were currently considering only market testing of non-clinical supplies, and I accept that; but this is a first step towards further developments. Despite what some hon. Members have said, I will support the amendment, and urge the Government to do the same. From time to time, strategic decisions will have to be made that can be taken only at an all-Wales level.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): The possibility of establishing fewer health authorities in Wales is one of the main aspects of the amendment. My constituency contains what is probably the smallest health authority currently operating in Wales—if not in England and Wales—and I am extremely concerned about the impact that the Bill may have not only on my constituency but on those of my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams), my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis).

This year's announcement of funds for the Pembrokeshire health authority was linked with the announcement relating to East Dyfed. In effect, a Dyfed health authority has already been created. But the indications are that Dyfed and Powys—the old, soon to be the former counties—will be united in a huge health authority, which would cover more than 50 per cent. of the service in Wales. Hon. Members who do not know Wales may find it interesting that it would be far quicker for me to travel from the extremity of my constituency to this place, than to travel from one extremity of the proposed health authority to the other side. It would probably take me twice as long to get from the far west of Dyfed to the far east of Powys than to travel to this place.

The objection to the Bill involves the lack of accountability inherent in it. In relation to local government in Wales and England, the Government are saying that small is beautiful and that local authorities should be getting closer to their electorate and to the people they represent. Unitary authorities will be in place in Wales from April 1996. It is remarkable that, in relation to the provision of health care, the Welsh Office may be saying the complete opposite: that big is beautiful, and that being further away from patients and people who need care is a far better system. That is extremely worrying.

8.30 pm

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House objected to the possibility of a reduction in the number of police authorities in Wales because of the lack of accountability, and because of the extremely effective performance of the smaller, in particular, rural police authorities. I would be worried if, because of the Bill, the Secretary of State for Wales could create extremely large health authorities.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: Does my hon. Friend agree that, as the Government are proposing to reduce the number of health authorities in Wales from 17 to five, it is vital to realise that some hospital trusts in Wales are relatively small, and that it would be helpful if some of them were amalgamated? Their delivery of services could then be improved, and the sort of duplication that occurs in some of them would not arise.

Mr. Ainger: I agree. I welcome the amalgamation of district health authorities with family health services authorities. I am concerned, however, that combining those authorities will create large organisations, which will in effect, because of the enormous areas involved, become extremely remote and difficult to organise. That

[Mr. Ainger]

is certainly the case with Dyfed-Powys, which I am concerned about. If the Secretary of State goes down the road of combining FHSAs with district health authorities, that will obviously cause administrative problems. Those two organisations have different roles.

Mr. Rogers: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right in some of what he is saying, but we should remember that we are seeking to amend the awful system that was created by a Tory Government in 1973. Before that, far more effective and closer delivery of health services took place. There were, for instance, hospital management committees, which were much more appropriate for some areas. The false structure set up by the Conservatives in 1973 has been so inefficient and so bad that it must be amended. It was amended once, and it is still being amended now. I still would not want large authorities to operate to the detriment of small units, with a personal delivery at hospital level.

Mr. Ainger: I agree. We must remember that the Bill is relevant only to health authorities—the purchasing authorities—and not to the running of hospitals. They must be sensitive to patient needs, because they are the ones that will be purchasing health care from the various trusts and from directly managed units. I do not want to be accused of making an awful pun, but they must obviously have their fingers on the pulse of what is required in their areas.

It is important to remember that it is only a couple of years since reorganisation. In Pembrokeshire, we saw the disastrous effects of that reorganisation, which followed the establishment of the Pembrokeshire NHS trust and of the purchaser-provider split.

In September 1993, Pembrokeshire NHS trust and Pembrokeshire health authority, prompted behind the scenes by the Welsh Office, called in independent advisers to sort out the problem where they could not agree a contract between themselves. They had to approach the chief executive of Clwyd health authority, Mr. Brian Jones, and the finance director of the Wrexham Maelor hospital trust, Mr. David Galley, to consider what had happened since the establishment of the trust and, effectively, the emasculation of the then Pembrokeshire health authority.

It was an interesting report. Those two men spent three months in Pembrokeshire considering in great detail what had happened immediately before and immediately after the establishment of the trust. Their report makes interesting reading. It is certainly worth quoting. This is what those two experts in health care had to say about that reorganisation:

"the residents of Pembrokeshire did not receive any increase in the level of services provided, although increased levels of expenditure were taking place."

Pembrokeshire health authority lost virtually all its members of staff, bar two, to the new trust, because of the way in which purchasing staff had been transferred to the trust from the authority.

The report continues:

"a minimum of £750,000 has been diverted from purchasing health care for the Pembrokeshire population into additional purchasing management costs."

The money went into administration, not health care.

We should not forget that the report was written by people who had spent virtually all of their working lives in the NHS and who were senior individuals. They went:

"there appears to have been a significant increase in the cost of employing a number of senior managers within the trust during its first year of operation."

Basically, that related to one particular individual, the then chief executive of Pembrokeshire NHS trust. Before the establishment of the trust, he had been general manager of the Pembrokeshire health authority, where he had received a salary of approximately £50,000. At the end of the first year of the operation of the trust, that individual, as chief executive of the trust, received a salary of £73,000—an increase of £23,000 in 12 months. By the end of the second year of the operation of the trust, he was receiving not £73,000, but £87,000. That is why we need to be careful, to establish a properly accountable system of health delivery, and to be sure that we do not make a mess of further reorganisations.

That individual has retired from the Pembrokeshire NHS trust under interesting circumstances. I am told that the chairman of the NHS trust was informed by the chief executive in December 1993 that he had completed virtually 30 years in the NHS, and that he was looking for pastures new. He joined the NHS from school and, even after completing 30 years of service, he was only 47.

Mr. Rogers: My hon. Friend is being extremely unkind. He does not realise—I am sure that the Minister will advise him later—that executives of health trusts are in enormous demand within industry and management outside the health service, as well as in America and Europe. They need to have their salaries doubled year after year so that they can be retained in the health service. I am sure that the Minister will put my hon. Friend right.

Mr. Ainger: I am not being unkind. I understand that the individual is now running an antique shop. His successor, who in my opinion had greater experience of running large organisations at senior level, was employed on a new contract. His total emolument is not £87,000, but £64,000. That is a significant saving. In the meetings that I have had with Mr. Stuart Fletcher, the new chief executive of the Pembrokeshire NHS trust, I have been extremely impressed with the quality of his performance and experience.

It is interesting that Mr. Brian Davis told his chairman in December 1993 that he would like to leave the NHS trust to go to pastures new.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. The hon. Gentleman is going into considerable detail. I hope that he can relate his comments more closely to the amendment under discussion. If not, it seems more like a general history.

Mr. Ainger: The essence is the lack of accountability within the current organisation in Wales. I am trying to enforce the point that we need an accountable system of administration in Wales in order to stop the abuse—I use that term advisedly—that has happened in the past.

We must never allow individual managers to assume certain powers, often because of the weakness and ineffectiveness of other members of the board who improperly control the way in which salaries escalate, allegedly under performance-related pay. It is worth referring to that, because the Jones Galley report said that, while that individual's salary was increasing in the two

years that he was chief executive, the performance was going down, and the £750,000 was spent on administration, not on health care.

It is vital that, if and when the new reorganisation takes place, it must maintain the true connection with our local communities, particularly in rural Wales. Large organisations find that difficult to do. It is important to ensure that, when we appoint new people to the boards, they know that they have a responsibility to ensure that the reorganisation is done smoothly, effectively and efficiently, and to ensure that we do not see a massive escalation in salaries.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is hoped that the Government will advertise all the posts that will become available on the new health authorities, including the role of chief executive, so that we can have open competition? Does he agree that no job that currently exists should be protected, but that they should all be open to anyone, whether executive or non-executive, so that we have the best people running the health authorities? Perhaps early retirement packages could be looked at soon, so that those who are reaching the stage at which they need to think about retirement can be assisted in that direction.

Mr. Ainger: I could not agree more. To illustrate my hon. Friend's point, it is interesting that, when the post of chief executive of the NHS trust in Pembrokeshire was first advertised, it referred to requiring somebody with business acumen. It did not mention health care or patients. That advertisement failed to lead to an appointment. After my intervention to point out the omissions, the post was readvertised, and included references to health care and requiring somebody with experience in the NHS. The excellent Mr. Stuart Fletcher was then appointed.

8.45 pm

Mr. Richards: The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) made the best speech that I have ever heard him make. He spoilt it by supporting the amendment at the end. I agree with his first point—

Mr. Rogers: The Minister is being very unfair.

Mr. Morgan: My hon. Friend has a majority of only 64,000.

Mr. Rogers: I wish my hon. Friend would not take the words out of my mouth. I am in such a sensitive position with my parliamentary majority that any compliments from the Minister can only put me in jeopardy.

Mr. Richards: The hon. Member for Rhondda spoke about clinical effectiveness. The Government share his view, and attach a high priority to that. There are on-going trials. The Government also agree with the hon. Gentleman's point about centralisation. I am sure that he will agree that the health service reforms have devolved power and decision making to local people. His comments about the size of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority reflect the Government's view.

The hon. Gentleman referred to standards of design. The current standards and the need to maintain standards will remain, and a capacity will be needed at the centre, either within the Welsh Health Common Services Authority or within the Welsh Office, to monitor the projects. That will need a fairly small team, and the Welsh office will receive and consider all evaluations undertaken by trusts.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) gave one or two anecdotal examples of what I would call micro-level savings that might be made in Gwynedd. What we are doing with the Welsh Health Common Services Authority is on rather more of a macro-level. We are looking for greater efficiency and a better service. The hon. Gentleman made a serious point about the guarantee and continuity of supplies. It is for the customer—the trust or whoever—to ensure that continuity of supplies is maintained.

The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) raised the small versus large issue. The Bill is not the end of the road, but is very much the beginning. We envisage that, over time, the purchasing role will shift more and more to GP fundholders. Decisions will therefore be made much closer to the patient than he fears would be the case with rather larger health authorities than he would wish. With regard to his point about salaries and so on, the my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that management costs must and should be kept under control, and, indeed, they include the salaries of senior executives within the trusts.

Mr. Morgan: I rise briefly to explain why I shall seek leave to withdraw the amendment.

The Minister mentioned, perhaps unwisely, the fact that Opposition Members supported one of the principles behind the Bill, but I do not think that he made any attempt to understand our objections. The idea of crossing the boundary between primary and secondary health care, in purchasing and commissioning—the new word, as the Government have a taboo about using the word "planning"—is one that the Minister does not seem to understand. We agree with crossing that boundary. We agree with merging family health service authorities and district health authorities, but the Government have demerged at the same time as they have merged.

They are demerging GP fundholders, who represent an ever-increasing proportion. The figure is expected to be 40 per cent. in Wales—it may be higher in England, but it is certainly less in Scotland—from April. They are being demerged from the merger. That is the problem that the Minister has not understood and which causes us difficulties. Indeed, we know from the documents that we have from his Department that it is causing the Welsh Office considerable difficulties.

How does one, having broken up Humpty-Dumpty, put him back together, when one has one created all these new animals that make their own purchasing and commissioning decisions? People have described the difficulty as one of herding cats in a thunder storm, but it was not me who said that, of course. When these alleged savings are created—I do not think that the Minister has dealt with this problem—what do we do with them?

The savings are known as "do-it-yourself top slicing". If anybody under the age of 15 is listening, it is not something that I would advise them to do at home. The Minister top-slices sums to release into waiting list initiatives or whatever, but GPs are now able to do that themselves. They can reserve money—it looks as though the figure will be £10 million in Wales and probably £200

[Mr. Morgan]

million throughout Britain—to spend as they want, in the same way that Ministers have the right to top-slice for special ministerial initiatives.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) attempted to solve the fundamental problem of the health service: how does one have local initiative and national guidelines? I made the point earlier about the Wrexham Maelor to Cardiff stillborn baby scandal—perhaps the Minister will refer to it with respect to the Glan Clwyd baby theft issue. We all want a local inquiry to try to solve the problem and for the Minister to say, "What lessons have we learnt from the local inquiry? Do we need national guidelines?" Perhaps he should have been a bit clearer about what lessons could be learned at an all-Wales level from those individual incidents, which teach all of us a lesson. That is the way in which one bridges the gap between the need for decisions to be taken locally, but with the right to establish national guidelines for minimum standards when required.

Mr. Rogers: Surely the lessons are immediately apparent. When the Government issue instructions to health trusts to go outside to private contractors, they must impose particular standards. That is self-evident. We do not need a massive inquiry involving hundreds of thousands of pounds. Something should be done at a local level. It is all about controlling private contractors.

Mr. Morgan: I entirely appreciate that; otherwise those scandals occur, and our functions as politicians is to slam the stable door shut with as much panache as we can, finding a new locksmith and so on, while trying to persuade the public to forget that the horses have been stolen in the first place. We are concerned that the Government are not good at listening when, if they have to listen, it cuts across the dogma.

The Minister said that he was happy with the consultation on the artificial limb and appliance service in Wales and that he will preserve necessary all-Wales services, but he will have seen the scathing letter from the British Limbless Ex-Servicemen's Association about the break-up of that service. I hope that he will reconsider the matter.

I apologise to the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) for any misunderstandings between him and me, as we are undoubtedly on the same side of the issue tonight. I am sure that we will be able to agree on any remarks that I made but which he may have misheard.

I want to know whether we received a genuine concession from the Minister on in-house bids for the Welsh Health Common Services Authority. He told me that I was wrong and that in-house bids would be allowed. I have to tell him that at a face-to-face meeting with the chairman, the chief executive, two union officials—one lay, one full-time—and several senior officials, the chairman told me that he had been instructed by the Welsh Office not to allow any in-house bids. I cannot do better than that. That is the information that I was given.

Mr. Richards: Let me make it clear to the hon. Gentleman, so that there is no misunderstanding, that no instruction has gone from my Department to the Welsh Health Common Services Authority to exclude in-house bids.

Mr. Morgan: The authority seems to have developed the opposite impression. Perhaps I should try to clarify that, and perhaps the Minister will as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) made some extremely important points about the accountability of the health service, particularly of some of the rip-roaring practices that have occurred in the pay of chief executives, their perks and early retirement. In Pembroke, what is known as Bennett's folly occurred when one of my hon. Friend's predecessors, just before an election, formed a trust because the Government were determined to have a trust in place before the election.

When the chief executive took early sick leave—I understand that he had been driving a Porsche, which had been paid for by the health authority, and he developed backache, because Porsches tend to have that effect—it is believed locally that he wrote on the application the reason for his illness as "Munchausen's syndrome by Porsche". The lesson for everybody is not to go for flashy cars if one is in a senior position in the health service.

That was symptomatic of what was going wrong with Ministers exceeding their powers, or letting their vision of a new dogmatic health service overtake sensible planning of what the people of Wales wanted. It was also one of Bennett's follies to send the Welsh Health Common Services Authority to a new, expensive skyscraper office block, which has now become the target of the next Secretary of State's desire to eliminate bureaucrats in the health service. The Minister's predecessor has two black marks against him for the problems that he has created for people working in the health service.

The predecessor before that was the Secretary of State who, of course, had all the wonderful pleasures that the present Secretary of State wants by virtue of this Bill, to decide how many health authorities there should be. His predecessor but one, Lord Crickhowell, decided that he wanted a local health authority for Pembroke and set up an additional health authority but the present Secretary of State wants to rationalise health authorities.

It must be wonderful for Secretaries of State to be able to decide how many health authorities they can have, while the House does not have a great deal of opportunity to establish proper criteria to determine how many we need in Wales. If we are really to decide how many health authorities there should be in Wales, the job should possibly be left to a Welsh Assembly after the next election.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. Gentleman seeking leave to withdraw the amendment?

Mr. Morgan: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. I mentioned that earlier.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman was going to withdraw it, but did not do so.

Mr. Morgan: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Gunnell: I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 21, line 5, at end insert—

'5.—(1) No appointment shall be made under paragraph 1(a) or (b) above unless the Secretary of State has first procured and considered independent advice as to the suitability of the respective candidate.

(2) "Independent advice" in subparagraph (1) above means advice from a person or persons with relevant local knowledge or experience, with particular reference to the provision of health services, but who is, or who are, not—

(a) employed in any capacity by, or in any commercial or contractual relationship with, any Health Authority or NHS trust,

(b) employed by the Crown,

(c) the holder or holders of any public elected office, or

(d) affiliated to, or publicly identified with, any political party or cause.

(3) "Suitability" in subparagraph (1) above means personal qualifications or aptitude, irrespective of political affiliations, for discharging the functions of the post to which the appointment is to be made.'.

It was said earlier that we had been through some issues a number of times, and this is one such issue. We have discussed many times, and at length, the appointment of health authority members. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) thinks that we have spent an unduly long time on such matters, and I notice that, in support of his plea, the digital clocks have broken down. It is the first time that I have seen them out of action, and it means that we cannot check whether we are talking for too long. However, it is an important issue, and it is necessary to emphasise one or two points in the context of amendment No.4.

9 pm

The amendment seeks to change the procedure for the appointment of non-executive members and chairmen of health authorities and other health bodies. The Government have already accepted that their record in this respect has been very poor. They have made grossly biased political appointments and because they now feel some guilt in the past month the Secretary of State issued a paper on the appointment of chairmen and non-executive directors to NHS authorities and trusts.

Much of the procedure is contained in the statement but not in the Bill. The Bill gives an outline but not the detail of how the appointments are to be made. The amendment seeks to add that detail to the Bill and to ensure that the system of appointments is more independent than that which the Secretary of State, to judge from her guidance notes, is trying to introduce.

From a statistical point of view, appointments made since the NHS reforms have involved those with affiliations to the Conservative party. Analysis after analysis has made that bias clear. In fact, it is unusual for that bias to be denied, and only in the Standing Committee debating the Bill have I heard vigorous denials that there were political appointments. Even in Committee, evidence was produced to show that appointments were structured to favour Conservative party members. I stress that the barrier to changing the political bias in appointments is in the guidance notes produced by the Secretary of State.

Our experience in Yorkshire shows the political nature of such appointments and, although I raised this matter in Committee, I shall do so again. I was a political appointee, albeit a Labour political one, to Leeds health authority. It might be argued that I was appointed as a member of the council, but I was appointed as a Labour member of a Labour-controlled council. Leeds Health Care, the health authority that I joined, is, in many ways, a very good health authority. Four of its six members were clearly political appointees, if I count myself among them.

The chairman, who I believe to be a good and effective chairman, was the chairman of Yorkshire area Conservative group. One member was the ex-leader of the then Conservative-controlled city council and another was a noted Conservative business man who had previously been the chairman of one of the two Leeds health authorities when they were divided. That makes three political appointments out of four, and there were two appointments that I regarded as neutral. A university appointee became vice-chair of Leeds Health Care and a second university appointee was director of the Nuffield centre for health service studies. That meant that there were two people who may have been generally politically neutral.

The health authority made its decisions on the basis of what it considered to be best for health care in the city as a whole. I do not think that decisions were made on a political basis. The appointments were political, but the decisions were, on the whole, sensible. It was intended to reach consensus on the way in which Leeds Health Care worked.

There are still some malfunctions in the way in which our authorities work, as shown by the case concerning long-term care to which I have already referred. The health commissioner found Leeds health authority at fault, yet the case was never reported to health authority members. Although the authority was strongly criticised by the health commissioner, none of the non-executive members of Leeds Health Care—those who were privy only to what went on in board meetings—were aware of the case. I do not think that the chair of the authority was aware of it, either. With a case that gained such notoriety, it was a reflection on the way in which we were organised that a decision that strongly upset the health commissioner was never, either before or after it was seen to be a difficult case, referred to the board. That matter needs to be looked at.

In Yorkshire, although there were a number of Labour appointees, the then chair of the regional health authority made it clear to me that he was regarded as having appointed enough Labour members. When it was suggested that he might appoint another to another authority, he said that he felt that he was already somewhat suspect because most of the authorities in Yorkshire appeared to have a Labour member. As he told me, that was a contrast with what happened in other areas. If we look at the statistics as a whole, we see that the pattern in Yorkshire was not a normal pattern.

What concerns me about the pattern established for the future is that we shall continue to have political appointments despite the fact that the wording suggests otherwise. The position is made clear in the draft guidance, which says:

"The aim of this guidance is to establish a national framework within which Regional Policy Board Members . . . can implement new procedures for the appointment of non-executive directors and chairmen to NHS authorities and trusts."

The guidance continues:

"RPBMs are responsible for the integrity and effectiveness of the arrangements in their region and for making recommendations on appointments to Ministers."

[Mr. Gunnell]

As we run through the guidance, it is clear, again and again, that the decision rests with the regional policy board member. The guidance says that there will be a sifting process

"conducted by a panel consisting of at least three local chairmen or non-executives . . . The panel may also include an independent member".

When one gets to the end of the section on procedure, it is made clear that the appointment referred to is the appointment of a regional policy board member.

"The RPBM will be able to use this information"—

information about people's performance and information that has come from the independent panel—

"when making his/her decision whether to recommend re-appointment to the Minister. RPBMs will retain the right to over-ride the preferences of any individual board chairmen when making recommendations."

The guidance continues:

"RPBMs should consult with all local MPs on those candidates intended for nominations to Ministers as chairmen."

That is a means of ensuring that the appointments remain in the hands of the Conservative party. The regional policy board members who were appointed under the old appointment procedure—not under the guidance issued by the Secretary of State—were hand-picked members of the Conservative party, whose judgment could safely be relied on. I am sure that the Minister would tell me if he were not absolutely convinced that each appointee was a card-carrying member.

Nothing is said, of course, about what the judgment of the regional policy board members will be based on. I have already mentioned a letter that I received from a regional policy board member of the Northern and Yorkshire regional health authority. That board member attempted to consult hon. Members about an appointment to St. James's hospital trust—a critical appointment at a very important hospital. The Minister knows that it was a contentious appointment because the acting chairman, who was a Labour councillor, had extensive experience of the health service.

In telling us about the appointment, Mr. Greetham says:

"David"—

that is the name of the person appointed, whom I have never met, so I am totally neutral—

"has very wide management experience both in industry and in his distinguished career with the Territorial Army. I am certain that this will place him in a very strong position to lead the Trust through the challenging and changing times ahead, and I hope you will be supportive of this appointment."

We are contrasting a person with distinguished service in the Territorial Army and experience in industry with someone acting as a chair of social services, who played an active role when the widespread issue of child abuse first came to public attention and who has been a member of the health service trust since it was established at St. James's seven years ago. The latter candidate also had experience of being acting chairman for over a year.

I do not discount experience in industry, but I wonder what the Territorial Army has in common with the national health service. I have no doubt that some of my colleagues would be able to suggest a reason.

Ms Coffey: They all wear uniforms.

Mr. Gunnell: I forgot that. I know that the Territorial Army is pretty hierarchical, too.

We need a process that ensures much more genuine independence. The amendment suggests that independent advice should not be given by people who are holding office in the health authority, who are employed by Her Majesty's Government or who are the holders of any publicly elected office. They should not be political people. *[Interruption.]* We are suggesting that those people should not be identified with any political party. We are not suggesting that none of the appointees should have political affiliations, but we are suggesting that the independence of advice on suitability of candidates should be more genuinely independent than is suggested in the Bill or in the regulations.

Ms Coffey: I want to add a few comments to those made by my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell), who gave a fairly comprehensive analysis of the problems. He described how the amendment would achieve some credibility in terms of the public's perception of objective criteria being used in relation to the appointments.

I would be interested to know the size of the new health authorities which will comprise the old health authorities and the FHSAs. Obviously the size of the new authorities will vary according to the existing membership. However, there will have to be a process in some areas whereby existing members will not be reappointed to the new health authorities because there will be too many members when the members of the FHSAs are added to the members of the old health authorities.

9.15 pm

As there is no transparent system to show how the members of those authorities were appointed in the first place, I should be interested in the explanation of why some members are not going to be reappointed to the new health authorities.

I was a member of an old district health authority. I did not sit on that authority after 1990 as elected political nominees were thrown off it. Of course, I was not a political appointee, but I was a representative of a political party. That was regarded as positive, because places were reserved for members of political parties.

I sat beside other members of the district health authority who were clearly appointed because places were reserved for particular specialities. Others were appointed by mysterious routes. The problem about appointments is not recent; it has existed for some years.

The difference between appointments to the old district health authority and the new appointments is that, in those days, no one was paid to be a member of the district health authority. People made a contribution because they were public spirited. They did that work voluntarily. With the new trusts and health authorities, there are executive and non-executive directors. That model is taken directly from private business and all the appointees are paid.

Some of the members of those authorities do not really know how they came to be appointed. One person told me that he had received a telephone call from someone who said, "You're a local business man. Would you be interested in being on this trust?" That man said, "Yes," so he knows something about his process of appointment.

People who have been appointed in that way have not answered an advertisement. They have simply been approached informally. They know that somehow they have been appointed by the Government because telephone calls from people inquiring whether they wanted to be members of trusts or health authorities clearly came from people who have the power to make such appointments. Ultimately, the appointments are made by the Government, so everyone assumes that they are Government appointments.

The problem for people appointed in that way is that they are not aware of the criteria for what they have to do. They do not know the criteria by which they were appointed. The appointments are short-term contracts. Presumably, members do not know whether they are going to be reappointed. The trouble is that that makes them less than independent. I am sure that some of them must think, "Well, if we create too much trouble, we are not going to be reappointed by this mysterious process which appointed us in the first place. We are not here to be troublemakers."

That attitude impinges on the members' ability to be independent, particularly if they are paid. A voluntary member might think that if he was not reappointed, he could do something else, but when it is a paid occupation, the matter must be given some consideration. That may affect their attitudes and perceptions about what is happening.

The Government's view on appointments to trust boards is that trust boards—as the phrase implies—are business organisations. It is clear that they want to encourage people with business interests on to boards because they see the management of trusts essentially as a business enterprise. My hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell) pointed out other difficulties, as there have not just been business appointments. I do not find it acceptable to say that a trust board is a business, and therefore we need people with business experience. But I suppose it is the logical view, if nothing else. A problem is that some appointments have been made for party political reasons.

In Committee I told the Minister that the Conservative Member who lost the Stockport seat in 1992 materialised as the chair of the Tameside trust some months later. The Minister would find it hard to convince me that that man was appointed because of his experience. I think—as do other members of the public—that it was a pay-off to him for having lost his seat. That sort of appointment brings the whole system into disrepute and makes it difficult for us to take seriously the notion of objective criteria.

Appointments to health authorities will be important because the Government cannot argue that those are business enterprises. Health authorities have a clear health commissioning role on behalf of the local population. If the Government's view is that health authorities should be responsive to local people, the people who sit on the authorities will be crucial. My experience in Stockport is that, almost without exception, the trust members came from outside the town. We shall be relying on those members of the health authority in Stockport to justify the idea of a locally responsive health service.

The attitudes and beliefs of the people who are appointed will be important. As the authority's purchasing role diminishes with the increase in GP fundholding, the strategic role which it performs will be absolutely crucial in the provision of care for the mentally ill, the mentally handicapped, the elderly and other specialities. It is important that the people on the health authority have the experience needed, and are local people. It is more important that they are seen to be appointed by a transparent system in which people can see what the criteria are and what the appointees are being asked to do, and that appointments have been made on the grounds of experience.

If we cannot get on to the authority people who can do the best job for the people of Stockport, and who are seen to be the ones who can do that, it will not only bring into disrepute the whole system but will be a great loss to Stockport. That view can be duplicated for all health authorities around the country.

It is not enough for the Minister to say that he believes that appointments should be made among people with the best experience. He should bring forward clear guidelines, and show how those guidelines are to be systematically adhered to and properly monitored. If he does not do that, there will be continual criticism that people get on to health authorities not because of experience, but because of who they know. Ultimately, that is to the good of neither the health authority nor the people it serves.

Mr. Kevin Hughes: Everybody knows that the system is based purely on patronage. The Government have tried to defuse that criticism by changing the procedure for appointments. The new system, however, is also a closed process and the changes represent little more than a sham—a con trick to make people think that things have changed.

The Government are not interested in real change or proper accountability and do not want people to see what is happening in the national health service. They do not want to be held accountable for the problems that exist in some parts of the NHS. They want to cover them up and keep them quiet. In short, they would be happy to take the advice of John Maples to have zero media coverage and keep the whole mess under wraps.

The amendment seeks to encourage the Government to introduce a truly independent element into the process, for example, community health councils. The Government's attempt at change—the new guidelines which they announced on 14 February—is no great leap for accountability, openness or democracy. The new sifting panel will consist of chairs of trusts appointed under the old system, and the regional chair will have the final say. Those people, who were all appointed under the old system, will control who enters the national health service and Ministers will still have the final say on chairs of NHS trusts. That is what we in Doncaster call the "Old Pals Act", section 1, paragraph 1.

One reason for our amendment is the fact that local people will have no opportunity to have a say. Five of the eight regional chairs are Tory supporters. A recent survey by *The Independent* showed that two thirds of the trust chairs examined had links with the Conservative party. That fact speaks for itself. Among them were spouses of Members of Parliament, former Tory politicians and party workers.

[Mr. Kevin Hughes]

We need a more open and democratic system. Philip Hunt, director of the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts, recognised that the changes made by the Government will not be enough to restore public confidence in the system. Lord Nolan seems to share that view. The amendment seeks to introduce an independent element into the system and ensure that people who are neither politicians nor civil servants, nor in health quangos, will have a say. The Secretary of State will be forced to seek advice to ensure that the candidate is the best possible person for the job.

Needless to say, when the Government decided to reform the appointments guidelines they missed the opportunity to introduce an independent element. In response to their announcement last week, Lord Nolan pointed out that an independent involvement could give the Government an opportunity

"to dispel the widely held perception that so many are Conservative appointments."

The changes are an admission that the appointments system is neither fair nor open. The fact that the Government have made such a trifling change shows that they are not prepared to open up the system to greater scrutiny and independence, particularly locally. The Government have resisted almost every move to increase both democracy and accountability in the national health service. In Committee, they knocked back amendment after amendment on those issues whenever they arose. They will no doubt do the same with this amendment—I expect little better of them.

The Government have no belief in democracy in the national health service. We have realised that time and time again as they have made their reforms. No doubt the "Old Pals Act" will prevail this evening.

Mr. Malone: I am delighted, as always, to oblige the hon. Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes) by not rising to any of the invitations that he gives to accept any of the amendments that are tabled. Can I say, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: Madam?

9.30 pm

Mr. Malone: Mr. Deputy Speaker. My goodness, one has to be rapid in perception in the House, with the changes that take place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that it will not be regarded as a serious discourtesy, but I wish to refer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), who is not in the Chamber. I must say, in accordance with several admonitions from the Chair this afternoon, that I have not given the hon. Gentleman notice that I intended to refer to him, because I wish to make a fairly friendly comment.

When I slipped out earlier, as my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), was responsible for an amendment, I did not expect that, when the hon. Member for Cardiff, West had finished, I would return to the Chamber to discover that all the clocks had stopped—but, having listened to him in Committee, I was not entirely surprised.

I have listened to the debate on amendment No. 4, and several questions occur to me. First, where will that paragon of independence be found? If we took the amendment literally, it is hard to imagine who would be left to take up that important appointment. I assumed that the Opposition tabled the amendment with serious intent, and I considered whether we could accept it. I was tempted by what the hon. Member for Doncaster, North said, and I might well have been tempted to accept the amendment on behalf of the Government, had there not been several problems.

The amendment appeared to rule out anyone employed by the national health service as an independent contractor; so 830,000-odd souls in the country are ruled out by the amendment to start with. The amendment ruled out anyone with any type of contract with the NHS—whatever that means. Perhaps patients have contracts with the NHS—that is 78 per cent. of the public who visit their general practitioner. The amendment appeared to rule out any public sector employee or public office-holder and anyone who was a member of a political party—and presumably is a member of a political party—or identified with a cause. That no doubt also rules out many voluntary organisations.

Amendment No. 4 is the amendment from the planet Mars, because only someone from the planet Mars would qualify to serve as the independent assessor if that amendment were to be passed. On that substantive and important reservation, I suggest that the House should reject the amendment in any event.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State published new guidelines for the appointment of chairmen and non-executive directors of NHS authorities and trusts on 14 February 1995. The guidelines, which draw together examples of current best practice and appointment procedures, demonstrate the Government's commitment to a fair and open appointments system based on merit, not patronage. The implementation of those guidelines from 1 April 1996 throughout England will ensure that the NHS continues to benefit from the services of non-executives of the highest calibre.

It is an insult to all those who serve the national health service in a non-executive capacity that the Labour party continues to attack them in a way that is reprehensible and entirely without substance.

The new guidelines make it absolutely clear that all new candidates for non-executive appointments will be sifted by a panel of at least three people. Perhaps that meets the independence criterion in the Opposition amendment.

Surely the people best placed to judge whether a candidate is suited to the demands of service as a non-executive director are people already working in that sector. I object to the suggestion in the amendment that people who are meant to be independent should be cut off from the service. I should have thought that the solution to ensuring that proper appointments are made is that people who know the way in which the service works, who can bring some of their knowledge to bear, are far better suited to select people who will serve the health service as chairmen and non-executive directors. That is why the guidelines say that people chosen to serve on the sifting panels should be local health authority or trust chairmen or non-executives.

We recognise the need to avoid possible accusations of bias in the appointments system. We have said in the guidelines that members of the sifting panel must not be drawn from the same NHS health authority or trust board,

and that the panel may include an independent member. We have suggested, for example, that it might be a member of a local community health council—which no doubt would be welcomed by the Labour party—a local justice of the peace, or someone who is involved in the community. We recognise the value of the view of someone who is detached from the NHS, but who cannot be permanently detached from the NHS as the Labour party suggests in its amendment. The new guidelines establish the flexibility to meet local demands without compromising standards in the appointment process.

On this issue, the Government are adamant that the best people, chosen from the widest cross-section of the population, are serving our national health service. I know that Opposition Members like to mock them, but that does no service to those who have given voluntarily to a substantial and a good cause. I think it is disgraceful that Opposition Members continue to do that.

The amendment constitutes an absurd suggestion to introduce an independence that would detach people from the health service rather than bind them to it. The new guidelines will draw people from an even wider pool of candidates by advertisement, thereby encapsulating what is already well-established best practice. I suggest that the House reject the amendment.

Amendment negatived.

Order for Third Reading read.

9.36 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

This has been an extremely important debate, and I valued being present for Report as I was not able to serve on the Committee. It takes forward two of the Government's most important objectives for the national health service and it devolves many important responsibilities closer to patients, while ensuring that all parts of the national health service work to common standards upholding its ethos and its values.

The Bill abolishes the regional health authorities and will create a new and more effective local health authority with responsibilities across the broad sweep of health and health care. It will also make a major contribution towards our goal of a primary care-led NHS. The merger of DHAs and family health services authorities is welcomed throughout the House, and I am sure that it will lead to much greater clarity for all of our constituents—the users of the health service.

The new authorities will be in a stronger position to take an all-round view of local health needs; they will be able to secure a sensitive balance between prevention and treatment and between primary, community and hospital-based care.

Mr. Heppell: The Secretary of State has talked about the consensus in the House concerning the amalgamation of the FHSAs and the DHAs. We want to see those two authorities merged into one; however, we want it to be done in an efficient and effective way.

This is my only opportunity to ask the Secretary of State how she intends to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping), who wrote to her on 31 October to ask about the appointment of a new chief executive of the Health Commission. The former chief executive of the FHSA, Mr. Tony Ruffell, was away on gardening leave. The Secretary of State replied then that he was being made redundant and that the matter was being sorted out. Apparently it was not sorted out, and my hon. Friend then asked the Prime Minister on 2 February—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. That really is not a Third Reading point. I call the Secretary of State.

Mrs. Bottomley: As you have said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not a Third Reading point. That matter is still being investigated and I think that the individuals concerned are entitled to receive replies before I deal in the House with the issue of people's occupations.

I am very pleased that, in Committee, a number of clarifications and improvements were made to the Bill. We have been able to clarify the question of junior hospital doctors, and focus on the importance of education and training and the role of postgraduate deans. Of particular importance is the amendment that the House accepted today which requires new health authorities to secure professional advice from across the whole range of disciplines.

It is that integration of professional advice, rather than the rigid traditional structures, that will be much more effective. That process will include nurses, doctors and other health professionals, and it will give statutory backing to the commitment that I made on Second Reading that professional advice should become professional involvement.

I draw the House's attention to a recent survey carried out among local directors of public health, reported in *The Guardian* last week. There was much debate in Committee about the role of directors of public health.

The report showed that most of those involved see the NHS health reforms that have taken place over the past five years as having produced clear benefits in terms of improved public health. It revealed that 90 per cent. said that, since the reforms, the needs of the population were either being better met or at least that there had been no change; 91 per cent. saw benefits or at least no change from the purchaser provider system; 85 per cent. said that waiting times for in-patient treatment had improved; 65 per cent. said that hospital surroundings were better; 75 per cent. of local directors of public health thought that fundholding had improved the effectiveness of public health service or at least had led to no change. I hope that all those who feel strongly about the role of the directors of public health will at least take note of their opinions.

I remind the House that, only five years ago, we were debating the Third Reading of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. Then, the Parliamentary Secretary spelled out the key issues as the need to provide better patient care, the need to continue with a NHS funded by the taxpayer, largely free at the point of delivery, the achievement of better value for money, the achievement of better choice for patients and the delegation of authority to NHS staff closer to patients. All those objectives are being achieved, and the improvements in patient care and a more flexible responsive service are at the heart of all our changes.

The Bill marks the end of a period of change and reorganisation to free the NHS better to carry out its vital task for the people of Britain. The role of GPs is vital.

[Mrs. Bottomley]

They, with other members of the primary health care team, have a pivotal role in shaping the provision of services. Advances in practice should not be held back simply because they are not available everywhere at the same time.

Our policy is to level up, not down. I point out to the House—it is a very important point—that under our legislation, for the first time ever, the district director of public health will become a statutory post.

The real point about the directors is that we are devolving important responsibilities to local level, where they properly belong. Regional directors of public health will have a new and important role within the regional offices.

Apart from the clarification of the important nature of the Bill, we have learnt something else about the attitude of the Opposition. They continue to attack managers, but support bureaucracy. In Committee, they sought to amend the Bill to introduce strategic health planning authorities—a bureaucratic nightmare, a waste of money and proof of a Labour party still wedded to centralism not dynamism; to indecision not innovation and to pen pushers not patients.

In contrast, our Bill will save £150 million every year for better patient care. The Labour party's advocacy of regional bureaucracy finds few supporters elsewhere and its enthusiasm for putting councillors in charge of the NHS finds even fewer friends. The BMA has rejected local authority control, and the RCN does not want councillors in charge. Nye Bevan did not want it, and the NHS does not want it. Anyone who has worked under the tyranny of Labour-controlled local authorities knows only too well that our constituents do not wish the health service to be run in same way as Labour-controlled local authorities.

The Bill will create accountable health authorities with a job to do and the means to do it. It will reinforce our policy of allocating money to populations and not to institutions. Accountability will be strengthened through the public having access to a single body.

The new authorities will involve the public in decisions about priorities. They must take on more responsibility for explaining the key issues that the health service faces. My hon. Friends were right to focus on the quality, calibre and merit of those involved as non-executives and executives on health authorities as well as trusts.

The Bill is a sensible, timely and effective measure. It will build on the achievement of the new NHS and it will make it an even better place to respond to the changing needs of the patients. It is part of the Government's enduring, unshakeable commitment to the national health service and I commend it to the House.

9.44 pm

Mrs. Beckett: I was a little surprised to discover that the Secretary of State intended to speak on Third Reading. As I recall, it is not customary for a Minister who has not bothered to serve on a Standing Committee to take the prime slot in the winding-up speeches. I am no longer surprised, however: it is clear that the right hon. Lady wanted to bore us with yet more of her irrelevant ranting.

It was right, however, for the Secretary of State to refer to an aspect of the Bill to which I too wish to begin by referring. Although explored in Committee, that aspect has not been discussed much on the Floor of the House. I refer to the merger of district health authorities and family health services authorities to create the new health authorities which alone will replace the existing regional authorities.

My party does not oppose the principle of such a merger; in fact, we have advocated it for some time, although we have never suggested that the merged authorities should replace the existing regions. Despite our support for the principle, however, the way in which the issue has been handled casts an interesting light on the Government's attitudes.

First, the Secretary of State indicated in her statement announcing the legislation in October 1993 that mergers between authorities would be permitted by the legislation; in fact, they are to be compulsory. Secondly, to further the programme of mergers, the Secretary of State has taken sweeping powers in the Bill—more sweeping, I understand, than those allowed by any precedent. She has done so despite the doubt that experience of the Child Support Agency must confer on precedents of this kind, and on the idea of taking all the powers in legislation and leaving all the detail to regulations.

The third revealing aspect even of this agreed element of the Bill is the way in which elements of the proposals that might arouse discussion or dissent have been withheld. I refer particularly to proposals relating to the shape and geographical spread of the new authorities. Ministers are well aware that the proposals are likely to prove controversial: in fact, they were warned about that on Second Reading by a Conservative Member, the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd). I have given notice to the hon. Gentleman of my intention to quote what he said.

The hon. Gentleman expressed his strong preference, and that of his constituents, for the present structure, whereby a more local health authority—a district health authority—relates to the Department of Health via a regional authority, rather than being structured like the previous, broader health authorities that drew in other elements across the area involved.

We all know that the chances are that boundaries have been drawn up for the new authorities. Many administrators probably know what they are, but Parliament and the people will not be told until it is too late for the House to reject the Bill. The information that we lack about the new merged authorities, however, pales into insignificance in comparison with the information that we lack about the main provision of the Bill, which deals with the abolition of regional health authorities.

The Secretary of State said a moment ago that it was only five years since the last major reorganisation Bill was discussed in the House. That is true—and it was as a consequence of those changes that greater powers were given to the regional health authorities whose abolition the Secretary of State now proposes. It is perhaps in that respect particularly that the Bill reaffirms the Secretary of State's reputation as the Madame Mao of the national health service, proceeding with her continuous revolution. Every element of the Bill takes us further towards the cultural revolution of privatisation that she espouses,

concentrating power as it does with individual health businesses that have been set up to be ripe for privatisation.

The Bill will eliminate any pockets of resistance on the 14 regional authorities by abolishing them—although any lingering doubts about the need for their existence in their present form must surely be reinforced by the fact that so many of their functions are to be retained at regional level and, in the case of mental health tribunals, not just at the level of regional offices but at the level and in the structure of the existing 14 regions.

The Bill will introduce positive vetting of a small group of regional representatives, all of whom are to be hand-picked by the Secretary of State. It will extend the practice of gagging independent medical experts such as the directors of public health. Although the Secretary of State spoke warmly of their role, she knows very well that the regional directors strongly resent the loss of their independence. The Bill will also reduce the rights of medical, nursing and other groups to the degree of representation that they have enjoyed in the past.

The Secretary of State congratulated herself on giving way to our representations and on reinstating some statutory right to consultation in the Bill. Nevertheless, the Bill takes away the role that those representatives have enjoyed in similar authorities in the past. The Bill will end the collection and publication of regional statistics, other than those approved by the Secretary of State. It will concentrate power, presently dispersed through a tier of authorities, in the hands of the Secretary of State.

Just over a year ago, the British Medical Association expressed surprise and concern at the proposals, saying:

"this has not been a consultation exercise in the proper sense of the word".

It said that people had

"been presented with a fait accompli."

It questioned the rationale of the exercise of abolishing regions,

"particularly since the increased size of the new regions will inevitably create communication difficulties which can only serve to undermine efficiency."

It is no clearer now than it was on Second Reading before Christmas why the Government have really brought forward a Bill that has such substantial and damaging effects on the structures and staff of our health service, and that creates so little benefit. It is undoubtedly true that the Bill creates the opportunity for the Secretary of State to implement one recommendation of the Maples report: to create a closed world of health care in which staff, from regional directors of public health to nurses and others working on our hospital wards, can more effectively be silenced and gagged about what is happening in the health service.

Earlier today, the Minister was sniffy about his claim that the Bill would make no real difference to the information available, but I should like to give the House examples, first, of the Department's way with statistics, and, secondly, of its way with other information. Those examples cast doubt on the Minister's assurances.

In a press release published on 13 February, the Minister publicised information about the role of junior doctors. He referred to a questionnaire that was sent to them in July last year. It asked how the new roles were affecting their work. The press release says that 17 per cent. of junior doctors felt that their hours of work had reduced. Clearly, it did not seem pertinent to the Minister to say that that presumably meant that 83 per cent. did not feel that their hours had been reduced.

The press release draws attention to the fact 40 per cent. of junior doctors were experiencing more satisfaction in their work, which presumably means that 60 per cent. were not experiencing more satisfaction in their work. That is an interesting example of how the gloss on a piece of information can somehow subtly change its meaning.

Apart from the issue of the statistics that the Department publishes, and how they are described, there is the issue of the new open government code proposed for the national health service. A report in December drew attention to the views of the Campaign for Freedom of Information on that matter. The campaign pointed out that, if that code of practice went ahead, information that would have to be disclosed today by the Department of Health could in future be withheld by health authorities and national health service trusts.

It says that the new code

"repeats the failings of the central 'open government' code, but omits its positive elements"—

if such there be. It draws attention to the fact that the code allows

"all information on commercial or contractual activities to be withheld—not merely information which could prejudice such activities, as in the central government code."

Every piece of information that can be described or classified as relating to commercial or contractual activities may be withheld. In this new health service for which the Secretary of State takes such credit, just about everything comes under commercial and contractual activity.

It is almost certainly the case that the major reason for the Bill is the control of information, but is it the only reason? We can dispose of the Government's excuses without too much difficulty. They claim that the Bill has been introduced because of their pressing desire to reduce bureaucracy and to create savings.

On Friday, I received a parliamentary answer from the Department. It shows not only that the number of general and senior managers employed has soared far beyond what could be explained by the reclassifying of people as managers, but that the salary bill for such posts has gone from £156 million before the health changes to £600 million last year. Most of that burgeoning growth in numbers and costs has taken place not at regional health authority level—the Minister of State admitted today that the number of staff employed at regional level has fallen—but because of the division of trusts into individual businesses.

There is yet another reason why there is no need for us to take the Government's claims seriously. They are hellbent on introducing locally determined pay. They have been pressing the pay review body for years to accept that that is Government policy and it must be the framework within which their own recommendations are made. Introducing local pay will mean hiring a fresh army of negotiators and administrators for every single trust. The BMA estimates that introducing it for doctors alone would cost £40 million at least, which would wipe out every penny of the savings that the Government claim have inspired the Bill. So they cannot be in it for the money.

There are other potential reasons apart from secrecy. There were 14 regional health authorities with a minimum of about 140 board members. The clear pattern of the

[Mrs. Beckett]

Government's appointments is that those selected must be hand-picked Government loyalists. Perhaps there are not 140 people left in Britain who still loyally believe in the Secretary of State's health service changes.

That view is strengthened by the fact that the 14 RHA are being replaced by eight regional offices in which the voice of the people is heard through eight individuals appointed by the Secretary of State. Rumour has it that those eight will soon be six. Perhaps even they are showing dangerously independent tendencies. I wonder whether finding even six reliable followers will soon be too much for Madam Mao. How long will it be before we have a gang of four?

The other possible reason for the abolition of regional health authorities lies in the reaction of the Secretary of State's shock troops in the trusts. In the document "Managing the NHS", published by the Office of Health Economics, William Laing says:

"Accountability of Trusts to central government has also been exercised through RHAs. Controversy arose because many NHS Trust chairs claimed that RHAs were attempting to exercise excessive and inappropriate control over Trust's operational activities."

Perhaps they still believe in the national health service.

Mr. Laing goes on:

"The issue of who should monitor Trusts has now been resolved by the government's decision to abolish regional health authorities."

Dr. Jeremy Lee Potter—*[Interruption.]* Yes, the former Conservative voter, as he has said himself—recently said:

"at the root of the NHS changes lies political dogma."

What really matters is where that dogma-driven change will lead. The Minister of State accused me today of claiming that the health service is being fragmented and that it is being centralised. He is correct: I did make both those claims, and both are justified. A total of 500 individual health businesses delivering health care is fragmentation by anyone's standards.

It is the framework to which those businesses relate that is the real giveaway. That framework now consists simply of area health authorities which cannot possibly come together to present an alternative strategic view as the regional health authorities used to do. Within that framework, the individual trust will concern itself solely with its own business and the individual health authority will concern itself solely with its own area. Apart from that, we shall be left with a structure about which the BMA says that, instead of a "management tier . . . independent of" the Executive at national level, there will be an "increase in centralised control".

In the document "Managing the New NHS" the new arrangements are described as a "single corporate structure". That structure will be without a countervailing voice, without any pretence of any democratic input, and every appointment within it will be made by and at the hands of the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State, like the Government and like the Bill, becomes more discredited daily. We shall vote to reject the Bill tonight, and if and when the British people are next given the opportunity, if they vote to preserve and enhance their health service, they will vote to reject this Government.

Mr. Malone: On behalf of my right hon. Friend, Madam Mao, may I present compliments to Polly Pot on the other side of the House, and make this simple point?

The Labour party has opposed a Bill that will reduce bureaucracy, and create savings that can be spent on patients. That shows precisely where the Labour party stands on the issue. It always has, and always will. The Labour party is always for the vested interests of the producer, not the consumer—the patient, whom the Bill is designed to serve. I hope that the House gives it a Third Reading tonight.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 285, Noes 243.

Division No. 81] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and
Mr. Michael Bates.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*

Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. George Mudie and
Mr. Eric Clarke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

War Widows' Pensions

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

10.14 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): This debate is about widows whose claim to the attention of this House is one of compelling priority. They are the widows of men who died or who gave the best years of their lives in the service of this country. They live with a sense of grievance which is shaming to us all and which, in this 50th anniversary year of victory in the second world war, the House must now urgently address.

Their plea for help is being debated today not only here but in the House of Lords. There the debate is led by the young Lord Freyberg who, although he is a Cross Bencher, I am delighted to call my noble Friend. He is strongly supported by other peers of all parties and of none.

Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House will recall my last Adjournment debate on war widows' pensions as the culmination of a campaign that led in 1989 to more adequate provision for tens of thousands of pre-1973 widows. But the campaign did not achieve all our objectives. There was unfinished business of importance both to war widows and to service widows which my early-day motion 186, with backing from all parts of the House, urges the Government to tackle without further delay.

The motion was tabled at the request of the Officers Pension Society and the War Widows Association of Great Britain, strongly endorsed by all the 123 affiliates of the Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations, and by Help the Aged. Today, the early-day motion has 167 signatures in addition to the declared support of right hon. and hon. Members who, by convention, cannot sign such motions.

Some hon. Members have declined to sign the motion. They declined not because they disagree with its objectives but because they feel that early-day motions are of no importance. In my view, they are mistaken. It was the huge cross-party support for early-day motion 68 in 1989 that eventually persuaded that wily parliamentary tactician, Margaret Thatcher, as she then was, to concede the principal aim of the war widows' campaign of that year.

Moreover, those who support our further objectives but decline to sign the new early-day motion strangely imply that such parliamentarians as the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer), the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) and the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), among many other senior Members of this House who are sponsoring the motion, know less than themselves about parliamentary realities.

What is it that we now seek for war and service widows? We seek, first, pensions for war widows that will be for life; secondly, the provision now of pensions for the widows of men who married them after retirement from the services; and, thirdly, an increase in the pensions of elderly service widows from one third to one half of their husbands' pensions.

In regard to the first of our aims, let me make it clear that basic provision for war widows was markedly improved by what we achieved in 1989. But there remains a cruel and indefensible anomaly. If a widow remarries, she loses all her widow's pension. Should her further marriage end in a second bereavement, or if it fails, her DSS war widow's pension cannot be restored.

Younger war widows, who have an attributable occupational pension from the Ministry of Defence, can apply for restoration, but even this is subject to a demeaning means test which 25 per cent. of applicants fail. That is why only one in 100 war widows feel that they can take the risk of remarrying. The other 99 per cent. remain on state benefits throughout their lives. They also suffer the enforced loneliness imposed upon them by regulations which are now very widely seen as anachronistic and inhumane. Should any war widow be found cohabiting, she forfeits her pension forthwith.

I want to quote Janet Cross, from Manchester, whose soldier husband Phil was killed by an IRA bomb in 1991. Janet, now 36 and struggling to bring up their two sons on her pension, told me that because she and her husband had to move home every two years there was no way she could build up a pension in a long-term job. She added:

"I don't have a penny saved. If I marry again, or live with another man, I lose my pension."

Janet was speaking to me in a year when the National Association of Pension Funds has announced that 84 per cent. of widows' pensions in issue are now for life regardless of any change in status. At the same time, careful research by the Officers Pension Society into 14 pension schemes of our allies and former adversaries shows that eight of them never remove war widows' pensions on remarriage and, of the remaining six, five provide automatic restoration of her pension if a widow is bereaved again or the marriage fails.

Ministers say that this is too costly for them to contemplate, but we are already paying full pensions for 99 out of every 100 war widows. There would also be savings to the Department of Social Security vote and the taxpayer if, as the ex-service community argues, the younger war widows retain only the Ministry of Defence attributable pension, but not the DSS war widow's pension, which I am assured would be accepted as reasonable by war widows themselves.

I turn now to widows who married their service husbands after they had retired from the forces. In these cases, the marriage is termed a post-retirement marriage—PRM. The younger PRM service widows are allowed a pension from the MOD in respect of their husbands' service after 1978, but the older service widows have no such entitlement. That not only causes undoubted hardship, but often blights the final years of the service man's life.

The prospect of leaving his wife penniless is deeply worrying to the service man, but all he can do is scrimp and save until he dies. It is especially unfair to the older service man because, in the late 1970s when almost all public servants worked until they were 65, he was compulsorily retired at an earlier age and much more likely to enter into a post-retirement marriage.

The experience of Mrs. Heather Matthews is highly instructive. She does not receive a penny from the Army because her husband, the late Major-General Francis Matthews, retired just before they were married. He fought in the second world war and served until 1970. Then he married Heather. Five years later, he had a heart attack and she nursed him until he died in 1976. She now ekes out a living at her home in Wiltshire and is "very bitter" that Britain is one of only two comparable countries to deny pensions to widows who married their husbands after they had retired from the services. She adds poignantly:

"I hope something can be done for us."

The Officers Pension Society and the War Widows Association of Great Britain want the Government now to accept that a service widow who married her husband after his retirement, but before the age of 65—up to which point the ex-service man is liable to recall—and provided the marriage lasts for at least three years, should receive a pension related to her husband's service. It is important here to note that pension provision in such cases is already made in 14 of the 15 comparable allied schemes studied by the Officers Pension Society.

Here again, Ministers will point to the cost; but in a great many PRM cases the widows are on income support. That is almost twice as expensive to administer as widows' pensions and with none of the dignity of the as-of-right benefit they deserve.

I come now to service widows who are entitled to only one third of their husband's service pay on retirement. Half-rate forces family pensions were introduced in April 1973, but those who had already retired—including many who fought in the second world war—were excluded.

It may come as a shock to many Members of the House that Britain is now alone, among all the countries with which it can be compared, in paying any service widow entitled to a pension less than a half-rate pension. In the United States, the minimum figure is 55 per cent.; in Germany, 60 per cent.; in Australia and Belgium, up to 67 per cent.; and in the Netherlands, 71 per cent.

The result of our Government's policy in retaining "third-rate" widows' pensions is exemplified by the case of a widow living in Oxford whose late husband was a Fleet Air Arm pilot. He flew throughout the war and took part in the famous raid on the Tirpitz in Alten fjord. He died at 37 of a massive heart attack while still serving as a pilot, but his death was adjudged not to be attributable to service. After tax, his widow's current MOD pension is £29.06 a week; scarcely enough, perhaps, for the main course of a meal fit for the chief executive of British Gas. In a recent television interview, she said:

"A half-rate pension would give me another £800 a year—which would revolutionise my life."

That is how pushed she is on her present income.

The Officers Pension Society and the War Widows Association of Great Britain ask the Government to accept that, where service men had no opportunity to buy in an entitlement to a half-rate pension, their "third-rate" widows, most of whom are between 75 and 85, should now have their pensions increased to the higher rate for the closing years of their lives.

Ministers may object that this would involve retrospection. But we all know that when it suits the Government, they do not hesitate to act retrospectively. State earnings-related pension schemes and delayed pensions for women to 65 come readily to mind. The latter is expected to save £5 billion a year, some of which will come from service widows. Compared with that £5 billion, the costs of righting the wrongs which I have described are very small change indeed.

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

In a moving letter to *The Times* on 13 February, Lord Boyd-Carpenter, a former Conservative Minister of Pensions and National Insurance, wrote that this 50th anniversary year of the ending of the wars in Europe and the far east is an especially appropriate moment to give comfort to those who suffered the loss of a husband and the end of their married life. He added:

"Their numbers are with the passage of time diminishing, so the cost of a real improvement in their pensions will also diminish . . . An announcement of a generous increase in the awards to those who lost a husband in the War would seem to be the best way to commemorate the victory which their sacrifice helped us to achieve."

Who can gainsay the justice of that appeal?

Does the Minister refute what Lord Boyd-Carpenter says? If so, how does he respond to one of the more elderly of Britain's 28,000-plus "third-rate" widows who has written to me to say:

"The Government will say yet again that there's no money left to help us. But there will be more than enough money for all the junketing that will take place. Tell them that not a single penny must be spent on that until there's some justice for us"?

While millions will celebrate the 50th anniversaries of the victories of 1945, others will still mourn the loved ones they lost, not only the widows of men who gave their lives in the second world war but the widows of those who have died on active service since then—in Korea, the Falklands, the Gulf war, Northern Ireland and elsewhere. In a leader about their plea, *The Sun* states today:

"Both Lords and Commons will debate their shabby treatment. But words aren't enough. We need action. While we're laughing on VE Day, the widows will be crying. Brave men didn't die for that."

The vast majority of people could not agree more. Our debt to war and service widows cannot be measured in money terms, but lack of money inflicts hurtful indignities upon them. Let us, therefore, agree tonight that there is no better way of celebrating the historic victories of 1945 than by, first of all, meeting in full our debt of honour to Britain's war and service widows. If we cannot agree tonight and the battle has to go on, then go on it will, until justice is secured for them.

10.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. James Arbuthnot): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on obtaining a debate on this exceptionally important subject. He has secured the support of a number of his right hon. and hon. Friends and some right hon. and hon. Conservative Members. We can all understand the right hon. Member's wish to help war and service widows. No doubt he did all that he could for them when he was Minister with special responsibility for war pensions in the Labour Administration in 1978.

Today's war widow's pension is, for most widows, worth almost £140. In real terms, that is much more than it was worth in the right hon Gentleman's day. In 1978, half the war widow's pension was taxable; today, like all benefits under the war pensions scheme, that £140 is tax-free. In 1978, there were only two allowances in respect of age—at 65 and 70; today, there are three. The two earlier ones are worth more in real terms, and a new tier was introduced in 1984 for war widows aged 80 and over. That allowance is now worth £24.40 week.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, in 1978 there was no additional provision for pre-1973 war widows. Today, all second world war widows and many others receive, on top of the basic pension, a supplementary pension worth £48.70 a week. That supplement is not only tax-free but completely disregarded for income-related benefit purposes.

The right hon. Gentleman raised a number of issues. To avoid confusion, I shall try to deal with each separately. What is being asked for today, both in the Chamber and in another place, and by means of the early-day motion to which the right honourable Gentleman referred, which has attracted much correspondence from right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the Houses is that, first, a pre-1973 DSS war widow's pension should be for life, irrespective of remarriage. Similarly, that widow's pension, under the post-1973 Ministry of Defence armed forces pension scheme, should be for life.

Secondly, the half-rate armed forces widow's pension should be extended to widows who receive only a third-rate pension because their husband's service terminated before 31 March 1973. Thirdly, provision for occupational widows' pensions under the Ministry of Defence scheme should be extended to widows who married their late husbands after retirement from the forces, where that retirement took place before 6 April 1978.

I shall deal with pensions for life first. The DSS war widow's pension may be awarded where the late husband's death is due to any service in the armed forces. Pension provision for widows under the Ministry of Defence armed forces pension scheme is a separate matter. The scheme pays two types of widow's pension: the normal forces family pension and the enhanced pension where the late husband's death was due to service. The rationale behind the DSS pension and both the Ministry of Defence pensions is to assist with the loss of support which a widow could have expected from her late husband. Those pensions are therefore paid not as compensation for the loss of a husband but for the widow's maintenance.

As the right hon. Gentleman correctly said, the consequence of remarriage, since the lady is no longer a widow, is that the widow's pension is withdrawn under both schemes. The DSS position on that reflects what happens to the national insurance widow's pension. The Ministry of Defence position reflects that of the other public service occupational pension schemes.

As the right hon. Gentleman rightly said, on remarriage, the DSS awards a gratuity equal to a year's pension, which normally amounts to about £7,000. Should the lady unfortunately become widowed again, she will be eligible for assistance from the social security system. There is no provision, under the DSS war pensions scheme, for the restoration of a war widow's pension.

However, under the Ministry of Defence scheme and in line with the provisions of other public service occupational schemes, there is discretion to restore the pension. That discretion is normally exercised where the widow is financially worse off on second widowhood than when she was first widowed. In recent years, in 80 per cent. of claims for restoration, the pension has been restored.

The DSS war widow's pension is paid at a much higher rate than a national insurance widow's pension. Most widows receive, as I have said, almost £140 per week tax-free, which is approximately 250 per cent. more than the national insurance widow receives. In addition, a war widow is able to receive a retirement pension based on her own contributions, which could increase her income to nearly £200 a week, irrespective of any other income that she might have.

For many widows, £58.70 of a war widow's pension may be disregarded as income for the purposes of claims to income-related benefits. Widows who benefit from improvements made to the Ministry of Defence scheme from 31 March 1973 receive a basic DSS war widow's pension but in addition can also receive a Ministry of Defence pension.

Our record in this area is a good one. For example, we have improved significantly the value of the age allowances payable on top of the basic war widow's pension, we have increased from £4 to £10 a week the amount of war widow's pension that may be disregarded for income-related benefit purposes, and we introduced in April 1990 a supplementary pension of £40 a week, which will be £49.77 from next April, for those war widows whose husband's service ended before 31 March 1973; that is not only tax-free, but is completely disregarded for income-related benefit purposes.

The proposal of the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe is that all those generous pensions should be granted for life regardless of any change in marital status. He referred to the matter of cost. He is right that war widows' pensions for life could not be introduced without further cost. Almost 90,000 war widows have remarried since 1939. Although we do not know exactly how many are still living and would claim restoration of their pension, it would almost certainly be extremely expensive. For pre-1973 war widows alone, it could cost about £60 million in a full year, and that is taking into account offsets for state benefits currently in payment.

I assure the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe that we fully appreciate the sacrifice that the late husbands of those widows made on behalf of their country. That is why we have ensured that the pension provision for war widows fully recognises that sacrifice. That of course is no more than the country would expect while the state of war widowhood remains. However, to continue to pay a very preferential pension when a war widow has remarried and still has or has had the support of a second husband is neither justified nor fair to the widow who loses her national insurance widow's pension on remarriage.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): There appears to be some disparity with our own provision in the House. I understand that, if we pass on and our widows remarry, they can still enjoy the benefits of our parliamentary scheme.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I shall discuss that if I have some time later, but the difference that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) has drawn attention to stems from the fact that, when the scheme for the House was set up, the contributions were set to take into account the point that the hon. Gentleman has made.

I shall move on to those matters that relate solely to the Ministry of Defence armed forces pension scheme. The effect of accepting the changes that the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe suggests would be to extend pension scheme improvements that were introduced in 1973 and 1978 to all widows of service men whose service ended before those dates. I should explain that it is a fundamental principle that improvements to occupational pension schemes should benefit only those serving on or after a qualifying date. There are good reasons for that.

It would be impossible on cost grounds, if for no other reason, to introduce major improvements to schemes such as that without imposing a fixed and current date from which those improvements can be made available. Even though the cost of making just one concession for the Ministry of Defence scheme might appear to be modest, the wider implications are significant. To make exceptions for that scheme in any of the ways which the right hon. Gentleman suggests can only have expensive knock-on effects for other public service pension schemes.

The first of the right hon. Gentleman's proposals under this heading is that all widows should receive a normal Ministry of Defence occupational widow's pension of at least half that of their late husbands' occupational pension. Before the introduction of improvements to the Ministry of Defence scheme from 31 March 1973, the widow received a pension at one third of the rate of her husband's pension. Those serving on or after that date were given the option of "buying in" to the new scheme and making direct contributions so that their widows could receive the half-rate pension. Each service man was given that opportunity, and many accepted it.

Clearly, the widow of a service man who did not choose to make such contributions cannot receive the enhanced pension. That is partly because it would be quite unfair on those who did pay, and partly because the normal principle for occupational pension schemes is that those retiring before the introduction of an improvement may not benefit from it. The option to "buy in" given to those still serving would in itself make it impossible, in all fairness, to extend the half-rate pension to widows whose husbands had left the service before 31 March 1973 and who had not, as a result, paid towards the improvement—indeed, they could not have done so.

I turn now to the last of the right hon. Gentleman's proposals—that a Ministry of Defence occupational pension should be available for widows who married their husbands after they had retired from the forces and where they had no service on or after 6 April 1978.

As I have said, when a person retires it is the provisions of the occupational pension scheme in force at the date of his retirement which determine his, and through him his widow's, entitlement to a pension. The Social Security Act 1975 provided that pensions should be given to those widows who married after their husbands' retirement. That improvement was introduced into public service occupational pension schemes, such as the Ministry of Defence scheme, from 6 April 1978 and those who left the forces before that date do not benefit from it. Even for those who do, because they left after that date, the post-retirement widow's pension may be calculated only on the length of service after that date.

Finally, I come to the comparisons which the right hon. Gentleman made between the DSS and MOD schemes and the schemes of other countries. It is true that, in some countries, widows' pensions are either never removed or restored on second bereavement. As far as the DSS scheme is concerned, those arrangements cannot really be considered in isolation, but have to be viewed within the

[Mr. Arbuthnot]

context of the general social and welfare environment of each of the countries concerned. While many countries continue or restore war widows' pensions, their original pension rates are generally lower than those in the United Kingdom. For instance, the rate of our war widow's pension is significantly higher than that of Australia, France, Spain and New Zealand.

As to the occupational pension schemes for the armed forces of other countries, again, comparisons are not valid. Apart from the different entitlement conditions that might apply, such as the level of contributions needed to qualify for a pension, different social factors will also apply in each country.

Comparison of occupational pension schemes within the United Kingdom would be more realistic, and in that respect the MOD scheme compares well with those offered by most employers and, in particular, with those of other public service pension schemes.

As I have said, these are complicated and emotive issues, but I do not believe that there is any real justification either for providing pensions for life for the widows of men whose deaths were attributable to service, or for breaching the fundamental principle of public service pension schemes that any improvements to those schemes should not be made retrospective.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 22 February 1995

The House met at Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Live Animals (Export)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

10.4 am

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): I am delighted to have secured this important Adjournment debate on the transportation of live animals, but before I begin my speech, I am sure that the whole House would join me in sending our best wishes to our Prime Minister in Belfast this morning as he takes part in that vital initiative.

Animal welfare is of great concern to many of our citizens, who have been genuinely distressed by some of the scenes of cruelty to animals in the process of live transportation that they have witnessed. It is therefore important that this matter be discussed in detail in Parliament, so that the facts may be clearly presented and argued.

Although it is an emotive and complex issue, I hope that we can debate the matter in a dispassionate and reasonable manner; in a broadsheet rather than a tabloid fashion. I hope that we can reach a clear view of the way forward, and that we can balance the understandable desires of our farmers to supply a real demand for live meat on the continent with the need to have the highest possible levels of animal welfare; that we can balance our needs as a meat-eating species to raise animals for slaughter with our responsibility to be wise and caring stewards of all other creatures; and, finally, that we can balance the need to support the dairy industry and the livelihoods of our farmers with widespread public concern about animal welfare.

On Saturday night, at Millbay docks in Plymouth, two cattle lorries arrived and boarded a privately chartered ferry bound for the continent. The lorries carried calves and sheep, and came from farms throughout the south of England. Standing at the gates of Millbay docks with banners, 200 to 300 people were shouting and screaming their protests as the lorries swept through. The police were there in force to ensure that the protesters did not prevent the lorries from entering the docks.

Once inside the docks, the cattle and sheep were inspected by the vet who accompanied them on their entire journey. They were inspected by Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials, and by representatives of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, all of whom gave the cattle and sheep a clean bill of health. Once inspected, the lorries boarded the ship, and the ship left.

I recently visited Millbay docks, and spoke to the vet and RSPCA representatives, who confirmed their opinion that the sheep and cattle were not in distress. Yet many of the protesters were in tears; many were simply angry. They are an embodiment of an outpouring of concern that has grown from all corners of our society.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Is my hon. Friend able to assist me by reconciling the view of the chairman of the Sussex police authority in my area, who calls this trade barbaric, and thinks that it should be stopped, with the view expressed by his colleague, the Liberal Democrat agriculture spokesman in this place, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who described the activities of protesters as "naive, hysterical and counter-productive"?

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point. It is important that we approach this issue from a consistent position, and that, wherever possible, we say the same thing.

I ask myself, who are the demonstrators? Some are retired civil servants, some are teachers, some are housewives, some are students. Most of them care genuinely about the welfare of animals, and are prepared to stand in the cold and the rain night after night to make their protests. That picture is repeated almost daily all over the country. Many people want to stop the export of live animals from the United Kingdom to the continent for slaughter. They believe it to be a cruel and unnecessary practice. They care, they are committed and they are to be respected for their compassion and their concern.

Some of the people at the demonstrations have a different motivation. They are members of Class War or the Animal Liberation Front, and are there to cause trouble and pursue their own agenda, whatever that might be. I shall say more about them later, but the first question that I want to explore this morning is: why do we not ban the export of live animals, which causes so much distress to some many people?

The first reason is a legal one. Article 36 of the treaty of Rome—with its clause allowing restrictions on imports and exports on the grounds of public morality, public policy or the protection of the life and health of animals—is not applicable, because there is an existing EC directive on animal welfare standards. That EC directive does not deal adequately with the provision for feeding, watering, journey times and other matters, but it exists, and it prevents any member state from taking unilateral national action.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The hon. Gentleman is making an eminently sensible contribution to the debate, and I am sure that many of us support what he has said. Will he condemn the actions of his hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), who deliberately set out to destroy the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew)? Will the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) condemn the actions of his hon. Friend, who prevented Parliament from dealing with an issue that the great majority of people in this country wanted to be addressed?

Mr. Streeter: I entirely reject the hon. Gentleman's comments. At the beginning of my speech, I said that we should address the issues, not in tabloid terms, but objectively and sensibly. I refute what the hon. Gentleman said.

[Mr. Streeter]

If we were to proceed with a ban on exports, the European Commission would take the United Kingdom Government to the European Court of Justice to have such a unilateral ban swiftly reversed. In the meantime, UK farmers would rightly claim for compensation against our Government for damages suffered as a consequence of unlawful action. It is simply not an option.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I apologise for missing the opening moments of his speech.

Surely, if the Government were prepared, unilaterally, to institute a ban, it could be tested in the European Court. There is a body of opinion which says that, as European law is untested in many spheres, that would be a worthwhile step. At least the Government could then say that they had done their best, but were overturned by the European Court. At present, the Government seem to stand between the people and the European Court, frustrating the wishes of the people of this country.

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. The Government have had the benefit of legal advice from the best legal minds in the country. Were I asked to choose between the hon. Gentleman's legal opinion and that of the best legal minds in the country, I would go with the latter every time.

The same is true of veal crates as of banning exports. We fought hard in 1990 and 1991 to impose a Communitywide ban on veal crates when formulating the EC directive on the subject. However, the European Union adopted a lesser measure in 1991. Our Government secured a provision allowing member states to adopt stricter standards.

We chose to adopt stricter standards, and effectively—and rightly—banned veal crates from our shores. It is cruel and unacceptable to keep a calf in a crate in which it cannot turn around or groom itself. But it is not possible to ban the export from the UK of calves that end up in veal crates. An existing EC directive covers the matter, and such a measure would be doomed to failure. It is simply not possible to ignore the legal realities and seek a unilateral ban, however much Opposition Members might object.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Was my hon. Friend encouraged to see Brigitte Bardot demonstrating in Paris and attacking the French Government for their poor, but improving, attitude? Would it not help the important cause of animal welfare if Brigitte Bardot or her equivalents did the same in Greece, Spain and other countries, thus providing better support for the excellent attitudes of this country and our Government?

Mr. Streeter: Unlike my predecessor in the House, I do not know Brigitte Bardot personally.

Madam Speaker: Pity.

Mr. Streeter: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) has anticipated later sections of my speech on the importance of approaching the problem Europewide, and mobilising public opinion throughout Europe, so that standards of animal welfare throughout Europe become as high as they are in this country.

It is likely that measures banning or restricting the export of calves would constitute an unacceptable interference with the operation of the common agricultural policy as it affects the market for beef and veal.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): The hon. Gentleman is discussing the legality of a ban. Perhaps he will support me in asking the Minister to place the legal advice in the House of Commons Library so that we can look at it. My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) asked the Minister to do that, but the Minister refused.

Mr. Streeter: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister has heard the hon. Gentleman's point. It is a long-standing convention that the Government do not disclose their legal advice, or even whether they have taken legal advice from a certain source. I see no reason to change that convention in this case.

My first question was whether it would be possible, legally, to ban the export of live animals and veal calves. It is not. My second question is: even if the ban of the export of live animals were legal and possible, would it be desirable? What would be the result of such a ban? Surely our concern should be for animals everywhere, not just restricted to our shores.

If our farmers, employing decent standards, were not able to supply the demand in southern European states, someone else would. Let us be under no illusions—it would almost certainly be the east European nations, which raise animals in far worse conditions than we do. That would set back the cause of animal welfare by decades. Fewer sheep and cattle would be produced in the United Kingdom, where we have decent standards and transport animals in humane conditions. More sheep and cattle would be produced elsewhere, in poorer conditions, and transported under lower welfare standards.

Such a ban would not help the cause of animal welfare, but diminish it. There is nothing intrinsically cruel about transporting animals in a lorry. I draw upon my experience of being brought up on a dairy farm. I have been surrounded by sheep and cattle all my life—nothing changes.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): I hope that, as the hon. Gentleman develops his interesting speech, he will comment on the air transport of live animals. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, an animal rights campaigner in my constituency was recently killed. It is an emotive subject. The vast majority of animal rights campaigners are decent people, but there is always a minority of troublemakers. Will the hon. Gentleman comment on air transport, particularly in relation to noise levels and how they affect residents living in areas such as mine in Willenhall in Coventry?

Mr. Streeter: I shall talk about the demonstrators in a moment. I see no significant difference between transporting cattle and sheep in a lorry and other forms of transportation, provided the same standards apply. I have not inspected the aeroplanes in which those cattle are transported, so I have less knowledge of that. I am satisfied by what at I see at Millbay docks in Plymouth that such transportation is not intrinsically cruel.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): The hon. Gentleman says that we should participate in the trade because, if we do not, others—perhaps from eastern

Europe—may do so, and do so cruelly. But the reason that we have a law banning veal crates in this country is because they are cruel, immoral and unacceptable.

If the hon. Gentleman says that we should transport animals to a state that is cruel, immoral and unacceptable because we want to make profits rather than let others do so, does not his argument undermine the basis of law in this country, which bans that cruelty? The hon. Gentleman cannot say that we should allow animals to enter such a state simply because we would rather make the profits rather than allow someone else to do so.

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way to me in his long speech. If he will be patient, I shall deal with that precise point in a moment.

Provided that the appropriate conditions are in place and are monitored effectively, the journey to the slaughterhouse need not cause distress. In January, the Government introduced even tougher restrictions on our farmers, which require each exporter to comply with an approved journey plan. If we withdraw from the debate and seek to impose a unilateral ban, irrespective of the legal consequences that would follow, we would surely lose our voice in Europe on the issue just when people are beginning to listen to us about animal welfare.

I believe that the decision by the Council of Ministers last night to discuss the issue again in a month shows that people are beginning to fall in behind us on the issue, and that there is a real chance that progress will be made. For those reasons, I simply do not believe that a general ban on exports—if it were legal—would help the cause of animal welfare generally, and it would not be desirable.

I am bound to ask what impact a general ban on live exports would have on the dairy industry. Male calves are an unavoidable by-product of the dairy industry. We cannot ignore the laws of nature: a dairy cow will produce the milk from which we derive our dairy products only if she has a calf each year. Farmers must do something with male calves.

It would be convenient to believe that they could be sold for veal in the United Kingdom, but the domestic market is simply too limited. If farmers are left to fatten calves for beef, a huge increase in the amount of beef on the market would destabilise the farming industry and the common agricultural policy.

Farmers could be forced to slaughter calves within days of their birth—I think that that is a strange argument to come from people who are concerned about animal welfare—but that would be an unaffordable expense for farmers unless they were subsidised by public money for every calf slaughtered. There is no doubt that an immediate ban would threaten the economic viability of our dairy industry, to no avail. UK farmers would pay the price, animals would not benefit and eastern European farmers would laugh all the way to the bank.

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): Such a ban was imposed by the Conservative Government in 1974, and in 1975 the then Labour Government reversed that decision. Does my hon. Friend have any idea why Labour Members now suggest that the policy should be changed to reverse their original decision?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. As I said earlier, it is important that hon. Members do not play to the gallery, but have the courage of their convictions on the issue.

Some of those who are protesting at Millbay docks and elsewhere are vegans and vegetarians. They do not eat meat themselves, and they do not wish to see others eat meat. They represent about 5 per cent. of the population of this country. Joyce DeSilva and Peter Stevenson of Compassion In World Farming are strong vegans. I respect that, but it is not right that people who have such an unnatural agenda should seek to impose their views on the rest of us.

I do not need to debate the morality of eating meat. I have no moral qualms about it and I am joined in that view by more than 90 per cent. of the population. If the vegans and vegetarians had their way, there would be no dairy industry at all in this country, which would devastate our economic and rural landscape. It is a dangerous agenda, and we should firmly reject it.

Sir Andrew Bowden (Brighton, Kemptown): I apologise to my hon. Friend for not being present to hear the earlier part of his speech. On his last point, it is true that the vast majority of those who are demonstrating against the export of veal calves eat meat themselves. I see nothing wrong with that. Surely my hon. Friend agrees that we have a responsibility to treat animals decently while they are being prepared for the table, and to kill them painlessly, instead of allowing them to spend six months of living hell in a veal crate?

Mr. Streeter: Obviously my hon. Friend did not hear the first part of my speech, which was devoted entirely to that very point.

I have dealt with the fact that the vast majority of demonstrators are genuine, decent people, and I have paid a great tribute to them. However, some of the protesters are not nice people. Some extremists, whose primary concern is to disrupt society, have jumped on the bandwagon. Some of that group claim to care about animal welfare, but they show a complete disregard for human life, which gives the lie to their claims.

I shall refer to some brief extracts from recent newspaper reports. An article by Emma Wilkins, which appeared in *The Times* of 4 February 1995, said:

"Animal-rights demonstrations at ports and airports are being infiltrated by violent militants intent on criminal activity, a senior police officer said yesterday.

Mick Brewer, acting Deputy Chief Constable of Warwickshire Police, said that the peaceful protests at Coventry airport against the export of veal calves had been sabotaged by activists who had their own aims.

'I think it is clear that we are seeing an influx of criminally minded people who are operating off the back of a peaceful demonstration,' Mr. Brewer said. 'After the tragic accident, our officers began to notice new faces in the crowd at the airport. Their technique is often to hide behind the peaceful demonstrators and egg them on'.

Mr. Brewer has discussed the policing of demonstrations with his opposite number at Devon and Cornwall Police. Violence has broken out at Plymouth docks. 'I think we are being targeted by the same type of individuals,' Mr. Brewer said".

An article from *The Sunday Times* of 8 January 1995 by Mark Christy and Andrew Alderson, contains an interview with Michelle Ratcliffe, 27. She is

"a self-styled black Boadicea of the anarchist movement, is typical of the hard-core elements who have hijacked the demonstration for political motives and who have left respectable protesters"—

the people about whom my hon. Friend is concerned—

[Mr. Streeter]

"questioning their own involvement. 'These animals are being tortured,' she said. 'We are tooled up with baseball bats and other weapons and are prepared to defend them'.

Ratcliffe conceded, however, that she and her companions from the Justice Department, the anarchic group, were 'not particularly concerned about the animals. We are here to fight for social justice . . . I'm so angry with what's happening here I would kill the police to achieve our ends'.

Ratcliffe, who travelled from her home in Brixton, south London, with Stu Johnson, 24, her white, dread-locked boyfriend, has protested previously"—

this will be no great surprise to my hon. Friends—

"against the poll tax, the Criminal Justice Bill and new roads. Many of the protests have culminated in violence. 'We like to steam in and sabotage a bit. The police are indiscriminately beating people up, and we are not just going to stand there and take it. We fight back,' says Ratcliffe . . . 'There are more of us now so the police will get trashed'".

They are not nice people. A very sinister picture is beginning to emerge from some of the demonstrations. We must not be deflected by violent extremists who are seeking to hijack the issue. The rule of law, not mob rule, must prevail in this nation.

I pay tribute to the police, who have done a tremendous job in protecting those who seek to go about their lawful trade. In so doing, the police express no opinion about the export of animals. Individual officers may be for or against it, but the police will protect any person equally against any assailant. I find it deeply reassuring that in this country, even in the face of the most ferocious attack, one person will always come forward to help—the uniformed policeman.

Some irresponsible voices have said that the police should not prevent the demonstrators from stopping the export of animals, or that farmers should pay the cost of deploying the police. But that is a very dangerous road to tread. If law-abiding citizens must pay the police for protection in going about their lawful business, the police force will become nothing more than a privatised security force which protects the interests of the highest bidder.

The police are a neutral force, who look to preserve public peace by safeguarding the laws of this country. If demonstrations were peaceful and non-threatening, there would be no need for such a heavy police presence. Whatever the rights or wrongs of the export of live animals, the outcome must be determined according to the rule of law.

What can we do? I hope that I have shown that it is neither possible nor wholly desirable to ban the export of live animals from the United Kingdom. It would not improve the cause of animal welfare as a whole. It is also clear that it is simply not possible to ban the export of calves to the veal crate trade, much though I would like to see that happen.

Nonetheless, there is a clear way forward. We must shift the focus of attention away from unilateral action in the United Kingdom, and mobilise public opinion throughout Europe in favour of wider measures in support of animals. That is the greater prize that is within our grasp: to see standards of animal welfare in Spain, Greece, Italy and elsewhere throughout the Community brought up to the high standards of animal welfare here.

We must do two things to achieve that aim. First, we must maintain and increase pressure on member states through the institutions of the European Union. That is why I welcome the diplomatic mission upon which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has recently embarked. She is going from capital to capital throughout the continent, seeking to persuade her European colleagues that the veal crate trade should be abolished. I can think of no one more persuasive or better qualified to lead that charge than my hon. Friend.

I would ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to state what progress my hon. Friend has made in her challenging and worthwhile mission.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary is not just doing that. She is also calling a conference on Friday of farmers and retailers of veal to encourage the development of a new market for veal in this country, so that our farmers can get the added value, instead of those involved in transport and foreign rearers.

Mr. Streeter: There is no limit to the initiatives being produced my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary in support of British farmers and the cause of animal welfare throughout the EU. She deserves our congratulations, as does my right hon. Friend the Minister on his success in moving the question of veal crates up the Euro-agenda. Whereas the matter was due to be discussed in 1997 by the Council of Ministers, it is very much to my right hon. Friend's credit that the matter has been discussed this year, and that positive steps are being taken.

I understand that the Commission has already started work on a scientific report on the directive on the welfare of calves, which is the first stage of the Council's veal crate provisions. Let us hope that that scientific report recommends the banning of this trade. It would be an enormous tribute to my right hon. Friend's efforts if the veal crate trade could be abolished throughout Europe in the next 12 months.

It is also vital that the Government continue to press our European colleagues to adopt stricter feeding and watering intervals, the licensing of hauliers—with provisions for disqualification—and a journey limit for animals travelling to slaughter. While it was disappointing that no resolution could be found on the matter at the Council this week, I would be interested to hear from my right hon. Friend what progress has been made.

Mr. Robert Hicks (Cornwall, South-East): Is it not a fact that, if the shadow spokesman for agriculture, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), held the position of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Foods, he would find himself in an identical situation to that of my right hon. Friend? At least the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East understands that position, having been—unlike many of his colleagues, including those on the Front Bench—in both government and opposition.

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. I hope that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) says in his speech that he entirely accepts my right hon. Friend's position.

It may well be that the introduction of proper welfare standards in the transportation of animals throughout Europe will not be achieved in the short term, but it is a much more valuable prize than any unilateral action could ever be. I am certain that it is the right way forward. One of the reasons why a pan-European approach would be so

effective is that, as more countries join the European Union in the future, so they will have to comply in full with the stringent requirements on animal welfare. That means that an ever-increasing number of animals would be brought within the better conditions.

The enforcement of EC directives—we in the south-west know that that is difficult—is only achievable on a Communitywide basis. We have all been horrified by the videos of what goes on in some slaughterhouses in Spain and Greece, and those are already in contravention of EC directives. A far greater emphasis on enforcement must be given by the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. My right hon. Friend might mention in his speech the question of enforcement.

Many of us criticise the institutions of the European Union—I think, often with good cause—but here is a situation where the machinery of state of the European Union can be put to good use to produce a Communitywide solution which we could not possibly achieve on our own.

In preparing my speech, I have recognised how restricted we are in taking our own decisions in agricultural policy; but this is perhaps one of the areas in which membership of the European Union can be used to our advantage. Who knows—we might even be able to use qualified majority voting to force the southern European nations to come to heel.

The final way to tackle the issue is by an extension of people power. Attention drawn to the issue of animal exports by demonstrators has unleashed a powerful surge of public concern in this country. It is now time for that concern and energy to be harnessed in the most effective way. It is time to take the protests to Europe. I call on the lobby groups involved in the battle to mobilise public concern throughout Europe, and to take the arguments to Europe in a lawful and peaceful way.

If there are to be demonstrations, let them be in Brussels and Strasbourg, or outside the slaughterhouses of Greece and Spain. Let letters of protest be written to the Italian and Portuguese Members of Parliament. It is time that the European Parliament, and its ruling party, took a closer interest in this subject, and started applying pressure wherever it can. Let it be a voice for change within Europe. Here is an issue on which the European Parliament can make a positive name for itself.

In conclusion, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on all he has done in furthering the cause of animal welfare. I seek assurances that he will continue his crusade to improve welfare and standards throughout Europe by putting pressure on other Council Ministers and institutions.

I call upon all those who are genuinely interested in the subject of animal welfare—not the extremists and anarchists, but genuine people—to lift their sights and take their arguments to Europe. They must seize the greater prize which lies within our grasp; not a unilateral action, which would be so unproductive, but a secure future for the welfare of animals across the whole of Europe, once and for all.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. There is obviously a great deal of interest in this subject, and that is very good. May I appeal to Members now to speak for about 10 or 12 minutes, so I may call as many as possible?

10.36 am

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): May I first declare that I am not a vegetarian? I worked for 21 years in the dairy industry, and I am qualified as a dairying chemist, so I do know a little about the industry.

I was a little disturbed by the speech of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), because he seemed to be saying that there is nothing we can do about the matter, that it is all to do with Europe. The first person to say something like that was Pontius Pilate.

I am glad at last to have the opportunity to speak on the transportation of calves, because I want to talk about calves which are sent to the veal crates. I believe that that needs to be stopped, and I believe that this country could do it.

Unfortunately, the only thing which has been stopped so far is my Protection of Calves (Export) Bill, which was due to be given Second Reading on 3 February. The Bill was blocked by the cynical methods of the hon. Members for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), whom I am glad to see in his place, and for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), whom I am glad to see sitting behind the Minister of Agriculture. It is my understanding that the hon. Gentleman is the Minister's parliamentary private secretary. I do not wish to dwell on that matter.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The hon. Gentleman said that he was solely addressing the issue of calves. Is he not addressing the issue of sheep and other livestock exports?

Mr. Martlew: My view is that there is a clear argument for this country to institute a unilateral ban on the transportation of calves, and we have a legal right to do that. It would be more difficult to do that with regard to sheep or other cattle.

Hon. Members should realise that we have taken unilateral action in the past. Four years ago, there was an outcry about the transportation of horses for slaughter, and some 250,000 letters were written to the then Minister of Agriculture. The outcry was such that we banned the transportation. No one said that it was illegal, but we found an excuse, and we banned it. That went against all the concepts of free trade.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will the hon. Gentleman unequivocally confirm that his private Member's Bill has the full and public support of his own Front-Bench team?

Mr. Martlew: I am sure that they will reply to that. My understanding is that their views are similar to mine. Doubtless they are in favour of banning the transportation of calves destined for veal crates.

I shall not dwell on the behaviour of certain Members of Parliament on the occasion in question—*[Interruption.]*—or on the antics of the Tory yob element today. It is enough to say that their behaviour did no credit to this House.

As for my reasons for wanting to ban exports of calves to the continent: in 1994 we exported 500,000 calves, mainly to the veal crate system.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Gentleman has on a number of occasions levelled accusations of filibustering at us, and

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

has just described us as "the yob element". Surely that cannot be in order, the more so as he will not give way to us to allow the truth of the matter to be told.

Madam Speaker: I think that temperatures in this House are rising too high at this time of the morning. This is an important issue; I want it to be debated properly. If there are a lot of interventions, hon. Members will not be called—it is as simple as that. Hon. Members should therefore use a little common sense and allow Members to speak for 10 or 12 minutes. That way, they will all be called.

Mr. Martlew: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Most of the calves that we exported in 1994 were destined for veal crates, a system banned in this country in 1990, although the regulations went through the House in 1987.

The fact is that this is a relatively new trade, and the idea that the dairy industry would be devastated without it is incorrect. In 1986, we exported fewer than 200,000 calves. The dairy industry has simply taken advantage of the high prices on the continent.

We banned the trade in 1990 because it was cruel. We decided that it cannot be right to incarcerate young calves for five months in a system that does not allow them to turn around or lie down. They are fed an unnatural diet, kept in semi-darkness and often tethered, before being slaughtered, because the continentals prefer white veal.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): This whole House is greatly opposed to the rearing of calves in crates. That is why my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary is trying to convert her colleagues on the continent to pink veal, which is not cruelly produced.

The hon. Gentleman referred earlier to unilateral action on the export of horses. In fact, we imposed a minimum price. That was not illegal; it was accepted by others and it had the same effect. The current proposals could be illegal and are likely to be reversed immediately, thus offering only a short-term solution, whereas we want a long-term solution.

Mr. Martlew: I appreciate the hon. Lady's point that the banning of exports of veal calves may or may not be legal. In the case of live horse exports, the action taken was merely a pretext. The fact is that it has never been challenged in the European Court, because the Europeans know that we will not stand for the exporting of horses for slaughter.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North) *rose—*

Mr. Martlew: I am afraid that I must move on.

The campaign against veal crating is overwhelming. No one should delude himself that it will disappear into the bureaucracy of Europe. The vast majority of the people I have met at various ports are good, honest citizens—many of them have never demonstrated before, and most of them are former Tory voters.

These people are looking for a parliamentary solution. Many of the demonstrators are rather bemused by the antics of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He condemns the demonstrators in the same way as the hooligans at the Dublin football match are condemned—he calls them the hooligan element. But when they demonstrate in Brussels, he shakes hands with them and tells them what a splendid job they are doing—even though they are often the same people who demonstrated at our air and sea ports.

It is nonsense to condemn them at home and congratulate them abroad. We are, however, used to the Minister being somewhat two-faced—

Madam Speaker: Order. I really do think that we are going too far with this personal abuse at this time of the morning.

Mr. Martlew: I withdraw it, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman. He is usually a good debater and parliamentarian.

Mr. Martlew: I am grateful. We are used to seeing the Minister deploying double standards. He says that he hates and opposes the veal crate system, yet until a few months ago he was allowing calves from his own farm to go to market to be sent on to veal crates.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. William Waldegrave): As the hon. Gentleman has lowered the tone of this debate by his personal abuse, I remind him that the management of my farm is in the hands of his—not yet right hon.—Friend, the spokesman on agriculture in the House of Lords. He might like to address his question to him.

Mr. Martlew: Once again, the Minister seems to be saying that he owns the calves but that what happens to them has nothing to do with him. I do not accept that.

Let us take a look at the exporters, and in particular at the leader of the exporters, Mr. Richard Otley. He was recently described to me by a senior police officer at Brightlingsea as a right-wing fascist. The man has a record of cruelty to animals, he claims to have personal influence with the Prime Minister, and I understand that he has been asked by a Welsh Conservative association to stand as a parliamentary candidate.

There are good legal arguments on which the Government can rely if they want to prohibit the exporting of calves to veal crates. There is strong veterinary evidence that the EC calves directive is wholly inadequate in the protection it affords calves—it sanctions the continued use of crates, for instance. As such, it could be argued that the directive fails properly to occupy the field, and is thus no bar to a United Kingdom export ban.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): A few moments ago, the hon. Gentleman said that his Bill seeks the imposition of a unilateral ban, but he seemed a little less sure whether he had the support of his Front Benchers on that matter—no doubt they will clarify that later. Labour's policy paper on animal transportation suggests that the hon. Gentleman does not have their support:

"We will seek a ban through the European Commission and the Council of Ministers".

If that is Labour's policy, surely it makes the Front Benchers' attitude to the hon. Gentleman's Bill crystal clear?

Mr. Martlew: The hon. Gentleman is confused. I am talking about this country's right to ban the exporting of calves to veal crates—

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Martlew: I have said that I cannot give way any more.

Secondly, unusually for an EC directive, the calves directive imposes only minimum standards, and expressly allows a member state to maintain stricter standards. The "occupied field" principle notwithstanding, it could be argued that, when a member state lawfully maintains stricter rearing requirements under a minimum directive, as Britain has done, it is then entitled to rely on article 36 in declining to send animals to other parts of the EU for rearing in the very system that has been declared unlawful in its own country.

A minimum standards directive should not be viewed as occupying a field in the same way as a normal directive. Unlike the more usual kind of directive, a minimum standards directive does not purport to say all that can be said on a particular matter. It does not fully occupy the field; rather, it recognises the legitimate right of member states to establish stricter provisions.

Surely this is a matter of political will, not of law alone. I am convinced, however, from my experience, that there is no political will. When I introduced my Bill, I expected all-party support. There was a problem in my constituency at the airport, and the local councillors, from one end of the political spectrum to the other, voted against the export of calves for veal. Unfortunately, the Minister was opposed to that approach from the outset.

I wrote to the Minister on 3 January asking for an urgent meeting to discuss my Bill. I wanted to talk things through, and to ascertain whether it would be possible to get the Bill into Committee. There would then have been discussions with the farming lobby.

The Minister did not reply. Eventually, I phoned his office. I made the call a fortnight after writing. I was told that the right hon. Gentleman was too busy to see me. He could not see me, but I was told that the Parliamentary Secretary could. On two occasions, the hon. Lady cancelled meetings with me. One of the cancellations was at short notice. I was told by a member of her private office that she was in Europe on the day when she was to meet me. She was due to meet me at 6 pm. At 6.20 pm, the hon. Lady walked into the House and said that she was going to a meeting.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, we had, unfortunately, to cancel the meeting. When I saw him in the evening of the day when we were to meet, I had been in Europe. He will know that one can travel to Europe and back within a day these days. When he saw me, I was in the middle of a meeting in the House. I went to the Members' Entrance to collect some documents. I offered the hon. Gentleman an appointment before his Bill was due to be heard. He declined to see me.

Mr. Martlew: It is strange that the hon. Lady had a meeting a 6.20 pm when she was due to meet me at 6 pm. It is obvious that something was going on.

As I have said, the Minister refused to see me. The Parliamentary Secretary cancelled two meetings. On the day when my Bill was debated, they sent the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Chamber to run the filibuster to block my Bill. It is obvious that that was done with the knowledge—

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It has been suggested that I have engaged in filibustering. You ruled that I had not, Madam Speaker, and that nothing untoward had occurred. Is it acceptable for such suggestions to continue?

Madam Speaker: Members are responsible for their comments.

The House will appreciate that I provided three hours for the debate. A number of Members had written to me because of the seriousness of the subject. I felt it was one that deserved the full three hours that the House allows me to give for such a debate. I hope that we shall debate the subject, and not personalities, with the seriousness that the House should adopt when approaching extremely important matters in which all our constituents are interested.

Mr. Martlew: If there are no more interruptions, Madam Speaker, I shall come to a conclusion quickly.

The argument is whether we can ban calves going to the veal crates in Europe. In my opinion, we can. The Minister has never said that it would be illegal to introduce a ban. He said in his letter of 1 February that it was likely to be illegal. The Parliamentary Secretary stated in a letter to *The Times* that it was likely to be illegal. But they are not prepared to say categorically that such a ban would be illegal. The transportation of live animals raises difficulties, but it is my view that we could take unilateral action.

The idea that we shall lose our way in the bureaucracy of Brussels and that the demonstrators will go away is nonsense. We have seen the Minister's failure over the past two days to get any movement in Brussels. The idea that the southern Europeans will suddenly change their minds and allow the European Community to ban veal crates is nonsense. We all know that. We must take action soon. We must have debates with the farming industry to ascertain how we can help it. At the end of the day, the cruel trade that we are debating must stop.

10.53 am

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. William Waldegrave): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) on securing the debate and on a sensible and level-headed speech in introducing it. I associate myself with a good deal of what he said.

I think that we all recognise the width and depth of concern in the United Kingdom about these issues. They are famously, I guess, the easiest subjects on which to stir the British people. If a Member wants to increase his mailbag, the answer is to raise the subject of animal welfare. In one sense, it is a tribute to our country. When emotions are so easily stirred, however, it is incumbent on us to try to tell people clearly what the situation is and not to play on emotions. These are emotions easier to stir than to calm.

Some of my criticisms of one or two of those who have offered their advice on these matters do not mean that I doubt their intentions, which I am sure are good. I merely say that it lies on us all in the House and outside to direct energies in a way that does not lead to frustration.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman. I shall observe the advice that has been given by Madam Speaker that my speech should not continue for too long.

Mr. Banks: I am surprised that the Minister has intervened at this stage. I hoped that he would listen to the

[Mr. Banks]

debate and then respond to the various points raised by hon. Members. Will the Parliamentary Secretary respond to the debate? We want some ministerial responses on points that are likely to be made during it.

Mr. Waldegrave: I thought that it would be helpful to the House if I were to intervene relatively early in the debate. After about six months of argument about these matters, we are reasonably clear about the principal lines of argument. It seemed that it would be helpful if the Government were to give a reasonably authoritative answer. Many hon. Members will seek to catch your eye, Madam Speaker. If I am allowed a short intervention at a later stage on any particular point with which I do not deal properly now, I shall seek to make it.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: That is not the way in which these debates should be conducted.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman says from his great wisdom that what I have suggested is not the way in which these debates are conducted. I have spoken in a good many such debates over the years. It is often of help to the House for a Minister to speak at a relatively early stage, and I shall do so this morning.

Let us deal with the history of the matter, but not too much. It goes back quite a long way. Concern about the export of live animals goes right back to the 1950s. Lord Balfour of Burleigh was asked to undertake a report in the 1950s. The result was the setting up of a system of mutual agreements between this country—this was long before we were in the Community—and others. The system was aimed at satisfying people in Britain that, when live animals were exported, welfare standards would be satisfactory. There was a series of bilateral agreements.

In the early 1970s, when a Conservative Government were in office, there was concern among hon. Members on both sides of the House about the continuing trade of live animals. There was an occasion when Conservative Back-Bench Members joined Opposition Members and overruled the advice of the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I do not think that there was a vote, but there was great pressure on the Minister. As a result, he agreed that he would stop the trade and call for a report. The result was Lord O'Brien's report. In those days, the Minister was fully entitled to take that course in the absence of Community law.

Lord O'Brien reported. He found that there was no reason why the trade, properly regulated, should not continue. He observed that there were being put in place a number of Europewide controls—not as many as are in place today, but some were being introduced. The trade restarted after a free vote in the House. Many Conservative Members and some Opposition Members, including the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on agriculture, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang), voted to reopen the trade, as did the present Commissioner with responsibilities for transport in the European Community. I think that it was perfectly sensible of them to do so.

It behoves Opposition Members, however, if they are serious about putting themselves forward for government, to remember what it feels like when in government. The point has already been made. They will be subject to exactly the same constraints. They will be having exactly the same arguments, probably, with their own troublesome Back-Bench Members. We all have them. *[Interruption.]* I apologise for that slip. I cannot think what I was talking about.

Labour Members would sometimes have to say some unwelcome things to well-intentioned and powerfully motivated Back Benchers on their own side. One of the things that they would have to say—

Mr. Jenkin: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Waldegrave: I cannot think how I could have stirred my hon. Friend into action.

Mr. Jenkin: However much sympathy the House may have with the objectives of the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) to ban calve exports, is it not the case that, even if it became law, my right hon. Friend would not be able to act, because if he acted contrary to European Community law he could be prosecuted and sued by those who had suffered financial loss as a result of obeying that Bill instead of Community law, as Community law overrides Acts of Parliament that have been passed by the United Kingdom Parliament?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not know whether it would be me who would be personally sued, but if we passed law that laid us open to damages in the European Court, the Government would have to pay damages. My hon. Friend points that out as though it were something new and astonishing. When we signed the Single European Act, with support from both sides of the House—including many who are known as Euro-sceptics—we were establishing, for the great benefit of this country, a single market. In certain areas, we said that, if the single market is to be maintained, there must be European law to maintain it. That is how we have harried European airlines and European steel companies to get rid of illegal subsidies. That is how we have just managed to get illegal pig support systems in France and illegal mushroom subsidies in Ireland stopped. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander—if I may make an agricultural analogy.

On this matter, I make no apology whatever for saying that the House and, I believe, the majority of those within my party, understood that, when we established the single market, there would be some common European rules, and sometimes they would not always be convenient to us. The judgment was—I think that it is shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House—that, over all, the maintenance of the single market is immensely in the benefit of the United Kingdom, as it is in the benefit of Europe as a whole. I do not think that on this occasion my hon. Friend points to anything particularly new. We knew that there would be rules.

Let us come further forward in history. The decision was taken at the time of the establishment of the single market that we must have better welfare rules for the transportation of animals. That subject was addressed. It was particularly important to us because our licensing arrangements, which involved inspection at the national borders, and so on, had to end because we were moving into the single market. The Community quite rightly said that we could not just dismantle all that and do nothing; we had to have proper standards of transport.

That argument is continuing. Although the Commission made proposals in, I think, 1992 or 1993, they have not yet been agreed. We came near to an agreement last summer, when my predecessor who is now the Secretary of State for

Education was Minister, but we rightly judged that the compromise offer—known in the trade as the Greek compromise—was not satisfactory, because it did not contain the concept of journey limits. There must be a definition of when a journey ends. One cannot just say that there will be a limit of five, 10 or 15 hours. One must define it. There must be a time scale after which it is a new journey, and it must be a long time scale to be meaningful.

The French compromise, which we have been discussing in the past two days, was 12 hours. I do not believe that that is a satisfactory compromise. I do not believe that the House would regard a journey that had been restarted again after 12 hours as a separate journey. I judged that it would be a continuation of the same journey. There must be a longer gap than that.

I have said that three days is a proper gap between journeys, because by then the stress level of the animals has gone right down again, and it probably is a new journey. The Dutch have said that it should be a little bit less than that. One must have a definition of what one means by a journey limit. No journey limit is allowed at present in European law.

Mr. Tony Banks: What about Germany?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is why, incidentally, the Germans, who have passed in their Parliament an eight-hour journey limit, will find that they will be struck down. They have already been challenged by other countries and have had to suspend it.

The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) did not hit the tone of the House quite right today, because we are trying to discuss important and emotional issues in, I hope, a reasonably objective way. If he thinks that this is all Tory villainy on this side, he has not studied the history of the matter. He would be in precisely the same position. It is quite dangerous, if the hon. Gentleman is serious about seeking to win the next election, to build up expectations that he cannot meet. He should think a little bit that his party might conceivably be in power—I hope that it will not be—but if he has pinned it to saying all sorts of things that are then shown to be false, he will make the situation much worse.

It is perfectly clear that one cannot unilaterally introduce journey limits. There is no capacity in European law at present to do that. That is why we must introduce that principle. It is also clear, as I think the hon. Member for Carlisle made clear in his speech, that he knows very well that we could not have a unilateral ban on live exports. He accepted that, because he said that it may well be a bit more difficult to do that—which, I think, is parliamentary language for saying that it would be completely impossible in this circumstance; otherwise, he would be pushing on that as well.

The legal argument is hardly worth entering into, because no one who has looked at it—certainly not Opposition Front-Bench Members, I believe, having read their document—thinks that the extent of interference with the single market and the common agricultural policy would survive for a moment as a legal judgment. It would not be a matter of long argument in the European Court. It would simply be prevented straight away.

We have acted to prevent the illegal German ban on the importation of British beef under the bovine spongiform encephalopathy rules. The scientific evidence in the Community has been translated into rational law and the German Government have had to abandon their unilateral objection to it, quite rightly. That is another example of where the same kind of legal pressures, which, sometimes, we complain about here, work greatly to our advantage.

I hope that I need not detain the House for long on the legal cases that prevent us from having a total ban on the export of livestock. That really is not conceivable, but I will not hide behind that. What is more, I do not think that it would be right to argue that even if we could do it. I am entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton, who opened the debate, and with many other hon. Members and people outside, who say that we must take action to maximise exports of meat, as opposed to live animals. It is already 80 per cent. of the trade by value and it can go up—in sheepmeat, perhaps, most easily.

I know that some of the livestock slaughterers who deal with sheep are hiring French butchers and bringing them over so that French purchasers get the precise cuts they want. That is very intelligent work to do, and we shall be promoting that with the Meat and Livestock Commission and thinking of further things that we can do. We have some money available, in marketing grants, and so on, to help that to develop.

Even if we can do so—I am sure that we can—I do not think that it would be rational or responsible to say to British farmers, "You are going to be the only farmers in Europe who are not allowed to transport any animals across your boundaries." That would be madness. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton said, quoting perfectly correctly the advice of vets—and, by the sound of it, a Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals vet or official—that is not based on any science, either. It is perfectly possible to move animals across 25 miles of water, as long as the conditions are proper, the trucks are right and the people are trained properly.

We must not drift into a position of saying that, if we could, we would ban the export of all animals. We would not. No Government would. It would be crazy to do that. What is more, it would create acute difficulties for Northern Ireland, Scotland and internally in Britain. If one says that animals cannot be moved more than a few miles without stopping, I do not know how sheep farmers—for example, in Cumbria—will carry out their winter pasturing, and so on. We must be a little careful in saying that.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): What are the unsurmountable difficulties in amending legislation so that animals can be transported by rail through the channel tunnel?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is always best, when one does not know the answer to a question, to say so. Therefore, I say that I do not know what the unsurmountable difficulties are. I note that, right from the beginning, the channel tunnel prevented the transport of animals. I should seek veterinary advice before pushing on that point, but I shall look into it. It is slightly frustrating to some that we have the tunnel and cannot use it. I take the hon. Gentleman's point; I suspect that there is a history to the matter which I do not know, so I shall come back to him on it.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): My right hon. Friend might find that, were animals of any kind transported in open lorries on freight trains with open sides through the

[Mr. Roger Gale]

channel tunnel—the only way in which they could be transported—the force of the wind would be such that they would suffer from severe windburn.

Mr. Waldegrave: I suspect that the matter has been looked into, which is why I say that I shall write to the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones).

That brings me to a further point which I shall take out of order in my speech. A way forward may be radically to raise the standard of the transportation vehicles, both ships and lorries, over time. The Irish have what are called pullman lorries, which are of a high standard, with air-conditioning and the capacity to feed and water animals on board. They are used particularly for pigs and for thoroughbred and breeding animals. In the longer term—it cannot be done overnight—we should be focusing attention Europewide on the radical improvement of vehicles and ships. Whether such vehicles could go on trains would have to be considered when the time came.

I return to the subject of veal crates. No one who has seriously considered the matter doubts that a ban on the export of all live animals is out of the question; nor would it be right, although we want to minimise that and maximise the exportation of meat because that is sensible and minimises such problems as exist.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I represent an area with a substantial number of sheep. The right hon. Gentleman will know that farmers in my constituency will share his disappointment that he was unable to secure agreement at the Council meeting during the past two days. However, I wish to impress on him the urgency of reaching agreement in March in particular. We are now coming up to the lambing season in April, May and June, which will be a critical time for farmers in my constituency. Will the Minister ensure that he and his colleagues are in a position to try to secure agreement in March?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman has a particular interest in ensuring that we have sensible rules for the carriage of animals across water and that we do not put ourselves in the position where we cannot do that. He is living proof of the nonsense that would result from that.

I shall return to what happened yesterday. I apologise to the House if I am not as eloquent as the House is used to hearing. I returned late last night and I have not had much sleep. What happened yesterday had some good and some bad elements, to which I shall return because they are the basis of the crucial next step.

However, I want to deal with veal crates. I beg the House to remember that the stoking up of frustration outside by saying that something can easily be done unilaterally is not a sensible way to proceed. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said from a sedentary position that most of the people protesting are Tories. I do not know whether that is true or not.

Mr. Tony Banks: It is.

Mr. Waldegrave: If so, and if they are peacefully protesting, I am proud of them. I am grateful for the endorsement from such a source that Tories lead in concern in these matters. It is helpful of the hon. Gentleman to make that point.

When I talk to such people, to the decent people who are really worried—not the extremists; I am sorry to say that there are some, and dangerous people they are, too—they cannot get over the fact that they have been told again and again that there is something simple that I can do that I am not doing.

There are two reasons why there is not something simple that can be done. First, there is the legal position on veal crates. I have taken legal advice on the matter. There is a long-standing convention that the Government do not publish the detailed legal advice that they receive, and for good reason. The Government will appear in court next week in the case of Lomas, in which we are defending the ban that we imposed on exports to Spain because its slaughterhouse standards were not good. We made a bilateral deal with Spain on that, on which we are being challenged.

We do not want to set out all our advice in detail, because that would be a gift to the other side, who would seek to pick holes in it. However, with the permission of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, I have set out unusually fully the range of arguments that lead us to conclude that it would be irresponsible for a Government of either party to seek to introduce unilaterally a veal crate ban.

The reason is a matter of common sense and law, which sometimes point in the same direction. The Community has passed a legal instrument which defines veal crates, although unsatisfactorily. We were outvoted on the matter. It says what a veal crate is and its exact dimensions. In certain circumstances, where the Community has not put its mind to an issue, the court could say that article 36 could be used because it was claimed that there was a welfare issue.

But where the Community has debated the matter at length and has had all the points put to it before the decision is reached—as they were put by my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for the Environment—and the Community, through all its instruments, endorsed by the European Parliament and the Commission, comes to a conclusion, the court is bound to take the view that the matters were taken into account at the time and cannot be brought up subsequently. That is sensible legal doctrine, and common sense.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is it not worth letting the court so decide? Why should the Minister be both judge and jury in the case?

Mr. Waldegrave: That is not a fair way of putting it. Ministers, of whatever party is in power, have to advise the House on what is a responsible and reasonable way to proceed. For us to introduce a law which we know will be challenged instantly and which may produce a period when the law is completely unclear because rival laws overlap would not be responsible, because it would raise expectations. *[Interruption.]* I shall return to the point made wrongly by the hon. Member for Carlisle about horses. Such a step would simply stoke up anger and confusion. I assure the House that all the advice that I have been given is that it would fail.

Two further points were made which have nothing to do with the situation concerning horses. We have carefully preserved the legal base for our extra ban on the export of horses for slaughter. That is based on an article in a directive, which includes solipeds, sea mammals and birds,

which allows us to take further measures. That is the basis of our legal action on that matter. It has nothing to do with the articles to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

I am determined that that legal basis for our ban on the export of horses will survive. We are making sure that its legal basis remains in any directive that is passed. However, it is wholly misleading to use that special case for additional bans. They would not work at all.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is not the conclusion to be drawn from what the Minister is saying that, at the end of the argument, it is the states of southern Europe that will determine the animal welfare policies of the United Kingdom Government? In so far as many of us believe that they will never change their position, because they have no history of understanding the issues in the way that people do in the United Kingdom, and they do not want to do so for commercial reasons and climatic conditions, surely the Government are saying that they must throw in the towel.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman must not despair. The last two days have been the third occasion in the Council in which I have been involved in the debate. It is perfectly clear that opinion is slowly but steadily swinging in the right direction. It would be misleading to tell the House that the battle is over and the problem will be resolved quickly. A hard, pounding battle faces us, like the battles on, for example, air pollution or environmental standards in the early 1980s when the British Government were initially a bit of a laggard.

Mr. Tony Banks: Thanks to Margaret Thatcher.

Mr. Waldegrave: That took time and caused great frustration. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West mentioned Mrs. Thatcher and said it was her great speech that shifted the whole policy so that progress was made.

It is hopeless to assume that we will always lose the argument. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton made an important point. Italy imports about 6 million animals a year on the hoof, including sheep, goats, horses and cattle. Many of those already come from eastern Europe, Russia and Poland. I am told by vets that the animals are arriving at the end of intolerably long journeys in very poor conditions.

If the House is so pessimistic that it thinks we will lose the battles before we start, it is saying that nothing in Europe will be improved in order to address the issues in those countries and to raise the standard of welfare for millions of animals—not just the few thousand from here—all over Europe. That would be a counsel of despair. It would not be the advice to our people based on animal welfare. It would be the wrong kind of little England attitude—if I may apologise to the Irish, Scots and Welsh who are present—to say let us take our bat away, look at our own corner and give up on the rest.

There is a great prize involved, and we now have a majority in terms of votes and in term of numbers of countries on our side. We are working as a team alongside the biggest and most powerful country in the community—Germany. People from the Scandinavian countries—the Swedes, Danes and Fins—are working closely with us and are concerned about the issues. The Austrians—new entrants to the Community—are also closely with us. The Dutch are closely with us and there are one or two countries that will agree to anything.

The four groups who remain are the Spanish, the Italians, the Greeks and the Portuguese. There is a very big economic interest for Italy and a biggish one for Spain. They have to be shown that real journey limits and journeys that are not too long will not put an overnight stop to the importation of animals. They will get their animals, perhaps at a slightly higher price, although those countries have great skill in extracting from those who pay for the Community certain subsidies to pay for any additional costs that fall on them, and I do not suppose that they would lose that skill. Nor would it be wrong to sugar the pill with some mixture of funds to make it possible, particularly for poorer countries such as Portugal and Greece, to meet the new standards. It would be a better use of funds than some of the uses to which they are put at present.

If we stick to our guns—the issue will not be solved in March—it will be hard pounding. I hope that we will return to the matter in March, but it may be June before that happens. It is not, however, a hopeless task. There is the idea of higher quality transportation and various other ideas that can be put on the table and shoved through.

If, however, the House says to Europe and the Commission that we shall take our bat away, pass illegal laws and give up, we shall be out of the game and we will not be thanked by those in Europe who are serious about raising animal welfare expectations and the strength of the animal welfare movement around Europe. We would be thought to have been pretty irresponsible; we would be locked in battle with the Commission and all those who are our friends would become our enemies. That would be a stupid piece of negotiation.

Mr. Mark Robinson (Somerton and Frome): My right hon. Friend has been at the forefront of bringing the issue to the centre of attention in Europe. He has gone a long way towards persuading other countries to come on side and building a serious consensus whereby we can achieve some sensible regulation. How would we be perceived in Europe if we were to turn around, say that we would act unilaterally and walk away from the issue? We would lose influence and our leadership role.

Sir Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): On the same point, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and I spend much time in the Council of Europe with people from those countries that want to join the Economic Union. The Ukraine is one of those, and throughout this century until the war, thousands of horses were transported in those now notorious cattle trucks. Countries wanting to join the Economic Union sign up to all its decrees before they are allowed in. We were discussing the matter only yesterday. The representatives arrive with lists of lists. The Baltic and eastern European countries are eager to show that they are as civilised as the rest of us, and it is a civilising measure. If we stop, they will have nothing to sign.

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. What is more, there is a danger of doing real damage—if we could get away with it, and I suspect that we could not. If we did that, we could damage British farming, where welfare standards are probably higher than elsewhere in Europe, and deliver the whole trade—the 6 million animals that go to Italy and the large number of animals that go to France and Spain—to eastern European countries; we would have lost the influence to raise the standards before those countries join. We must make proper rules before they join: otherwise, we shall drive the trade away to places where the standards are worse.

[Mr. Waldegrave]

Let me give one piece of evidence that the battle is not the forgone defeat which some people seem almost to hope it is. I remember being told we would get no interest in the veal crate story. I remember being warned that when I raised it in the Council there would be an embarrassed silence and people would say that the English were eccentric. That is not what happened.

I raised the matter in the January Council and I had no idea what the response would be. Eight other countries came in behind me at once and the Commission said that the review of the veal crates which was to be carried out in 1997 would be brought forward to this year. We raised the issue again last night and the Commissioner, Franz Fischler, said that he was now able to strengthen his earlier undertaking that the report would be available by the end of the year; having talked to the relevant experts, he was now able to say that the report would be ready considerably earlier. In terms of getting law through, that is not too bad.

We are concerned not only about the veal crates but about the animals' diet, which is also important. It is no good having calves fed no iron so that they are deliberately brought up anaemic. There are things that we can do: those who think that nothing can be done by persuasion and by raising issues in Europe are too defeatist.

There are also things we can do at home. That is why my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has been doing such good work. She has also done good work in diplomacy, in getting people around Europe to see how important the subject is. I also pay tribute to the RSPCA, which revealed by an operation it carried out last week the appalling situation in two Greek slaughterhouses. Experts went to Athens and did the work where it mattered; they got a big response in Athens, as this has now become a real issue there. I helped them by writing to the Commissioner, and they received an instant response from the Commission, which sent inspectors to see what was going on and to put the matter right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Robinson) asked what would happen if we took away our bat and ball and gave up. A large part of the steam would go out of the issue.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary is leading various measures we are taking to expand exports on the hook and to try to re-establish a British-based veal industry. Rose veal is perfectly satisfactory. The meat tastes nicer than insipid white meat, and it is far better that those male calves should be used for proper food which is humanely reared than that we should go down the route followed by the New Zealanders and knock them all on the head at birth. The farmers and the public would not like that, and it is wasteful and unpleasant. I am strongly against that; therefore, if I possibly can, I shall not introduce the subsidy premium to do that.

We have a difficult but serious set of policies. We need to win the argument in Europe and I believe that we are already winning the veal crate argument. We have a difficult, but not impossible, task on transportation. We have a set of policies for exports on a hook which we can develop further. I would be happy to receive sensible suggestions from the House and the country on what we can do, as we have a little money to spend on that aspect. We must not blackguard the name of meat in general or of veal in general. That would simply make the market collapse and would be extremely short-sighted. All the sub-editors who write headlines condemning veal are actually damaging the cause of humane rearing for a British veal trade.

I welcome today's debate, which has highlighted the current frustration about what are felt to be limitations when there is real progress to be made. I must, however, put the other side of the case, which has already been advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton. While the trade is legal, it is incumbent on the Government to defend it via the police, who do not always find that a very happy task.

As I said at the beginning, this is the easiest of all causes in Britain to stir up and campaign for—although that does not mean that it is wrong. The farmers' argument is more difficult to put, and it is easier to arouse emotional opposition to it. Having myself received hundreds of threats, I must say that some of the threats and so forth that ordinary farmers are receiving are not satisfactory in a civilised society. We must be a rule-based, law-based society, especially if we want to protect the weak—and the weakest of all are the animals.

If we are saying that we want a stronger law on animals, what is the point of applauding those who break the law because they feel strongly? I urge the House to be careful about judging causes by the strength of feeling that lies behind them: those who persecute Salman Rushdie feel at least as strongly as others feel about animals, if not more strongly. The strength of feeling does not justify the cause; what justifies the cause is rational and dispassionate debate such as that with which my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton so eloquently opened today's discussion.

My hon. Friend has shown that there are things to be done, and I hope and believe that the Government are doing them. They will take time, but they are worth doing. I commit Conservative Members—with, I think, a good deal of support from the Opposition—to doing those things, with, I hope, the full-hearted consent of the House.

11.31 am

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I welcome the initiative of the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) in calling for the debate—and, indeed, the decision to allot three hours to it. I commend the hon. Gentleman on his constructive and sensible speech.

Until now, the House has been slow to respond to the widening debate on the live export of animals and the welfare of farm animals in general. One can sympathise with the exasperation of some of the protesters at the apparent failure of the national political system to take action; but perhaps it is an indication of the strength of our democracy that so many people have exercised their right to argue and protest about the issue. This morning's debate is a mechanism for the representation of the public's views.

The protesters, many of whom are Liberal Democrats, have clearly done us all a service. They have raised awareness among the whole population—including politicians—of the animal welfare implications of our farming industry; they have shown a strength of commitment, and they have highlighted how much politics is changing and how much hon. Members must change with it.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us who speaks for the Liberal party? Is it the hon. Gentleman, who expresses sympathy for those who

demonstrate, or is it the party's official spokesman on agricultural matters, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who condemned the demonstrators in the language quoted by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson)? Who speaks for the Liberal party—those who condemn the protesters, or the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey)?

Mr. Harvey: I have heard the hon. Gentleman mumbling about that all morning, so I am grateful for the opportunity to respond.

While the language used by my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on the occasion to which the hon. Gentleman refers was perhaps rather more florid than the language that I might have chosen in the circumstances, two points should be made. First, his remarks should be taken in context: they were made after the protests had turned violent, and at a time when those who had initiated them, like Compassion in World Farming, were disowning the violence. Secondly, his points struck me as eminently sensible.

My hon. Friend said that, if the British took unilateral action, it would be found to be invalid within days; that if we went off on our own, we would lose influence in Europe; and that, if we replaced cruelty to British animals with cruelty to foreign animals, no overall benefit would be achieved. Clearly the protesters would feel that those urging them on had misled them if they proceeded with such a course and ended up disappointed. It seems to me that, whatever my hon. Friend's language, the points that he made were perfectly valid.

I am sure that most hon. Members support the motives of the peaceful protesters of Shoreham, Brightlingsea, Coventry, Plymouth and elsewhere, and want—at the very least—improvements in the welfare of animals that are exported and more exports on the hook rather than on the hoof. The House should, however, move beyond sentiment—important and powerful though that is—to discussing the practical measures that can be taken to alleviate the pain and suffering of animals.

What, then, are the options? First, the Government could respond to demands from hon. Members and others, and introduce a ban on the export of live animals. Secondly, we could allow an effective ban on live exports through ports and airports simply refusing to take the trade. Thirdly, we could tighten existing British regulations on live transport, and enforce them more rigorously. Fourthly, we could campaign for tough Europewide regulations to be effectively implemented.

The first two options may seem superficially attractive. They would ensure that British animals did not suffer the indignities of long-distance transportation or end up in systems that have been banned in the United Kingdom. As I have said, however, they would not reduce the sum of animal suffering in the European Union. British farmers are responding to a demand for locally slaughtered meat in exporting lambs and veal calves, and I see no reason to suppose that demand would not be met if we stopped supplying them via other producers in Europe.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I am a little confused by what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Before coming to the House today, I read the Liberal animal welfare policy document, "A Matter of Conscience", which clearly states:

"until such time as acceptable and enforceable EC-wide standards are in place, Liberal Democrats advocate an end to the live export of animals."

That is not what is being argued by the hon. Gentleman, or by the Liberal Democrat spokesman. What is the Liberal Democrats' policy on the issue?

Mr. Harvey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. I shall continue to build the argument as I proceed, but, for reasons that I have already explained, a Europewide solution must be found.

Mr. Morley: What about the policy document?

Mr. Harvey: I will not debate that point further. The Liberal policy document is exactly the same as the Labour policy document, and no doubt the hon. Gentleman will clarify that policy later.

A range of legal opinion—not least that of the legal director of the RSPCA, who has taken expert advice—has concluded that a ban introduced by the Government could not be sustained after the passing of a unilateral British law. It might not have mattered in 1973, when we entered the European Community, but our obligations under the single market and the general agreement on tariffs and trade make it extremely unlikely that we would not face a challenge.

Some have argued—it has been argued again this morning—that we should press ahead with such a ban in any case, and battle it out in the European Court. The loss of such a battle, however, would return us to square one. All the time, energy and effort put into lobbying for a Bill and pushing it through Parliament would be wasted; as has been said this morning, that time, energy and effort would be better expended on taking the argument to the countries that are delaying progress at a European level. It would probably also force the Government to allow the trade to pass through the ports that have decided, on their own initiative, not to take it.

The problem with the second suggested solution—an ad hoc ban allowing ports that have banned the trade to continue that ban—is that, while it would be effective in the short term, it would not provide a longer-term solution. The fear is that unilateral action by the United Kingdom, whatever its nature, will reduce pressure on the European Union to take action. Surely none of us wants the issue to fall down the agenda of the Council of Ministers, after the progress that has been made.

To some extent, the third option—the tightening of UK regulations—has already been followed by the Government, in response to some of the demands for change from the protesters. I join those who argue that the recent regulations do not go far enough. There have been many suggestions of further action, including those made by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), and I hope that the Government will continue to listen and implement some of them; but there are clearly limits to the effectiveness of regulation in the United Kingdom on its own, especially given the failure to enforce existing European regulations adequately in many other European countries.

How are we to achieve effective and enforceable EU-wide standards? The protesters themselves are clearly playing an important part in keeping the issue at the top of the political agenda. As I have said, more of their protests should be directed at countries whose animal welfare standards are lower than our own. The

[Mr. Harvey]

Government and the House must continue to exert pressure on the Council of Ministers. I commend the Minister on the progress that he has made in that, and I hope that further progress will be made at next months's meeting.

In fairness, the Minister has taken a more robust attitude on this matter than his predecessor, who was persuaded only late in the day last year to support the German proposal for a 15-hour limit on live transport. The Government have now seen the error of their ways. It is a pity that they did not take advantage of the British presidency in 1992. Their report on their achievements during the presidency makes no mention of any action to improve the welfare of animals during transport.

A problem exists on both sides of the issue: the failure to think through the consequences of the actions that have been taken. The Ministry and the Meat and Livestock Commission are thinking only now about how to develop a humane veal industry in the United Kingdom. Why did not that happen at the time of, if not before, the introduction of the veal crate ban in 1990?

Another problem has been the decline in the abattoir industry, where unprecedented centralisation has taken place. The number of abattoirs in this country has fallen to less than half the number in 1979. That has not happened elsewhere in Europe—or even in Northern Ireland—because the relevant Governments have found ways of getting around the problem and requested derogations.

As a result, Wales, for example, no longer has the abattoir capacity to deal with all its lambs, which have to be transported further away for slaughter. Farmers in the constituencies of, for example, my hon. Friends the Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) are simply not able to get animals to a slaughterhouse within eight hours, which we, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and many others would want to see.

Proposals from people who continue to advocate a ban for dealing with the large number of bull calves must be considered closely. I agree with the Minister that the public, farmers or anyone else would not welcome the suggestion that those animals should all be killed at birth. Even if they are, the cost implications of compensating farmers through some mechanism or other will be considerable. Similarly, people say cheerfully that bull calves could go off into the beef herd, but it is clear that most of those animals are not suitable for that purpose. In any event, that would cause immense disruption to the market in beef cattle and beef calves. Neither of those solutions is satisfactory.

In the longer term, we need far more radical change than has yet been considered. The whole thrust of the common agricultural policy needs to be changed. Rather than merely acknowledging the role of farmers and of rural areas, we need to acknowledge the much wider role of maintaining the countryside and protecting animal welfare. That is why we have called for the replacement of the common agricultural policy with a common rural policy; a call that has been echoed by many others, including Professor John Webster, head of Bristol university's veterinary school. With the National Farmers Union, he has argued that European Union funding should be redirected from food production to humane treatment of animals.

All that, however, would take time to implement. We must acknowledge that no magical solution and no quick fix exist. If we fail to acknowledge that, we may be pushed into accepting the wider use of bovine somatotropin in this country and elsewhere, which would increase the cows' milk yield without increasing the number of calves born. We could even get into the realms of genetic engineering to reduce the number of male calves that are born. We would not want either of those options to be embraced. All the options would require a great deal of discussion in the House and beyond.

The Government can and, to some extent, have introduced a series of policies to limit the suffering of animals in transport. More work needs to be done. Today's debate is a welcome start, but it is only a first step. I hope that the Minister will succeed in his efforts to keep this issue at the top of the agenda at the Council of Ministers, that he will keep the House informed of its deliberations, and that he will use the ideas and experience of many hon. Members in developing the necessary policies.

I hope that he will harness the energy of the pressure groups and of the public to work for change at EU level. If the campaign can be taken across the continent, the legitimate demands of protesters, the needs of farmers and the requirement to produce food that is affordable to the public can all be met.

11.44 am

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): This matter has been in the public eye for many months. During that time, and during this debate, I do not think that many people have recalled that the Select Committee on Agriculture, of which I have the honour to be Chairman, examined the matter of animals in transit way back in 1991. Our report, which was unanimously approved by all members of my Committee, treated the matter with common sense and should be a source of reference. I hope that commentators will take the opportunity to study some of the things that we said.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), who was a member of the Committee at that time, has now left the Chamber. He was not enthusiastic then about banning anything except the importation of exotic birds and other special species. The Committee confirmed the necessity for free trade in animals and went into the matter in some depth. It is a bit inconsistent of him to wish to ban the export of calves, but not of sheep. I suspect that that is because there are not too many dairy herds in Carlisle, but there are plenty of sheep. The hon. Gentleman's speech was seriously inconsistent.

My right hon. Friend the Minister set out the matter in common-sense terms. I strongly support the general direction of the Government's attitude to this problem. It is divided into two halves—the transport of animals, and the welfare of those animals once they have left our shores. I shall not go too much into the second point, in case my Committee resolves to examine the matter. I would not wish to anticipate the position. However, it went into the transport issue closely. I should like to remind the House of three important point that we made.

The report states:

"it would be desirable in principle for animals to be slaughtered at the nearest available point."

I think that the House agrees on that. The report continues:

"the Commission should frame legislation which expressly discourages the transportation of slaughter animals over long distances."

The report also urged the then Minister

"to be vigilant in holding the Commission to the spirit of the preamble in any new proposals with which they may come forward."

In other words, British standards are the highest and the best, and we should seek to impose them, rather than be prepared to allow derogation of our standards for the continental ones, which are not as good.

It is easy to say that animals should be slaughtered as near to the point of production as possible, but in many parts of the United Kingdom, slaughterhouses are a great distance away. The islands of Scotland would not be able to produce meat animals if they did not first bring them across on ferries and on other transport. I shall be interested to hear what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) says on that subject.

The Minister's decision to continue to block the export of live food animals to countries that fail to meet the new European Community directive gains unanimous support on both sides of the House. Even though the Community has subsequently removed the legality of some of the actions that we have taken, we understand that chief vets in the countries concerned are co-operating. We are moving towards EC-approved slaughterhouses, the standards of which are much higher than those of many of the slaughterhouses that, I am sad to say, we have been using in this country.

I am being diverted down a different road from the subject under discussion. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister uses the support that the Committee gave him when he presses these matters in Brussels. We made it clear that Community safeguards should be consistent with British statutes. The Government used just that phrase in their response to our Committee's report.

The maximum period of travel without rest is a contentious issue, but, having taken expert evidence, the Committee concluded that one of the most stressful factors in animal transport is the loading and unloading of those animals. When a properly equipped lorry is properly loaded with the right size of animal and in the right density, conditions are less stressful than when animals are taken on and off. I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) is nodding in agreement. As an experienced livestock man, he will concur that it is the stress that we want to avoid.

We did not go along with the RSPCA and others who have sought an eight-hour limit. We thought that the general limit should be 12 hours for any species, with the possible exception of horses, but with a 15-hour limit if that was to be the termination of the journey. That would be in line with Britain's existing legislation, although the Community has yet to adopt such figures. My right hon. Friend the Minister has the Committee's support in trying to achieve a lower limit on the continent.

The Committee recommended that vehicles should be certified. There is no question about the Dutch having a very high standard. It is quite wrong to think that all continental animal transport is cruel; it is not. During our inquiry, we learned that Holland is the second largest exporter of food in the world. It would be no use a Dutch exporter sending his pigs to southern Italy only for them to arrive in a poor condition. It does no good to any farmer or transporter if the product does not arrive in good condition.

There is no will to transport animals cruelly. There can be no advantage in doing so. From reading some of the articles in the press and seeing some of the advertisements placed by animal welfare societies, one might think that there were some advantages to transporting animals cruelly.

The Committee would like animal transport to be more rigidly checked. We were not convinced that, even in this country, checks were as rigid as they should be—and we were far from convinced that on the continent checks were even carried out. We hope that something can be done about that.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that one point that should be firmly stressed is the fact that, year after year, exports of bloodstock and of pedigree livestock for breeding purposes are carried out to the most humane standards possible? There is no reason why exports of livestock for slaughter should not reach the same high standards.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I agree with my hon. Friend. It simply does not pay the farmer or the transporter to produce animals, even those for slaughter, in poor condition.

The Committee suggested that there should be more official training for the drivers of vehicles. Unfortunately, the Government rather ran away from that idea, and took the view that more regulation was unnecessary. I was rather sorry about that, because it would be helpful if a training scheme were to be introduced for the drivers of vehicles carrying livestock.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government have now accepted the Committee's advice. Included in the parts of the European directive that are agreed—although the key bits are not agreed—is a training scheme for drivers.

Sir Jerry Wiggin: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. The Committee has not considered the matter for a year or two, so I was not fully up to date with the current position. I welcome what he has said.

I shall deal now with documentation. Much of the key to the welfare of animals in transport is ensuring that we know where the animals have come from, when they left there and where they are going. One problem raised by those who want a selective ban on veal calves—for example, those going for veal production—is how we can find out what will happen to those animals when they leave our shores and we no longer have any direct control over them. Therefore, the idea of a selective ban is ludicrous.

The Committee strongly supported the Government's view on the export of horses. The way we solved that problem was extremely clever, and I am sure that it is supported on both sides of the House.

I realise that time is short. It is regrettable that the procedures of the House do not permit the debating of Select Committee reports in greater detail and sooner after they are published. Had we had an opportunity to debate our report at the time, a few lessons would have been learnt and people would remember the interest that a Select Committee of the House had taken in such an important subject.

11.54 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I endorse what the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) said about debating reports from Select Committees. It is silly that hon. Members should serve on these Committees and produce reports after considerable deliberation, only for them never to be discussed on the Floor of the House. One could say it was almost time wasting. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for this work as Chairman of the Select Committee on Agriculture.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is a Christian gentleman—*[Interruption.]* He endorses that accusation. I am sure that if my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) were here, he would defend himself. If, over the years, he has changed his position on the export of veal calves, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, as a Christian gentleman, would welcome his conversion. A sinner repentant is welcome in heaven, even if, in this case, heaven is the Agriculture Select Committee.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) on choosing this subject for debate, which is named "Export of live animals". I believe that we should avoid the export of animals for slaughter as much as possible. I should prefer a complete ban; animals for consumption should be on the hook, not the hoof.

The RSPCA position on maximum journey times is quite clear—eight hours from wherever the journey starts to the abattoir. Of course I understand that there are implications for Britain because of its geographical position. Nevertheless, I believe the RSPCA demand to be reasonable. The Germans adopted a similar view within their law. They may now be moving away from that position, but that is another matter. At least they decided, in their wisdom, to adopt such a law.

The hon. Member for Sutton mentioned the European Parliament. In December 1993, it took a specific vote on the issue and, by 271 votes to six, decided to impose a maximum eight-hour journey time. If there is to be progress in journey times and animal welfare in Europe, it is important to try to achieve that during the French presidency. However much I endorse what the Minister said, he should never go into negotiations pessimistically—he should always go in intent on winning. Certainly Lady Thatcher always took that attitude in Europe, even if she did not always emerge as successfully as she thought she had. If we wait for the Spanish, Italian and Irish presidencies, which follow the French, we will have even more difficulties than we are experiencing now.

The hon. Member for Sutton spoke about taking the protest to Brussels—into Europe. I agree, but that does not mean that we should stop protests here. We must protest in all the countries of Europe, although I accept that in particular we should protest in Brussels. I understand that on Monday the Minister received a petition organised by the RSPCA, which had been signed by 2.5 million people. They were not all people from this country; European nationals signed the petition. It called for a maximum eight-hour journey time and other animal welfare measures such as the training of drivers.

The right hon. Gentleman was right to say that the RSPCA has been campaigning in other European countries—for example, France, Greece and Spain. It is not something specific to eccentric English people. Many people are protesting in European capitals and countries. That is right thing to do.

The Government have often spoken about leading Europe on this issue. I give credit to the Minister for doing more than his predecessor did. When the right hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard) entered into the negotiations last year, she was lagging far behind the Germans, the Dutch, the Belgians and the Danes on the issues of journey times and animal welfare. Perhaps we should be grateful that we have a new Secretary of State—[HON. MEMBERS: "Minister."] I am sorry, I have promoted the right hon. Gentleman—obviously something that will never happen to me.

I shall now discuss veal calves. Everyone who understands or knows anything about the way in which the veal calf is produced in the veal crate will be repelled by the concept of placing a young calf for six months in conditions that one would only describe as inhuman, barbaric and abominable. That is why the Government rightly banned the production of veal in veal crates. However, we thereby reach the absurd and, at times, hypocritical position, as many understand it, of banning the production of veal in veal crates in this country but exporting the same calves to be produced in veal crates and re-importing the product. It appears illogical.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The hon. Gentleman's speech is extremely interesting. Stepping aside from the hypocrisy for a moment, I understand that about 1.25 million unwanted male calves are born to the British dairy herd each year. What does the hon. Gentleman suggest that we do with those?

Mr. Banks: I accept that. It is fully understood that those calves are unsuitable for the beef trade. Perhaps people who are tucking into their cheese and drinking their milk should think a little more about the implications of what they are doing.

Mr. Duncan: They should eat British veal.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman asked me a question, and I shall answer him. One of the ways of solving the problem is to stop eating cheese and drinking milk. *[Interruption.]* Yes, the hon. Gentleman asked me my opinion, but I am an eccentric and a total loony. I accept that, so let not anyone else shout that out before I have admitted it.

If we were to ban the export of veal calves, it would give greater impetus to our own veal-producing industry, but I accept that demand for veal in this country has never been especially significant, and indeed is declining. However, those matters must be considered. If we find it necessary to move to a position in which male calves are killed at birth, that would have to be accepted. It is easy for me to say that, because I am not a veal calf. I should not like to be exterminated at birth, although I am sure that a few Conservative Members think that it would have been a good idea.

We must accept that implication, if need be; we must consider all the options, but I accept that that is one of the problems.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: No; but I shall in a moment.

It appears absurd that, although we have banned the method of production, we re-import the product that comes from the same method of production somewhere else. The same is true of paté de foie gras. One could not produce paté de foie gras in this country, force-feeding geese as the French do, because it would be illegal, but we are nevertheless prepared to import it into the country. Many people feel that that is an illogical position, which should be rectified.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman's speech is interesting and powerful.

Some people, led by some supermarkets, are selling veal that may be imported but take great care to ensure that it comes from humane rearing sources in Holland and elsewhere. I hope that nothing that we say today will diminish our commitment to that type of effort, because, every time that a supermarket does that, it helps us to ensure that animals are reared humanely before we manage to change the law to ensure that they are reared humanely.

Mr. Banks: The right hon. Gentleman is reading my notes, because that is precisely what I intended to say. Sainsbury's is one of the supermarkets that does that voluntarily. It would be helpful—we have asked Ministers questions about it—to make it compulsory to declare the method of production on goods, so that the consumer can exercise choice. If the consumer does not have the choice of deciding, "I do not want that veal because I do not like the method of production," we are not empowering the consumer as we should. Naturally, I welcome the fact that some supermarkets do so. I regret the fact that many others do not.

Mr. Jenkin: Some of us find it confusing that some of the most enthusiastic proponents of European union do not support my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in his efforts to achieve what we need to achieve on a European basis, and that they are the first to argue for a unilateral ban, which would appear to put the hon. Gentleman on to the Euro-sceptic side of the argument.

Mr. Banks: Is it not interesting that the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) is one of the most fervent Euro-phobes in this place, and continually pushes his colleagues to opt out, not to accept, to stand up and fight and so on, yet on that issue he is not prepared to urge his colleagues to do precisely that?

Mr. Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Banks: I cannot give way. *[Interruption.]* All right, I will, but Madam Speaker said that speeches should be 10 minutes long and I am trying to stay within that limit, because many Conservative Members want to speak.

Mr. Jenkin: My position is absolutely clear. I believe that the House should have, and ultimately has, the authority to decide what goes across our frontiers. I do not accept that this Parliament has lost its sovereignty. The policy of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food would have more authority if he acknowledged that the House had the power to ban live exports.

Mr. Banks: The Minister is arguing completely the opposite, but on this occasion I will join hands with the hon. Member for Colchester, North. It is a strange alliance. We make odd bedfellows—metaphorically, of course, not literally. Under the circumstances, I welcome what he has said.

Let me say something to the hon. Member for Sutton, who unfortunately is not in his place at the moment. The hon. Gentleman spoke with all the certainty of ignorance about the protesters who have been standing outside the harbour at Shoreham and at various other places throughout the country. I am a vegetarian, but I know that not all those protesters are militant vegetarians or vegans. Some are likely to be, but I suspect that most are meat-eaters.

I know, as a result of having perhaps the heaviest correspondence of any Member in the House about animal welfare issues, that many of the letters that I receive start, "I write as a lifelong Conservative supporter" and they often continue, "and I am not going to vote Tory again." It is not for me to help the Conservative party win back its lost support, but I shall make those letters freely available to Ministers so that they realise that those protesters, in many respects, are not militant vegetarians or vegans. Some protestors are vegetarians, like me, but many are middle-aged, middle-class Tory supporters, who are repelled by the trade.

Mr. Waldegrave: No one doubts the hon. Gentleman's commitment or concern, so it would be helpful if he would join me in unequivocally condemning those who use threats. We have all probably received such threats. I have received hundreds of very sick letters indeed. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me in saying that farmers, parliamentarians and so on should not receive such letters, and that that way of persuading people is utterly wrong.

Mr. Banks: I have no difficulty in saying that I agree, because such behaviour is diversionary. The media seize on those isolated examples—as did the hon. Member for Sutton, reading extracts from *The Times*—as a way of suggesting that the great mass of public opinion and the great mass of protesters are not genuine, decent, law-abiding people, many of whom have never been out on a protest before but who are moved to protest because they find that trade so abhorrent.

Mr. Duncan *rose—*

Mr. Banks: I cannot take up the time of the House much longer—a minute more perhaps.

Article 36 of the treaty of Rome appears to offer the Government a way out.

Mr. Waldegrave *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Banks: The Minister shakes his head. There is conflicting legal advice about it. It is often said that, if one does not like the advice that one receives from one lawyer, one should go and buy another lawyer. That might not be what the Government want to do, but I believe that it is worth imposing a ban under article 36.

If we ban the export of veal calves and the import of veal, we cannot be said to be interfering in trade in terms of giving preference to our domestic industry, because it is true that the farmers of this country will receive the greatest impact of the ban. It is difficult to imagine a way in which that could be challenged from outside these shores. If it is not challenged, we have won; if it is

[Mr. Banks]

challenged, I hope that the Minister would show more enthusiasm to defend it than he is now doing by shaking his head. He has already spoken about the minimum value order for horses. I know for a fact that he has said that, if that were challenged in the European Court, it would probably be lost, but he stands by that position and is ready to defend it in the European Court. We want some political will from the Government.

I am prepared to support the Government in their negotiations on improvements in animal welfare when they negotiate in the interests of animals and public opinion, but not when they are in thrall, acting as the lickspittles of the National Farmers Union.

12.9 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): It is a pleasure to be able to follow my friend, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who is a regular contributor to the debates that we hold internally in the all-party animal welfare group. The hon. Gentleman referred to his eccentricity on some of these matters, but nobody would gainsay his commitment to the cause of animal welfare or the sincerity with which he holds his views.

Sadly, I must almost immediately differ from the views expressed by the hon. Gentleman. He knows me well enough to understand that if I thought that there was a snowball's chance in hell of achieving a legitimate ban on the export of veal calves or, in general, of live animals for slaughter, I would be going for it hell for leather.

From a sedentary position, the hon. Member for Newham, North-West mentioned the situation facing Germany. Where one country has tried to introduce a unilateral ban—Germany is the only one that has—it has immediately been taken before the European courts by other countries. Were we to go down that road, I fear that the transporters, the farmers and others involved in the trade on both sides of the channel would immediately sue for large sums of money.

Also from a sedentary position, I heard the hon. Member for Newham, North-West say earlier, "Go for it. It's our money." I am not entirely certain that those who elect us would take that view once the bills started to come in.

I hope to be brief, if only because my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) covered so much of the ground in his excellent opening speech. I pay tribute to him for raising the issue and giving us an opportunity to debate it on such a relevant day, given my right honourable and bleary-eyed Friend's labours in Brussels over the past couple of days. It is immensely helpful to have this early opportunity to hear the present position from the Front Bench, whether we like it or not.

On behalf of the all-party group—I can probably speak for most if not all of its members—I must say that we respect the fact that my right hon. Friend has gone into bat very hard on this issue and has taken a robust line. I pay tribute also to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for the tireless work that she has done at grass-roots level with Ministers throughout the European Community, going round and trying to win hearts and minds. That is how the battle will be won, and I believe that it will be won.

For the past two years under my chairmanship, and before that under your distinguished chairmanship in another incarnation, Madam Deputy Speaker, the all-party animal welfare group has sought European solutions to animal welfare problems. In recent years we have had to recognise that, if we are to provide genuine solutions to animal welfare problems as opposed to populist tabloid newspaper headlines, we will have to do it on a Europewide basis. If there was ever need of the proof of that pudding, the veal crate problem undoubtedly provides it.

I concede immediately that I was one of those who welcomed the ban on veal crates in the United Kingdom. Shortly after that it became apparent, to some of us at least, that that was a pyrrhic victory. We did not ban the use of veal crates, we simply promoted the trade in other parts of the European Community. We moved the problem from A to B and some of us tried to pretend that we had solved it. That was not the case.

I do not believe that there is any merit in seeking a unilateral ban on anything if the practice continues on mainland Europe. If, by damaging our own trade, we simply create circumstances in which hundreds of thousands, probably millions, of cattle, sheep and pigs are imported into the European Union under infinitely worse conditions and over much longer distances from the eastern bloc, that is not contributing to the cause of animal welfare that I wish to promote as chairman of the all-party group.

As painstaking and unpopular as it may be on occasions—it is certainly not populist—my right hon. Friend the Minister and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary are correct to seek to press the cause within the European Union. I endorse entirely the actions of those, particularly the RSPCA, who have sought to take the battle, not to the tabloid headlines in the United Kingdom, but to the Ministers and the streets of Europe where the hearts and minds will have to be won.

My right hon. Friend currently has most of the northern states with him. That is a tremendous achievement and we should not gainsay it. Unfortunately, the southern states—Spain, Italy and Greece in particular—are less helpful. Millions of those who have been applauding what they have seen on television and some of those who have been demonstrating on the streets go to Spain, Italy and Greece for their holidays and eat the meat that comes from the animals about whose transport and slaughter they are complaining. Perhaps it behoves us now to remind our Spanish, Italian and Greek colleagues that those of us in the United Kingdom who use their holiday facilities do not approve of some of their practices and that we look to them for support to end once and for all the need for a trade that most of us find abhorrent.

I should like to see an end to the transport of live animals for slaughter in its entirety. It is not necessary in this day and age. My right hon. Friend said that he would welcome suggestions about ways in which we might achieve the export of more meat on the hook. I concur with those who have said this morning that our abattoir facilities are, for some very good reasons and some less good reasons, inadequate.

We have high-quality abattoirs, but they are not necessarily in the places where they are most needed by the farming community. Associated British Ports has told me that it has land at ports which, under the right circumstances, it might be prepared to make available for

abattoir facilities. I urge my right hon. Friend urgently to seek ways of investing in new and better abattoir facilities and in the cutting of meat specifically for the European market so that we can have the added value in this country and export our meat on the hook almost in its entirety. I should like to see the lot on the hook, not on the hoof. If we could do that, we would have brought about a major achievement. It could not happen overnight, but within months we could obviate much of the problem.

I must come back to the European solution. I have had to accept—I understand that not everybody in the House accepts this, but I do not believe that this is a party political issue—that the legal position does not allow us to pursue a unilateral ban. More than that, I genuinely believe that if my right hon. Friend, with support from both sides of the House, can win this battle, win the hearts and minds of his colleagues in the Council of Ministers and carry the sort of European directive that we want on this issue, we will have taken an enormous leap forward in European animal welfare. If we can win this battle, it will help us to win battles over the use of animals in medical experiments Europewide, in the import of wild-caught birds into Europe and in fiesta sports. That would be a major achievement.

12.18 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): The House can be in no doubt that the British people care a great deal about animal welfare, and today's debate has demonstrated that the House welcomes that concern. Many would argue that one of the hallmarks of a civilised society is the way in which it treats its animals.

When considering what legislation should be in place and what measures we should implement to avoid animal cruelty as far as possible, we must be objective. We must recognise that animals experience pain and strain, but it is wrong to assume that they think in the same way as humans and that what is comfortable for a human being would also be comfortable for an animal and vice versa. We must base our discussions and our decisions on the most objective scientific criteria available, but it must certainly be our objective to achieve legislation which ensures that animals are well looked after on the farms and that the opportunity for their ill-treatment in transportation and, of course, through methods of slaughter is absolutely minimal.

Mr. Duncan *rose—*

Dr. Strang: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I shall give way rarely because I am keen to allow a number of hon. Members to speak.

Mr. Duncan: To that end, is it or it is not official Labour party policy to support the private Member's Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew)?

Dr. Strang: I shall come to that point. We do not accept that the Minister is necessarily correct in his interpretation of the legal position with regard to calves, although we certainly accept the position with regard to sheep. Some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) may turn out to be germane to the final assessment of the legal position, but let me move on.

I appreciate the Minister's contribution to the debate. It is excellent that he is putting forward the Government's position in this Adjournment debate. I especially appreciate his presence in view of the tremendous pressure that he has been under in the past two days, involving, I understand, many hours of negotiation into the early hours of this morning. The House very much appreciates the Minister being able to give us the very latest position and explain why the negotiations failed in Brussels.

The Minister commented on the history of the matter and it is worth adding to it. It should be recalled that we extended the maximum journey time of animals in legislation passed by the House of Commons. Before 1 January 1993, animals were allowed to travel for a maximum of 12 hours before they were fed, watered and rested, unless the journey could be completed in 15 hours. The Welfare Animal Transport Order 1992 increased the maximum interval from 12 to 15 hours. The requirement for animals to be fed and rested for 10 hours and inspected near the port of export was also scrapped on 1 January 1993.

Then, the Greek presidency compromise, as the Minister rightly described it, was discussed in June. That proposal stipulated 22 hours of transport before animals should have to be fed, watered and rested. There is no question that the British Government were minded to support that. Indeed, the then Parliamentary Secretary, the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), said on 16 June that the Greek proposals were

"a great step forward for animal welfare in the Community".

He went on to indicate the Government's support of them.

When the Minister's predecessor—I make no apology for putting this on the record—the right hon. Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard), got over to Brussels, she discovered that, notwithstanding the British Government's support, since Belgium was joining Germany and the other opponents to the proposal, the proposal was to be defeated. So rather than vote for the proposal, lose the vote on the basis of qualified majority voting and have to justify that position, the Government flipped over and voted against it.

The Government's stance has been transformed since then, which we applaud and welcome. The stand now being taken by the Minister, which goes back to earlier in the year—he can now claim, along with the Germans, to be leading on the issue and seeking to drive it forward—is a mile away from what previously prevailed. We strongly support that new stance, and certainly think that the Minister was right not to go along with the final compromise put forward by the French presidency, which is rather technical, as some of us will have read in the quality newspapers, or heard on the wireless and seen on the television this morning.

The Minister has tried very hard to get a satisfactory agreement on journey times, which we applaud. He was right not to accept what was on offer, and we wish him well in the discussions next month. He has warned us—I am not criticising him, far from it—that it may not be as easy as some people think to bridge the huge gulf that still exists between the southern states and the more northern states of the Community, where the electorate feel strongly and, let us be honest, have much higher standards of animal welfare.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the RSPCA special operations unit trailed 21 vehicles during their journey from the United Kingdom to European destinations and that 14 of those exceeded the

[Dr. Robert Spink]

15-hour limit without providing food, drink and rest for the animals? What action does he think that the British Government should take to prevent such practice?

Dr. Strang: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raises that point. I add my congratulations to the compliments paid by the Minister to the work of the RSPCA in that area.

That brings me to a point that I want to develop. For some time, the Labour party has advocated a licensing scheme for lorry drivers and hauliers. Of course, we were very pleased when subsequently the European Commission included among its package of proposals last year a European licensing scheme. Unfortunately, its implementation is not likely to be achieved in the short run, so we would like the British Government to go ahead with a national licensing scheme. That would stipulate that if a haulier were to move animals over a substantial distance—obviously it would not apply to normal, short journeys—such as the distances involved in cross-channel journeys, the haulier and its and driver would require a licence.

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Agriculture, say that the Committee was interested in such an approach, although it was not identical to what we are advocating. The scheme would require high standards of hauliers and drivers and provide some training, advice and guidance for drivers. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, those of us with some experience of farming, as he has, know that the most stressful time for animals is when they are loaded on and unloaded off vehicles. It is perfectly possible for animals to be transported in reasonable conditions, although, sadly, it is also possible for them to be transported in appalling conditions, and we have seen some disgraceful examples of that which we want to eliminate.

Mr. Waldegrave *rose—*

Dr. Strang: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman soon, as I am keen to hear his view.

Although the Labour party advocates a national licensing scheme, we would prefer a European scheme. Before the Minister intervenes, I would like to put to him the grounds on which he criticises the scheme, so that I may better understand it.

If the scheme were implemented, a haulier would lose its licence in the UK if it did not comply with it and was found to be treating animals cruelly. It is galling to see on television an individual driving lorries on to vessels going across the channel when most people involved know that that person had been convicted of animal cruelty. That upsets and angers people. Obviously, it would never happen under our proposal.

I may be putting it too strongly, but I understand the Minister's objection. He thinks that the scheme could be applied in the UK—remember we are talking not only about the movement of animals across the channel but through the United Kingdom and across long distances in Scotland and the animals being looked after well during that transportation—but that there would be nothing to stop hauliers taking animals across the channel and immediately moving the animals to another vehicle.

My response to that criticism is that it would be bound to increase the costs of transporting animals such as sheep. We are not advocating a ban on the movement of live sheep across the channel, although we want the number of live sheep transported to decrease as quickly as possible because we are not happy about it. That would enormously increase the cost of the operation. It would be a financial penalty if, once across the channel, the animals had to be unloaded and put on a second vehicle. Therefore that in itself would be a positive factor.

Secondly, would it not provide a tremendous focus for people on the continent if they understood the extent of the cruelty? It would provide a focus if it was known that the British people had laid down conditions to be met by the lorry drivers when transporting animals, but that, on the continent, rather than meeting the conditions, those involved were unloading the animals and placing them on an unlicensed vehicle. I put that argument to the Minister and shall be happy to hear what he says.

Mr. Waldegrave: I hope that the House will forgive me for intervening, but this is an important point. The hon. Gentleman is making a good speech, and it will perhaps be helpful to the House to debate such issues, including that raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink), which is similar.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point said, we believed that some people were not following the journey plan that they had given to our vets, and were running over the limit—the RSPCA had shown that to be so. Therefore, we introduced a recent amendment to the transport order so that anyone not adhering to the journey plan could be prosecuted here. That is as far as we can go in making the provision stick. The trouble is that I am told that people are doing what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) and I feared that they might—changing to foreign hauliers as soon as they have crossed the channel.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: They switch contractors.

Mr. Waldegrave: As the hon. Gentleman says, they switch contractors.

Although I have introduced that amendment, and I think that it was a sensible thing to have done—anything that we can do, we shall do—it does not solve the problem. I do not rule out the suggestion of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East. If we do not achieve in reasonable time a European licensing system—which the hon. Gentleman and I agree would be much better—we shall have to consider all the options again. I fear that the provision has not solved the problem, for the reason that I gave. It may put up the costs, but unfortunately people seem to be willing to accept that.

Dr. Strang: That has been a helpful exchange. The first sentence of the Minister's press release states:

"Britain is to introduce national measures to improve welfare protection for animals during transport following the failure of the EC Agricultural Council to reach an agreement."

That was the point raised by the Minister. I cannot recall where it is stated in the press release, but the Minister certainly said that one of the pluses of the system was that authorities of the member states on the continent were to help the Government to police it. The Minister was effectively saying that Governments of the member states were not delivering their undertaking.

Mr. Waldegrave: The point is not that those Governments are not helping, but that they can only help us to provide evidence against British-originating hauliers, which they are doing.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: There is another way.

Mr. Waldegrave: If there is another method, as the hon. Member for Workington has suggested, I shall look at it. We shall not rule out anything. I agree with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East—if we can achieve a Europewide system, it will be far better.

Dr. Strang: The Minister's intervention was constructive and helpful.

Mr. Campbell-Sayours: The options that we are currently considering are whether to have a pan-European or a domestic licensing system. There is no reason why the Minister should not ask French Governments and other Governments bordering the channel to introduce licensing systems unilaterally. If they were to do that, we might—by tying up the licensing system with pre-transport arrangements for animals going into the mainland Community—be able to resolve the problem with licences rather than have a pan-European arrangement.

Dr. Strang: That is an interesting point. If we introduced a licensing scheme, perhaps the Germans, and even the French, might follow.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: I shall not give way, as I want to allow time for at least two more speeches before the end of the debate. I am sorry, but I have given way repeatedly.

It is surely accepted that the transportation of veal calves to crates is cruel. The House of Commons legislated because it is cruel. It is indefensible that, having deemed the system to be cruel—having said that it is wrong to put calves in narrow crates, raise them in relative darkness and feed them an artificial and unbalanced diet—we should transport our calves across the channel into precisely that system. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, not only are we doing that, but we are buying back the veal from the continental producer. That cannot be defended.

Of course, we support the Minister's efforts at a European level. We are not persuaded of the Minister's legal advice. Much work is being done on the subject and I believe that there could well be a different legal position. That has nothing to do with transport, but is based on whether the—

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Strang: No, I have said that I shall not give way again.

The legal position is based on whether the calf directive is sufficient to block national action here. There are other arguments that I shall not develop this morning.

In a single market, it is one thing to export an inanimate object that is to be finished or a food ingredient such as grain or flour to be turned into bread, but we are not talking about that. We are talking about sentient creatures and have to adopt a different approach. That issue must appear on the agenda—it is not just a matter of the single market.

Mr. Clappison *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am sorry, but the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) must resume his seat. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) has made it clear that he is not giving way.

Dr. Strang: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am certainly not giving way.

We support the Minister's efforts to achieve progress at a European level. That will be better for all the reasons that he gave—there are so many more animals involved and so much more cruelty and abuse will be eliminated if we act on a European level, not just a British one. However, that must not become an excuse for not doing everything that we can nationally. We must consider the subject in its entirety and take every possible action. It is the responsibility of all of us—Members of Parliament, farmers, transporters, slaughterers and the community—to prevent unnecessary cruelty to animals.

12.37 pm

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) on securing the Adjournment debate, which is very well-attended. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on his speech. We have come to expect good speeches from him, but today's was particularly commendable as he has spent two trying days in Brussels. It is deliciously ironic that Opposition Members who are first in the Lobby to vote for ever-closer union and single institutional frameworks suddenly discover the logic of their own voting records and are surprised to realise that they have largely succeeded in neutering the mother of Parliaments—assuming that a mother can be neutered—through the consequences of their actions.

My right hon. Friend the Minister mentioned some of the protesters—a subject on which there has been much discussion. Many of the protesters are well-meaning people, but, sadly, those who represent rent-a-mob are not well-meaning and a number of them have been travelling around the countryside. I hope that my right hon. Friend will not think that the protesters have a lot of time on their hands. They tour the countryside picking up the dole wherever they happen to be—demonstrating against the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill, committing mass trespass on my right hon. Friend's farm, travelling down to the docks. The only danger is that they may exceed the 48-hour directive.

I know from 30 years' experience just what an organisation the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was in days gone by. There were sometimes 5,000 animals at market in a single day. The RSPCA inspectors were always present, and the relationship between them and the auctioneers was close. If an inspector came to us and said that an animal in the market was unfit to be there, it immediately went home or to the slaughterhouse.

I wish that I could say that I have had the same high respect for the RSPCA in recent years. Although it still performs much good work, it has become just another political lobby group. That is a very sad development, because I think that the RSPCA could have played a vital part in the hours question. I have listened to the arguments about whether there should be an eight, 10 or 15-hour limit on journeys, but I am not sure that that is the point.

[Mr. Roger Knapman]

We could decide upon a maximum journey length of 10 hours, but what if a journey takes only 11 hours? My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) mentioned the process of unloading and reloading and my right hon. Friend referred to the three-day rest which would have to be taken for the sake of an extra hour's journey, perhaps on a major motorway. I believe that there should be some discretion in this area and the RSPCA could play a role in enforcing that discretion. I hope that that organisation will get politics out of its system before we reach any more agreements with it.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): Is my hon. Friend aware that Professor Jeffcote at the veterinary school in Cambridge has undertaken scientific research with regard to stress on animals in transit and has collected substantial data about it? Does my hon. Friend agree that, rather than plucking figures for journey times out of the air—whether it be eight hours, 10 hours or whatever—we should try to use scientific evidence as a basis for reaching decisions about the correct length of journey time for different animals?

Mr. Knapman: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend; I think that a lot more work should be done in that area. There is no "right" number of hours that animals should spend in transit. It may be highly convenient for parliamentary draftsmen and others to mention a number of hours as the basis of an agreement, but we should press for a certain amount of flexibility in the system. I suspect that Professor Jeffcote would find that the animals who were subjected to the activities of rent-a-mob as they passed through the ports suffered quite a bit of stress.

Once we have moved away from the views of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and others, the reality is that farmers thrive if their animals thrive. They want to sell their animals and by looking after them properly they increase the value of their stock. That point must not be overlooked. What would happen if there was a unilateral ban?

Mr. Duncan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. When I intervened on the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Dr. Strang) the hon. Gentleman undertook to answer later in his speech my question whether it was official Labour party policy to support the Bill of the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew). However, he failed to do that in his speech. Although he addressed the ambiguity of the law—a problem that we are all wrestling with—he did not come off the fence about that matter. Therefore, the House is entitled to conclude that Labour party Front Benchers do not support the Bill of the hon. Member for Carlisle.

Mr. Knapman: To be fair to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East, I think that he said that he agreed with certain points that the hon. Member for Carlisle made, but that he could not attend the debate on Friday, probably because he was busy elsewhere. The Labour party's paper on animal transport says:

"we will seek a ban through the European Commission and Council of Ministers."

If that is what the Labour party intends to do, the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Carlisle cannot be Labour party policy. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, East has not addressed that point, although he has been invited to do so several times this morning.

Mr. Clappison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. On the point about the legal advice to which the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East referred, is my hon. Friend aware that when the Labour party was in power it received the O'Brien report, which contained legal advice that a unilateral ban of the sort that the hon. Member for Carlisle favours was not clearly justified? It is even less likely to be justified now because, under the Community's directives on calf production, the ground has been occupied. If a unilateral ban were imposed, this country would face a legal mess and the Commission may have warned the Government to that effect.

Mr. Knapman: That is a fair point. If the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East has forgotten his own voting record, he may also have forgotten some of the finer points of the O'Brien report.

Mr. Waldegrave: I apologise for intervening in the debate once again, but I wish to assist the House. When a similar Bill was introduced by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), the Commission wrote to the British Government and said that such legislation would be contested. It is not simply a matter of my receiving legal advice; the Commission is extremely equivocal when it wants to be, but it knew that it would win any such case.

Mr. Knapman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making the position clear. I understand that the hon. Member for Carlisle is seeking a unilateral ban on live exports. What would that achieve? What would happen to small calves? They will be born on the farm and killed on the farm, and not all farmers have suitable equipment for stunning and killing small calves on their farms. It would lead to immense cruelty, which is most unsatisfactory.

I thought that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East made more constructive points on the subject this morning than he has for some time. As the hon. Gentleman said, the best scenario is for a maximum number of calves to be slaughtered in British abattoirs. It will add on value—as the hon. Gentleman said, if an animal kills out at 50 per cent., it is better to transport a ton of carcass than two tons of live animals. It may also prove a boost to employment in this country. It is the best scenario for all those reasons.

I listened carefully to my right hon. Friend's speech and it seems that there are four main lines of attack. First, we are seeking a ban on veal crates throughout Europe; secondly, we are pressing the Commission for stronger enforcement of animal transport rules; thirdly, we are pressing for the licensing of hauliers; and, fourthly, we are seeking the co-operation of the meat industry in promoting meat exports and the development of British veal.

British farmers currently produce pink veal, but white veal is preferred on the continent. However, people used to prefer white bread until there was a campaign to persuade them to buy brown bread. We must make people understand that pink veal has been reared more humanely.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on all his activities, which are extremely practical—unlike the suggestions offered by Labour Members, even assuming that they know what Labour party policy is.

12.47 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien (Warwickshire, North): I am conscious of the time, so I will try to progress quickly with my speech and perhaps another hon. Member will be able to speak as well. I congratulate the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) on introducing what has generally been a good and constructive debate—with the exception of the speech by the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman), which I think lowered the tone of the debate on occasion.

I think that the call by the hon. Member for Sutton for a broadsheet rather than a tabloid approach to the issue has been heeded. However, I believe that the hon. Gentleman lapsed into tabloid-speak twice in his own speech. On one occasion he described vegans as "unnatural", which I think was slightly pejorative. I will return to his other point later. However, he made an important speech which deserves a response.

I come from north Warwickshire, which is largely an agricultural area. Many of my farming constituents are unhappy about the veal trade and about many practices in other areas of agriculture. They prefer to send their animals to the nearest abattoir rather than transport them longer distances, even though they could make more money that way. It is not a matter of city and rural people having different views on the issue, as many of those in rural areas feel strongly about animal rights.

Mr. Marland: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: No, I am trying to make quick progress.

Transporting animals in conditions which we define as cruel is wrong. We have a moral basis in the law that has been passed here which says that we will ban veal crates. Allowing animals to be transported and put in veal crates in other countries and seeking to reap profits from that undermines the basis of the law. That is why it is very important for the Government, not only to carry on the work they are doing to try to get a European ban on veal crates, but to ensure that there is the strongest condemnation of those who seek to make profits from what we have decided is wrong, cruel and immoral.

Exporting live animals in that way damages our good abattoirs. My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner) recently tried to introduce a private Member's Bill on the export of live animals, and my hon. Friend has a long-term interest in the subject. He has drawn to my attention the closure of an abattoir in Nuneaton, with the loss of about 70 jobs which have now been exported. We must ensure that those jobs remain in this country.

Let us be clear that there is a real problem with EC law, but that legal opinion is, to some extent, divided. After all, legal opinion is often divided as lawyers, such as myself, make our money by arguing the different sides of a case. There is a strong argument for testing the law. There was a ban on exports in 1973, and there is an argument that that ban could be sustained, at least for a period, perhaps under article 36 of the treaty of Rome or article 20 of GATT. That could provide the basis for such a challenge to the law.

If they tested the law, the Government would show the strength of their opposition to the trade, and they would also put pressure on the southern European countries to change their views. Even if we lost the court case, it would give a strong discouragement to business men in the UK who are trying to make a profit out of this trade.

I welcome the Minister's convincing efforts to try to change the law in relation to veal crates. But if that European law requires some sweetening—perhaps for Greece or Portugal—let us ensure that we make some bilateral contacts soon to discuss that and to ensure that they understand that we are prepared to go in that direction. In the mean time, we should promote a system of licensing for hauliers and introduce tough regulations, high standards of training and vehicle supervision in which the licences can be withdrawn for any breach. Perhaps, as my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) suggested, we can make bilateral contacts with France and other countries to try to ensure that they introduce high standards. That is important and urgent.

I shall now refer to the position in Warwickshire. In my county and in neighbouring Coventry, six people have died as a result of the veal trade. Five people died in the air crash, while a demonstrator died under the wheels of a lorry. There is anger in my area about that, and it has had a significant impact upon local people. It is right at this point to declare an interest, in that I am the parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation. I hold no brief for them on this matter, and I have not discussed it with them.

There have been long-term demonstrations at Coventry airport which are putting enormous pressures on the local constabulary. If the trade is not banned, the implications must be looked into. I ask the Minister to approach the Home Office with regard to the considerable concerns felt in Warwickshire about the impact of the trade on the police force. There are enormous pressures on the police, as 50 officers are likely to be lost during the next year. There can be no recruitment within a two-year period and, at the end of this year, 16 per cent. of community beats will not be covered.

There is an immediate financial crisis as a result of the financial settlement upon the police this year. If the protest continues as a result of the veal trade, the implications for Warwickshire police are, if not disastrous, enormously serious. Police stations could be shut and officer posts lost. That could lead to a lack of policing in Warwickshire. Will the Minister approach the Home Secretary, not just on behalf of Warwickshire but on behalf of Essex, where there have been problems with policing at Brightlingsea?

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: I realise that the hon. Gentleman has an interest in the matter, but I am trying to ensure that one of his colleagues has time to make a speech.

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is referring to my constituency.

Mr. O'Brien: I shall give way as I have referred to Brightlingsea.

Mr. Jenkin: There have been confrontations with the police at Brightlingsea. In view of what the hon. Gentleman has said, will he join me in pleading with the protesters—who, after all, want to keep public support and are in danger of losing that support by confronting the police—to stop sitting down in front of lorries and confronting the police? It is not the veal trade which is causing the police to be at Brightlingsea in large numbers, it is the protesters. If they took a more responsible attitude, they would gain more public support, and they

[Mr. Jenkin]

would not be costing our constabularies money and threatening the police activities to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Mr. O'Brien: I shall come to that in a moment, as it is important. Those issues must be addressed and, as a result, I may go up to my time limit.

I shall finish the point that I was I making. As a result of difficulties in the negotiations about the trade, police forces face long-term public order problems in the areas concerned. There is a need for those funding difficulties to be addressed by the Government. There are unexpected difficulties, and there has been a high settlement on some police forces this year.

The position in Warwickshire is worrying. The Home Office needs to create a fund which ensures that those forces which have extraordinary public order problems can call upon it to provide the resources which they need. Otherwise, there will be severe dangers of police forces being unable to carry out their duties effectively at the end of the year. I ask the Minister to make representations to the Home Office.

I come now to the point raised by the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) and others in relation to the policing of protests. I agreed with some of the points mentioned by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter), although I disagreed with others. I entirely agree with his important point that the police are neutral in the matter. Some officers may support the veal trade, while others may disagree. That is not the point. They are paid by the citizens of this country to enforce the law, and that means doing two things—ensuring that the roads are clear for the lorries to pass and ensuring that people can exercise their civil right to protest. It is important for the police to observe both of those, and they know that.

I was pleased to hear the Minister say that he was "proud" of the peaceful protesters who exercised their civil liberty to demonstrate their real concerns. I welcome that statement by the right hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Sutton read out a number of press cuttings, one of which referred to a senior officer in Warwickshire. Extremists do get involved in many events and can often inflict great damage to the cause, but causes such as this do not depend solely on what happens during a protest. The strength of the arguments is what matters, and many decent and honourable people involved in the protest—whether they are Conservatives, Labour supporters or Liberal Democrats—properly want to peacefully protest their interest in raising the issue, and that should be welcomed. They have a strong argument, and are exercising their right to protest.

This trade is, in my view, immoral. While it is not breaching the law, it breaches the spirit of the law by seeking to make a profit out of something which we accept is cruel and unjust. I very much hope that the efforts of the Government to try to ensure that we have an EC ban on veal crates, and also a licensing system not only in this country and neighbouring countries but throughout Europe will be sustained. That will effectively ensure that animals will be transported and kept in the best conditions. That is what we are looking for, and that is what we can get.

12.59 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): I have little time, but I wish to speak in the debate because a great many of my constituents object vehemently to this trade. As the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, many people who object to the trade are Tory voters. What outrages them most is learning from the television and the radio that we have given up the power to do anything about it. I do not accept that. I regard this as a sovereign House, and I am not prepared to be lectured by MAFF officials about what the House can and cannot legislate for.

I am fortunate enough, I hope, to have secured an opportunity to present a Bill under the 10-minute rule which will restore to the Minister the powers that he needs to apply a ban, if he considers that appropriate, and I urge Opposition Members to support it—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

Spectac Ltd.

1 pm

Mr. John Hutton (Barrow and Furness): I am grateful for the opportunity today to draw attention to what I believe to be a serious risk to many of our citizens—the unscrupulous way in which many foreign-based overseas recruitment companies operate in the United Kingdom.

I want to illustrate a particular instance of this abuse. In the weeks leading up to Christmas 1994, 27 people became the innocent victims of a carefully orchestrated criminal conspiracy. They each lost £8,000, money that none of them could afford to lose. The 27 came from all parts of the United Kingdom, but mostly from our shipbuilding towns and cities. Eleven of them are from my constituency, where, as the Minister will know, unemployment has rocketed over the past few years as Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. yard has declined.

All 11 constituents were recruited by a Dutch company, Spectac, based in Dordrecht and operated as a one-man business by Colin Martin. The workers, who were welders, platers, riggers and electricians—many of them used to work in shipbuilding—were told that they would be working on five-year fixed-term contracts in Guam, and would be paid £4,000 a month tax-free.

Before signing any of the contracts, many of my constituents took advice from their financial advisers, who told them that this was a safe bet and to proceed with the contracts. Many of them borrowed money, some remortgaged their properties.

Spectac recruited these workers from a variety of sources. The company placed advertisements in several British regional newspapers, and it certainly used the jobshop operated by a local enterprise council in Invergordon. I am grateful to the Minister for providing me with that information. Others recruited have testified that they were notified by local jobcentres, but in the main, details of the recruitment were circulated through a network of word-of-mouth contacts of the type common in the offshore construction industry.

The company in Guam, Offshore Corporation, would require each worker to deposit a confidence or integrity bond worth nearly £8,000, which would be repaid monthly over the duration of the five-year contract. The downpayment of £5,000 was supposed to be a sign of good faith on the part of the workers towards Offshore Corporation.

Inevitably, the confidence bond money was duly handed over to Spectac. The workers and their money were flown out to Thailand and later to the Philippines. The tickets, I believe, were paid for out of the proceeds of the integrity bonds.

After a few days in Thailand and the Philippines, the truth became apparent. There was no company called Offshore Corporation. There were no jobs in Guam, and the money—by this time totalling more than £200,000—had disappeared, along with the villains of this whole dismal episode: Ronnie Hydes, Gerry O'Connor and Colin Martin himself.

There is some doubt about whether Colin Martin was a participant in the conspiracy. I have no opinion on that matter one way or the other, but I am alarmed by some evidence that I received today purporting to come from Spectac in Holland and claiming to provide evidence of a payment guarantee that it had lodged with Barclays bank in Jersey to cover any problems with the non-repayment of the integrity bond. That document, I am confident, is completely fraudulent—and it raises doubts about Colin Martin's participation in the whole business.

Unfortunately, the whereabouts of Ronny Hydes and Gerry O'Connor are not known; and the chances of recovering the stolen moneys are small. On 14 February, Spectac ceased to exist as a legal entity under Dutch law. Colin Martin is thought to be somewhere in Thailand, outside the effective reach of any legal action in the United Kingdom, and probably anywhere else.

My constituents have been devastated by these events. In short, they have been exploited and ripped off.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing a debate on this important subject. Bob Neil, a constituent of mine—the shipbuilding connection is again obvious—was also one of the 27 people affected. I can confirm that exactly the same happened to him as happened to my hon. Friend's 11 constituents. He too stands to lose £8,000 under the contract exposed by the good work that my hon. Friend is doing.

Mr. Hutton: I am aware of the difficulties that my hon. Friend's constituent, Mr. Bob Neil, is experiencing. They are exactly the same as those experienced by the other 27 innocent victims of the crime.

This is not the first time that Ronny Hydes and Gerry O'Connor have perpetrated this kind of fraud. They were well known conmen and cowboys. The sad fact is that they are still able to perpetrate this fraud in the United Kingdom.

I want to discuss how the Government can respond to what I believe is an acute problem. We are dealing not just with work outside the European Union. There is also well documented evidence of abuse on construction sites in Germany, where many skilled British workers have found themselves ripped off—their wages have not been paid, and so on. Mr. Bob Neil's case is a stark reminder of just how vulnerable many of our fellow citizens are. They never expected to be out of work, but they possess valuable skills, and they find themselves facing the dismal prospect of years out of work in this country. Naturally, they tend to look overseas for employment opportunities.

I do not believe it fair to say that the 27 people involved were gullible: they were innocent victims of a crime. These events highlight deficiencies and loopholes in what is left of our regulatory framework after deregulation. They also highlight a number of gaps and loopholes in the law. Unless we deal with those problems, it is likely that they will be repeated again and again in the years ahead.

We know that cowboys operate in the overseas recruitment business, often through front companies that act as agents for undisclosed principals. We need seriously to tackle and confront such problems.

Probably no regulatory system can be foolproof, but we can do a number of things to make it harder for the cowboys to operate. First, the Government should look at the arrangements for checking the bona fides of foreign-based recruitment companies that operate in the United Kingdom. A recruitment company that has no operational base in the United Kingdom falls outside the scope of the Employment Agencies Act 1973, so it is not

[Mr. Hutton]

possible under UK domestic legislation for enforcement action to be taken against a foreign-based recruitment agency.

Effective action will require co-operation between European Union member states if we are to deal with the problem satisfactorily. I hope that there will be a chance, under the French presidency, of another look at the posted workers directive to see whether there is any prospect of breathing life into that initiative. I recognise that, if it has life left in it, it might benefit only workers who work in the EU. Of course, the case that I am highlighting goes outside the EU, and would not be covered by the posted workers directive.

Secondly, the Department of Employment should ensure that all Government agencies are properly advised about consulting the overseas placing unit when handling overseas job places. That is especially necessary when job places are being advertised by a recruitment company. I understand that that did not happen in the case of the Invergordon job shop, which is run by the local enterprise company and is part of the Highlands and Islands enterprise agency.

If an overseas recruitment company were able to operate in this country through agencies established by central Government without any effective procedures for ensuring that proper information was disclosed between the agencies, there would be a serious abrogation of responsibility. I am prepared to accept that this case may be an example of a one-off, a mistake, but there were guidelines. It seems that they were not followed in this instance. I hope that it is a one-off. If it is not, the Minister should seriously consider what has happened. It is one of the ways in which we should have regard to how recruitment agencies are operating.

We must, of course, operate within a framework of European law in partnership with European Union member states, but there is a case for the Government examining the operation of the Employment Agencies Act 1973 and tightening some of their administrative arrangements for disseminating information and best practice in advising local job shops, job clubs and jobcentres about overseas recruitment and vacancies.

Thirdly, measures need to be taken to deal with integrity bonds. It is this aspect of the Spectac case that concerns me most. The Government should consider making it unlawful for companies to require the payment of such bonds in the United Kingdom. At the least, there should be more effective control over how the moneys are to be handled.

If it is considered inappropriate to make the payment of integrity bonds unlawful, there is a case for saying, for example, that any payments should be held on account by trustees and not, as in the Spectac case, paid directly by the 27 workers recruited by Spectac to the recruitment agency. When that happens, there is little or no effective control over the moneys, including where they eventually end up. In the Spectac case, we still do not know where the moneys ended up.

The Government should consider amending the guidelines issued by the overseas placing unit to overseas jobseekers. In particular, the guidance should be amended to warn against paying into integrity or confidence bonds. There is nothing in the guidelines issued by the overseas placing unit that refers directly or indirectly to the problems associated with integrity bonds. There is a warning about working overseas and not being covered by United Kingdom employment protection legislation, but that misses the point. Most people working in the far east, for example, would assume that that legislation does not extend to Guam and Thailand.

The problem lies more with some of the sharp practices that are increasingly finding their way into the recruitment agency business. Integrity bonds are inherently dangerous and dodgy. The Government should carefully consider the guidance they have already issued to overseas job seekers, with a view to spelling out the problems associated with the payment of integrity bonds.

It may be appropriate, in the light or wake of the Spectac case, for the Department of Employment to consider advising the editors of British regional and national newspapers against handling any advertisement from foreign or domestic recruitment agencies that require payment of integrity bonds. That would involve the Government in recommending editors and newspapers generally to engage in an easy and standard form of inquiry.

Our newspapers provide the main forum for the cowboys' operations. The Government should require an investigation to determine whether any vacancy being handled or placed through any agency requires the payment of an integrity bond. If the Government are not convinced of the need to make such payments unlawful, they should introduce a requirement that advertisements should warn the public of the dangers or hazards associated with paying integrity or confidence bonds.

We must bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice. I know that the Minister is extremely competent, but I do not believe that her jurisdiction extends into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I hope, however, that the Government will be in contact with the Dutch and Thai authorities to ensure that Hydes, O'Connor and Martin are all held to account for their actions.

It is clear that no criminal offence took place within the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom courts, but there may have been violations of the Dutch criminal code. I hope that the Government will raise the extradition of Hydes, O'Connor and Martin with the Dutch Government. British citizens have been the victims of an appalling fraud. That being so, I hope that the Government will do all they can to ensure that justice is seen to be done in this case.

1.14 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I congratulate the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton) on obtaining the debate and on raising an important matter. He will have increased public awareness of the problem, and I congratulate him on that, too. I congratulate him also on having his debate at such a "seasonal" hour. I hope that afterwards I do not go on autopilot and go home forgetting that there is the rest of the parliamentary day.

First, I shall respond to some of the hon. Gentleman's specific points about what the Government might seek to do to counter what is, fortunately, a rare but serious type of fraud.

We shall strengthen the guidance that we give to warn job seekers about the dangers of integrity bonds. I take the opportunity to reinforce the advice that we already give job seekers, which is that, if they find in a magazine

or newspaper an advertisement of employment abroad, they should take it up and have it checked through their jobcentre with our overseas placing unit, about which I wish to say more in a moment. That is a sensible measure, which will greatly increase the protection offered to job seekers.

European legislation will not help in dealing with the tiny minority of fraudsters who come within the terms of the debate. The Department has, however, taken up with the Dutch Minister with employment responsibilities the matter of illegal agencies that are based in the Netherlands. Officials will be taking discussions forward.

We have already taken steps to warn job seekers about bogus agencies, through a poster and leaflet campaign. In the light of the debate and in the light of the Spectac incident, I shall examine the need to refresh the campaign.

I do not entirely share the hon. Gentleman's view that we should be making representations to newspapers. Newspapers are already well aware that it is not in their interests to carry advertisements that place their readers at risk. On the other hand, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that bogus agencies do not make their purposes entirely clear in newspaper advertisements. I think that he will accept that it is quite difficult for newspapers to come to judgments. Often, however, they contact the Department for advice when they think that there is an element of doubt. There is already some contact between newspapers and the Department.

Ms Eagle: Is there a list of companies that are known to have been fraudulent in the past that the Department of Employment could refer to or begin to keep, if it does not do so already? At least those companies would have to keep changing their names and taking on new forms if they were intent on trying to perpetrate the same fraud over and over again.

Miss Widdecombe: When I come to discuss the overseas placing unit, I shall explain that one of the purposes is to check on the bona fides of job vacancies that are advertised from abroad. Given its experience, the unit would obviously have knowledge of companies where there was established fault or doubt. That is not information that would be held centrally in every jobcentre. We have the unit as a point of referral, so that we can try to keep a level of expertise.

I turn to the specific case that the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness has raised.

I wrote to him on 12 February and set out the steps that the Employment Service had taken to establish how the vacancies had been drawn to the attention of job seekers. I confirmed that it was not, in fact, through the Employment Service, and I also told him the checks that the Employment Service makes on vacancies that come to it from employers in other countries.

Of course we deplore completely the activities of bogus employers who trade in entirely fictitious jobs overseas with the sole intention of defrauding job seekers. It is a practice that is known to us, but it is, as I said earlier, thankfully, still rare. Where and when we can, we are taking steps to ensure that it happens even less often. I would advise anybody considering paying an integrity bond to take legal advice before doing so. They may well end up having to pay a solicitor, only to find that they are advised not to take the job, but that is infinitely better than losing thousands of pounds on an integrity bond.

This very unfortunate incident must be seen in context so that we can tackle it appropriately. About 5.7 million people change jobs each year. Many do so through informal channels, such as friends, colleagues or newspaper advertisements. The Employment Service and the private sector recruitment agencies have a valuable part to play, both in helping people to find work and in stimulating a flexible labour market.

The Employment Service is charged by the Government, of course, with offering unemployed people—especially the long-term unemployed and others at a disadvantage in the labour market—help and advice in finding work. In the last full year, 1.64 million people were placed into work and 2.27 million vacancies were handled, so that puts this problem into context.

From those volumes of business, therefore, we must bear in mind the infrequency of the type of incident that we are debating. Although we need remedies—and we do—we must keep them in proportion to the problem; otherwise, we would run the risk of prejudicing a wide range of good practices for all parties in the labour market, and thus reduce our ability to service legitimate vacancies from employers, including employers overseas, which can bring real benefit to skilled individuals from Britain. In that context, the posted workers directive, even if fully implemented, would have had nil impact on this case.

The Employment Service will therefore continue to deal with vacancies overseas, as do UK-based private employment agencies. Sadly, we cannot take direct action on foreign-based employment agencies, but I will come back to what the employment agencies, the Employment Service and its overseas placing unit can do, and in most cases what they are already carrying out, to minimise the risks of sharp practice.

The case that the hon. Gentleman has rightly drawn to the attention of the House is highly serious. The company that he has described—Spectac—is reported to have responded to an advertisement placed in a Dutch newspaper calling for the submission of tenders for the supply of labour to work on a barge on the north Pacific ocean island of Guam. The company that placed the advertisement, variously described as the "Offshore Corporation of Chicago" or the "Offshore Corporation of Bangkok", is bogus. Spectac, a Dutch-based company, run by a director of British origin but resident in the Netherlands, had agreed to obtain an integrity bond of US$12,000 from applicants as a condition of securing the contract for the supply of labour.

Men were then recruited from various parts of Great Britain towards the end of 1994. Some were indeed unemployed; others gave up full-time jobs to take up the vacancies. As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, many of them ill-advisedly raised the money for the bond through taking out loans.

The men went to the far east in early December, only to become stranded in Manila, where it became clear to them that the jobs did not exist. The director of Spectac returned from Manila to Bangkok, with one of the men from the final group to leave Britain, and there they reported to the police the activities of the Offshore Corporation. One of the directors was then held by the Thai police for a few days, but, allegedly, was released by them after promising to find his partner. He and his partner have since disappeared. Spectac has now been investigated by the Dutch authorities and closed down.

[Miss Widdecombe]

It is known that the unfortunate victims of the fraud came from different parts of Britain. There is, however, evidence that areas of the country where men have recently been made redundant were specifically targeted by Spectac. That may well explain why men in the hon. Gentleman's constituency were particularly affected. Many of his constituents are skilled shipbuilding workers, who supposedly would have been able to find the money for the integrity bond from redundancy payments.

There is also evidence that the highlands region of Scotland was targeted by Spectac, probably because it, too, has a large number of ex-employees from the oil fabrication industry, who have skills and a source of capital. But after exhaustive inquiries throughout the Employment Service, concentrating particularly on the highlands region, there is no evidence that jobcentres were involved in what is a profoundly regrettable incident. I believe that the hon. Gentleman might have been led to suspect that my Department was involved, because many people learned of the bogus vacancies through the Invergordon job shop.

The Invergordon job shop is run by three local enterprise companies reporting to Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Two years ago, Highlands and Islands Enterprise recognised that the oil fabrication industry, on which the economy of the area around the Moray firth had depended heavily for two decades, was facing significant decline. Along with the increased efforts to ensure the survival of the existing businesses, and the provision of advisory services, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, in conjunction with the three local enterprise companies, set up a redundancy counselling and placement service, known as the job shop. The job shop has, to date, been successful in placing some 1,100 redundant oil fabrication workers.

I understand that, on 3 November, the Invergordon job shop was contacted by the director of Spectac Ltd. in the Netherlands, notifying the management there of an impending contract in Thailand between his company and the so-called Offshore Corporation of Chicago, with the potential of up to 500 jobs. Seven days later, Spectac again contacted the job shop to say that its director was in Thailand, preparing to sign the contract, and gave details of the staff required.

In total, 54 people on the job shop's books were contacted to find out whether they would be interested in the contract. But it was stressed to them at that stage that nothing was known about the job or the company, and that the approach at that point was entirely tentative, to ascertain—

Mr. Hutton: Did the Invergordon job shop, at any time prior to contacting those 54 individuals, discuss Spectac and the contract with the overseas placing unit?

Miss Widdecombe: I shall come to that point, and will also point out that, when doubts were raised in the job shop's mind, it went to great lengths to contact all those who were on its books and who had originally expressed interest, to point out to them that they absolutely should not enter into a contract with Spectac, because the company's bond was illegal. Job shop staff contacted all 54 individuals. They even contacted 20 or so other people from the Easter Ross area, who had come to them unsolicited. It then gave them the same advice.

In the short time left, I want to say something about the overseas placing unit, and so shall leave my rather fuller description of what went on. I hope that I have shown from that rather brief description that the job shop in Invergordon took every last possible step to inform people that there was a severe risk in paying over an integrity bond. Indeed, it did more than that, and advised them not to do it.

The overseas placing unit, which is based at the Employment Service head office in Sheffield, provides guidance to our jobcentres on giving advice to job seekers about work abroad. It supplies guidance to job seekers directly and to employers both in the UK and abroad on placing vacancies.

It is supported in Employment Service English regions, Scotland and Wales by a network of experts known as Euro-advisers. They are connected by information technology to a central clearing point in Brussels and to other Euroadvisers in the European Union, so that they can exchange details of vacancies and information on living and working conditions. On average, the unit receives 3,000 inquiries a month on all questions about working overseas, not only in Europe but many other parts of the world.

In 1994, 950 people were placed by the Employment Service in jobs overseas, but as we can see from the subject of the debate, there can be special difficulties with such vacancies. Because they are overseas, it makes it difficult for my officials in jobcentres. For that reason—I cannot stress this too strongly—jobcentres may not act on overseas vacancies until the vacancies have been vetted by the overseas placing unit.

The overseas placing unit runs several checks on the contract of employment and job description. It seeks a letter from a lawyer, written in English, stating that the company is bona fide and clarification on the availability of work permits. If the prospective employer cannot meet any of those stipulations, the vacancy is refused, and may not be handled by our jobcentres.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

Senior Officers (Employment Conditions)

1.30 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for granting me the debate. I also thank my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces for being here this afternoon to respond to it.

Some colleagues and others listening to the debate will have believed that I applied for the debate to highlight the circumstances surrounding the case of my constituent, Air Chief Marshall Sir Andrew—otherwise known as Sandy—Wilson, KCB. Sir Sandy had an excellent record of service in the Royal Air Force for more than 30 years. He began as a formidable fighter pilot and subsequently assumed the initial command of our forces during Operation Granby and was promoted to the post of Commander-in-Chief of RAF Germany from 1991 to 1993. He is now Commander-in-Chief of RAF personnel at RAF Innsworth, a four-star appointment, and he is the third most senior officer in the RAF.

Given that exemplary record of public service, many were surprised to read of Sir Sandy's early retirement. I should make it clear for the record that it was his decision to seek early retirement and, on balance, bearing in mind all the circumstances, I believe that he made the correct decision. I hope that it will now be possible for him to retire with all the dignity and honour that he deserves and that his retirement, terminal grant and redundancy terms will be generous and befitting of an officer of his stature, and as recommended in paragraphs 63, 64 and 65 of the latest report of the Senior Salaries Review Body.

Before I move on to the substantive part of my speech, I want to highlight the case of Private Clegg. It is vital that the Ministry of Defence considers the yellow card instructions so that our soldiers carrying out their duty can know that they have the full protection of the law.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I am not aware that a private is a senior officer in the armed forces.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I just say that there is a welter of public indignation at the way—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may chose to say all sorts of things in different debates, but this morning he must confine himself to senior officers only.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We should have no doubts at the outset of the origins of overstretch. The armed services will number 236,000 in April 1995—a reduction of 22 per cent. since April 1990—but in general terms there is every hope that the pressure placed upon service men post-"Options for Change" will ease. I fervently hope that the Northern Ireland peace process holds so that it will be possible to reduce the number of roulement units in Northern Ireland, perhaps reversing the increase from four to six which took place in 1992.

There are other reasons for confidence that the conditions of stretch in our armed forces will be reduced, such as the creation of a Territorial Army unit for the Falklands, which will reduce the pressure for roulement units to cover those islands. However, it is likely that commitments elsewhere, such as in Bosnia, will always remain.

I welcome the fact that the Government have accepted in full the recommendations of the independent Review Body on Armed Forces Pay. The average pay rise will be 2.6 per cent., taking a corporal to a possible maximum of £18,527.

Furthermore, it is right that we continue to reward the most senior officers for the significant and increasing managerial responsibilities that they are now asked to undertake. We must pay realistic rates if we are to retain those with the skills and the ability to carry out senior officers' responsibilities. At £57,766 for a brigadier and £97,430 for a general, I have no doubt that, in comparison with the private sector, the taxpayer is receiving value for money.

The report of the Senior Salaries Review Body, published this month, offers some interesting comparisons between top officials. It recommends that a permanent secretary should be paid between £90,000 and £150,000, with an average of £120,000, a top judge should be paid £121,000 and the Chief of the Defence Staff should be paid £121,130. Those figures are all comparable.

I shall say a few words about the review of pay and conditions of service men being undertaken by Michael Bett, which is due to report to Ministers shortly and will cover the period up to 2010. The signs are that the Bett review is moving in the right direction and the Ministry of Defence has said that its findings will be published and subject to consultation. I welcome that.

However, we should recognise that there are differences between civilian and service life. Disruption through frequent postings is the recognised norm in all three services. Stability for those with young families should be considered and, where practical, longer postings should be the norm. There is also scope for better targeting of travel and other allowances for those who need them most. The children of Army and RAF officers facing frequent overseas postings in mid-career deserve a stable education. Boarding school allowances have an important role to play in that. We must also recognise the pressures that come from overseas postings and transient lifestyles on service men's wives who are unable to establish permanent homes, second incomes, or stable networks of friends.

Fair redundancy terms for senior officers also need to be considered in the context of the Bett review. According to recent media stories, eight major-generals, 32 brigadiers and 48 colonels will be asked to retire early under the "Front Line First" study. The details of the settlement by which a major-general will receive a total first-year pay-off of £210,000 seem fair in the circumstances. That figure is made up of 18 months salary worth £90,000, a further severance payment of £90,000 and a first year's pension of £30,000.

Paragraph 64 of the report of the latest Senior Salaries Review Body states:

> "We recommend that three-star officers and above who are retired early as a result of current and future restructuring should receive compensation on terms no worse proportionately than apply to junior officers in their service."

Given the age and current earnings of senior officers, such sentiments are only fair.

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

It is vital that we continue to attract the high-calibre officers on whom the future of our services rest. Ministry of Defence figures from the statistical bulletin in June show that while recruitment was above target for the Navy and on par for the Air Force, in the Army there was a 20 per cent. shortfall between target and actual officer recruitment—784 compared with 967. In comparison, the shortfall for 1990 was only 4 per cent., based on a much higher level of recruitment. A single year does not make a trend, but those figures should be noted with concern.

The public perception of the status of senior officers, including their remuneration, promotion and retirement conditions, will affect the recruitment prospects of officers at junior level. We should in no way compromise the level of talent in officers and other ranks whom we are prepared to recruit.

Again, the 17th report of the Review Body on Senior Salaries states:

"The quality of the senior officer structure depends on the ability of the services to recruit and then retain sufficient young men and women of the highest calibre to rise to two-star rank and above."

The most important part comes next. It states:

"In our last report we expressed concern that the reduction in career prospects could impair the recruitment and retention of junior officers. We remain highly concerned that the highly publicised reductions in armed forces strength may deter many high-quality individuals from pursuing a military career."

In this short debate, it has not been possible to cover all aspects of employment conditions of senior service men but I hope that I have highlighted a few concerns so that people of the highest calibre will continue to be recruited and to make their complete career in our armed forces. The public have a right to be proud that our armed forces are the most professional in the world. The Gulf, the Falklands and the Northern Ireland campaign truly demonstrated that, and I hope that it will always be so.

1.39 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) on securing this debate on such an important and timely topic. Some of the points that he raised went a little wider than the subject of the debate, but I would like to reassure him that a number of those points will be raised, and I shall deal with them at some length, during the Army debate tomorrow which, knowing his interest and support for the armed forces, I very much hope he will try to attend.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the great responsibilities placed on our service men and women at all levels, and the crucial importance of our continuing ability to recruit and retain people of the first quality. That is one of the most important challenges that face the armed services for the future. It is precisely with that objective in mind that my right hon. and learned Friend The Secretary of State commissioned the independent review of service career and manpower structures and terms and conditions of service that is being conducted for the Ministry of Defence by Mr. Michael Bett and his team. I hope that my hon. Friend will be reassured to hear that Mr. Bett and his team have gone to enormous lengths to produce what I am sure will be a worthwhile and interesting report.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State expects to receive Mr. Bett's report at the end of March. The review is very wide-ranging, as my hon. Friend knows. It covers pay and allowances structures, pensions, rank and career structures, housing and accommodation policy and terms and conditions of service, all of which, as my hon. Friend rightly knows, are extremely important to service men and women.

The review's purpose is to ensure that, as we approach the early years of the 21st century, arrangements are in place that are sufficiently robust and flexible and meet our needs in terms of our ability to attract and retain people of the highest quality to perform the very demanding tasks that we ask of people at all levels. In particular, the review was needed against the background of change in the deployment of the armed forces and the very profound changes—not all of them for the better—in our national life. Mr. Bett and his team will thus be taking the most careful account, among other things, of changes in the nature of the tasks which our service men and women are expected to perform, in the skills that they need and in the work force from which they are recruited.

At the same time, the review will certainly take the fullest account of the particular requirements and ethos of service life. That is an extremely important matter for the armed forces and one for which we shall have a very high regard and care. I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of that point and I want to assure him that it is especially reflected in Mr. Bett's terms of reference. It is a matter that we shall consider very carefully indeed.

As for recent and current recruitment trends, lower targets resulting from the "Options for Change" rundown have meant that we have had few problems in attracting sufficient numbers of suitably qualified and well-motivated young people to a career in the services, even though applications for both officers and other ranks are down on previous years. My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear, however, that premature voluntary release remains at very low levels, although there is some evidence of increased competition from the civilian job market as the economy improves.

As recruiting targets rise in the coming years, it may be more difficult to attract young people in the eligible age groups. That, as my hon. Friend will understand, would be a very serious matter for the forces. We are therefore spending great time and effort to see how we can better manage those issues. As my hon. Friend knows, studies about recruiting have been under way for some time and some have gone very well indeed.

My hon. Friend referred to allowances, on which we are expecting Mr. Bett to make recommendations. My hon. Friend has identified issues such as the degree of stability or otherwise in service life, which will obviously be a very important background to the review team's thinking because they influence the costs incurred by service men and women and their families as a result of the requirements of service life.

My hon. Friend might like to know that, last week, I met an outstanding brigadier who has served for 30 years in the Army, during which time he has had 28 jobs in 14 countries involving 17 home moves. He remains triumphantly happily married with two very beautiful daughters, but it is an appropriate moment to pay the warmest possible tribute to the wives of our service men who put up with a great deal and do not derive great confidence from the fatuous sniping by the Opposition.

Until we receive Mr. Bett's report, however, it would obviously be quite wrong for me to speculate about his likely recommendations or to comment on the speculation in the House or by the media.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Minister should be assured that this will not be a fatuous snipe. Will the Minister tell us when the Bett report will be published? Will it be available to hon. Members and will the House have an opportunity to debate it, as it deals with important matters?

Mr. Soames: I have never heard anything fatuous from the hon. Gentleman in my life and I totally exclude him from my remarks.

The Bett report is not yet with my right hon. and learned Friend. We expect it quite shortly. We will wish to give it the most prudent and careful consideration. Whether it should be debated in the House is plainly a matter for my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we will go to great efforts to ensure that what is in the Bett report is disseminated widely throughout the services and to all those who are interested in it. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's attention to it; if he wishes to come and discuss it when it is published, I should be happy for him to do so.

As well as looking at the time scale of Mr. Bett's review, we are seized of the need for today's pay levels to meet recruiting and retention needs. On 9 February, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was glad to announce that the Government are meeting in full the recommendation on service pay of the Review Body on Armed Forces Pay and the Senior Salaries Review Body.

I am glad to have the opportunity to respond to the claims made in the past few days by the Opposition about the pay of senior members of the armed forces. The figures on which the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) has been trying to drum up indignation compare movement in the earnings of the armed forces with rises in average earnings. It is not surprising that the pay of the most senior ranks has risen more and that of the junior ranks has risen less than the increase in average earnings. It is not the same as measuring increases in pay in real terms.

What matters is that the pay of all ranks, except the most junior entrant private, has risen in real terms since 1979. I accept that the most senior officers have seen the highest increases in real terms, but that mirrors the position in the economy at large and they bear great and onerous responsibilities for which they should be properly rewarded.

One of the more idiotic remarks that I have heard recently was from the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), who inquired whether senior officers received share options. That shows the level of understanding and debate in the Labour party.

I might add that, in its last two reports, the Review Body on Armed Forces Pay has said that its recommendations on pay levels for brigadier and colonel equivalent fall short of broad comparability. To suggest that other ranks are losing out to subsidise the salary of most senior officers is, frankly, ridiculous.

We have always accepted the recommendations of the armed forces review body and the Government are rightly and justifiably proud of their record on armed forces pay. We aim to be fair to the service men and to the taxpayer and to recognise that service pay must be sufficient to recruit and retain sufficient people of the very best calibre, including those at the most senior levels.

My hon. Friend has rightly pointed to the demanding range of skills that are increasingly required of our senior people. There is no doubt that restructuring and management reforms within the services have, in some cases, resulted in considerable increases in the responsibilities of many senior officers, but they have—almost without exception—risen magnificently to the tasks that they have had to undertake.

To fill posts at that senior level with people of exceptional calibre, we need in particular to retain our most able men and women. That clearly cannot be done without rewarding them appropriately and fairly. Today, the services are in regular competition with the rest of the marketplace at senior level and, indeed, at every level of expertise and training, not least because they are the best trained work force in the United Kingdom.

Inevitably and sadly, the process of restructuring in the armed forces has involved painful redundancies at all levels. In the longer run, the corporate identity of all three services will be enhanced by measures that have sought to ensure that the armed forces are able to concentrate their efforts and manpower on vital tasks, and on tasks that only they can perform.

As the House knows, that was the thrust of the "Front Line First" exercise: to maximise front-line capability by making prudent, achievable and wholly necessary economies in, for instance, headquarters, infrastructure, administration and stores. However, no one would wish to make light of the upheaval and pain that changes of that nature—and particularly the related redundancies—cause in the short term.

Let me place on record my profound admiration for the way in which both the services and their vital and essential civilian support are coping. I also pay tribute to the work of the resettlement organisation in the armed forces, whose record is outstanding. I propose to say more about its achievements tomorrow.

My hon. Friend mentioned compensation for senior officers who are made redundant—that subject prompted the recent question from the hon. Member for Carlisle about whether they were given share options. We have been reviewing the matter during the past 12 months—

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Soames: No, I will not.

Mr. Martlew: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that this is not a point of debate rather than a point of order. It is important to clarify that, as points of order have been abused on the Floor of the House recently. I am not suggesting that the hon. Gentleman is thinking of doing that, but it is an important point that he should bear in mind. Does he wish to proceed with his point of order? Is it a point of order for the Chair?

Mr. Martlew *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There seems to be some doubt. I invite the Minister to continue.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As I was saying, we have been reviewing compensation during the past 12 months. It is discussed in the recent report of the Senior Salaries Review Body. There are differences in career structures, and thus in retirement policies, among the three services, reflecting differing manpower structures and requirements. In the past, *severance compensation* for senior Royal Navy and Army officers has been paid only when an officer, having been promoted with the expectation of serving for a particular period, has been compulsorily retired before completing a specified tour. At present, however, we do not envisage paying compensation when the inability to offer an individual further appointments does not arise from structural causes—when the individual is not truly redundant.

Although my hon. Friend did not allude to it, a great deal has been written recently about the life styles of, and so-called perks for, senior officers. I must make it clear yet again that it is not for the individual's benefit that some official residences are provided for senior commanders; it is to enable them to fulfil their crucial command duties and their responsibilities for representational entertainment.

I do not wish to prejudge the outcome of the review that Sir Peter Cazalet is currently conducting for us; Sir Peter's terms of reference ask him to examine the requirement to entertain, and the means of discharging it. In particular, they ask him to consider whether it could be discharged more effectively than through the use of official service residences and other quarters and, in the light of that, whether any properties can be disposed of. Sir Peter will also make recommendations on how entertainment should be funded and on the levels of assistance that should be provided if the concept of entertaining in officers' own homes is retained. A statement of the Government's reactions will be made as soon as we have given detailed consideration to Sir Peter's report, which is expected later this month.

In the light of the report, we may well want to change some aspects of the current arrangements in the future. The fact remains, however, that our existing arrangements are intended solely to enable senior officers to fulfil their official responsibilities, which are of great importance to the interests of the country and the dignity of the service that they represent.

I agree with those who point out that, in many instances, the burdens placed on senior officers by the representational and social aspects of their duties are considerable, and often constitute a thoroughly unwelcome intrusion into their lives and the lives of their families. As my answer of 10 February made clear, we are determined—as are the services—that provision should be limited to what is absolutely necessary for the undertaking of those duties. We are taking appropriate steps to improve the control and visibility of expenditure on residences.

We are also anxious to ensure that the assistance given to occupants of official service residences and other married quarters is provided in a cost-effective and sensible way, and is no more than is required to enable officers to carry out their representational and command duties and conduct official hospitality to the standard rightly required by the high responsibilities of their post. My right hon. and learned Friend and I look forward to receiving Sir Peter Cazalet's findings.

My hon. Friend rightly drew attention to the distinguished career of Air Chief Marshal Sir Sandy Wilson, who ceases to be Air Member for Personnel at the end of April. I join my hon. Friend in acknowledging the valuable service that Sir Andrew has given his country and the Royal Air Force, and I agree with the sentiments that he expressed.

My hon. Friend also rightly remarked that we expect a great deal from our serving officers. He should be aware that the United Kingdom is unbelievably lucky to continue to have such truly remarkable people at the most senior level in all the services. By achieving high rank, they will have had to demonstrate the highest levels of reliability, self-discipline, self-reliance, loyalty, leadership, integrity, decisiveness and self-motivation, which mark them—and all other service men and women—and set them apart from any other organisation in the land. They are of a quality not to be found anywhere else, and they deserve our thanks and respect.

Forth Rail Bridge

1.57 pm

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): Thank you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am delighted that the Minister for Transport in London is to reply. I hold the Government responsible for the care and maintenance of the Forth rail bridge, and I am pleased that a United Kingdom Minister is present.

I have written to the Scottish Office, to no avail. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has been more successful, however. He received a letter, dated 2 February, from the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), the third paragraph of which states:

"As agreed, officials have also sought the views of Railtrack and ScotRail. You also wished the views of the Bridgemaster to be sought. As you will appreciate, the Bridgemaster is an employee of British Rail Infrastructure Services Ltd, who are contractors to Railtrack for the day to day management of the Bridge and for carrying out the maintenance programme. It is Railtrack who determine the maintenance strategy for the Bridge and have overall responsibility for it."

I do not want the Government to hide behind any organisation, whether it be Railtrack or British Rail. I hold the Government responsible for the maintenance and safety of the bridge and its funding.

Everyone knows that the Forth bridge is an engineering wonder of the world and a tourist must for people visiting Scotland. In Scotland, we consider that it belongs to the people and not to the persons who are its caretakers. Funding must be found, but that funding should not be for an industrial museum. That is not the intention of my speech. I want the Forth bridge to be an integral part and working model of communications between Fife, Lothian and the rest of Scotland.

We hope that rail commuting and freight levels will be increased on that route and that the proposal for a second road bridge which has been mooted by the Government will be put aside. One of the problems with the second road bridge is the fact that the problem of the bottlenecks will not be solved. One will get over the water more quickly, but one will hit a bottleneck more quickly as well, especially in and around the city of Edinburgh. If the Government wish to build a bridge, they should consider the Kincardine area. The bridge there has too much traffic. The savings from dropping the proposal for the alternative bridge could go into maintaining the Forth bridge properly.

I have visited the Forth bridge as a guest both of Railtrack and of ScotRail. I have sailed below it with my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe). We have examined it in detail and it is in a deplorable condition. Again because of the good offices of my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow, I have a letter dated 14 February from the Health and Safety Executive. It spells out in the third paragraph:

"In effect the situation is that the Railway Authorities have been moving since the early 1980s from a short term cycle of repainting to a long term cycle. The short term cycle involved manual abrasion of the structure followed by 2 coats. The long term cycle is involving shotblasting which is a lengthier process requiring more robust access equipment—including scaffolding to give a firmer base for this heavy work. Five coats of paint giving a 25 year life is being applied."

That is absolutely fantastic. We saw the effect of that work. We have no criticism of that. The organisation is tackling the trellis work, but when asked how long it would take to do the that work, it said that it would take 10 years.

In the meantime, what do we do with the bridge? Does the rest of it deteriorate? I submit as visual evidence an article in the *Independent on Sunday*, which was published on 23 October 1994. It contains pictures of the bridge. It shows a rusting hulk. It is a not a ship that has been tied up in Lerwick or a Bulgarian klondyker that has been ignored and that has not had funding. It is a part of the bridge. Anyone who looks at the picture can see actual rusting of the structure, and that it is in a deplorable state. That is a scandal for such a bridge.

If hon. Members think that I am exaggerating, let me tell them that I have a letter from a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling), Mr. L. Mackenzie. I shall not read the letter—it contains far too much detail for that—but I would be happy to submit it to the Minister at the end of the debate. On a fishing expedition near to and below the bridge, Mr. Mackenzie saw a girder and rivets fall off into the water. He was so worried that he put on his helmet, which he used when riding his motor cycle.

Since 1993, Mr. Mackenzie has tried to talk to the people who are in charge of the bridge. He has listed in detail all the people whom he has contacted. He reckons that, at a conservative estimate, he spent up to £200 on telephone calls. He has had the runaround. I submit that as an example of an ordinary member of the public who is worried about the state of the bridge, and who is getting nowhere because the authorities are dodging the issue.

The repair and maintenance of the bridge is too little, too late. What is being done is admirable. A first-class job is being undertaken, but a massive area needs to be covered. A structural, financial and, yes, independent inquiry into the bridge is needed, with action from the Government and funding of it.

I am aware that the Treasury has put the dead hand on many activities of the Government and of people connected with Government spending. Short-termism seems to be the policy of the Government. That will not be tolerated by the people of the United Kingdom. I re-emphasise that I hope that the Minister will not hide behind, and, in some way, hand over total responsibility to, Railtrack. If Railtrack continues with its current expenditure, the rest of the bridge will fall to bits. Why put a new engine in an old car if the old car falls to bits? It is admirable to put in something new to bring part of the bridge to a high standard, but if the rest of the bridge falls to bits, it is no use.

I give a warning that I will hold the Government solely responsible if any accident or something else happens to anyone in and around that bridge because of the lack of maintenance and care. I do not think that I am making this statement on my own. The people of Scotland, the people of the UK and many people worldwide genuinely care about the structure. I emphasise that I do not want it to be turned into an industrial museum. That structure is part and parcel of the lifeblood and communications of this country and of the region that I represent.

2.6 pm

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. With my hon. Friends the Members for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke)

[Mr. Brian H. Donohoe]

and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), I have visited the Forth bridge. One may wonder why a west coast Member of Parliament involves himself in this situation, but, as the Minister will know, I am a member of the Select Committee on Transport and I believe that it is important to focus attention on the shortcomings of Railtrack.

For a number of years, I have been concerned about the bridge's structure. I have made four visits to it to examine it in more detail with some other people. Major implications are involved in the continuing lack of any form of maintenance. Many aspects of the structure require examination.

There are implications for the tourist trade in Scotland, given that the bridge attracts a fair proportion of the tourist trade to and around the South Queensferry area. That is important. The bridge is a landmark of some distinction. As my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian suggested, it is viewed as the Scottish wonder of the world.

The state of the bridge is, obviously, of most concern. I have some experience of steel work. Having worked in a shipyard as a steel worker, and in ICI as an engineer, I have some understanding of how structures start to erode. It was clear from the visit that we made, especially during the boat trip beneath the bridge, that corrosion was at an extreme stage. There is absolutely no evidence of paint on the part of the structure nearest the River Forth. Bulging steel and warped steel plates are visible. In some areas, there is a void of any structure.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian said, the Health and Safety Executive report looks only to the short term. We want to ensure that the bridge is able to perform its function over a long period. In no circumstances would I accept that such an important issue should be left entirely to Railtrack. The current examination of the financing of the railway industry shows that ScotRail has given Railtrack £170 million. The Minister might care to ask Railtrack how that money is spent.

I, too, would back an independent inquiry. Indeed, nothing less would satisfy the Opposition—nor should anything less satisfy the Minister, if he has any understanding of the problems. I know of two reputable companies that have vast experience of painting and repairing steel work that is similar in nature to the Forth bridge. There must be other companies that could also be contacted to give evidence to any inquiry. My hon. Friends the Members for Midlothian and for Linlithgow would be the key to any inquiry.

The Minister is a fairly reasonable person. In the past, he has helped me with the affairs of the Transport Select Committee, and I am grateful to him. We need a commitment from him today that not only will he consider the matter more seriously than the Scottish Office, Railtrack and, over the years, British Rail have done, but that he will agree to set up an independent inquiry. I want my name to be added to the campaign.

2.12 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) on securing this debate. Recently, there has been a great deal of publicity about the Forth bridge, much of which I believe has been exaggerated. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) in his place. I value his contribution to the debate. I envy him and his hon. Friends their sailing expeditions, which sound quite delightful. Personally, I do not have the time for that sort of diversion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] There are those who have speculated about why—[*Laughter.*] I repeat, the sailing trips sound as though they are the most delightful occasions.

I acknowledge the presence of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton). I am aware that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has had some interest in this matter, and he has recently asked an oral question about it.

The concern about the publicity generated about the Forth bridge has been worrying on two counts. First, it has been worrying for the great many people who are admirers of the bridge as a structure of architectural interest and believe it to be a national monument. Secondly, there are those who claim that it is being run down as part of a hidden agenda to cut train services in Scotland. I hope to be able to reassure the House that the latter proposition is certainly not the case. I hope to put minds at rest about the structure.

Sir William Arrol's bridge has been a dominant feature over the Forth estuary for 105 years. However, it is not just a Victorian bridge of historical and architectural interest, or a structure that is aesthetically pleasing. Like any river or estuary crossing, it is primarily a working transport link, currently carrying more than 200 trains a day over the estuary.

For many years, the bridge was maintained by British Rail, until Railtrack assumed responsibility for it when it was established as a Government-owned company in April 1994. Railtrack has since received some adverse publicity about an alleged lack of maintenance and safety concerns about the structure. I assure the House that those fears are unfounded. Safety concerns are taken extremely seriously by Railtrack. The Forth bridge has been assessed by a wide range of engineering experts, including the independent Health and Safety Executive, all of whom declared themselves satisfied with the structural integrity of the bridge.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): There have been two letters from Mr. John Rimington. Who were the advisers to the Health and Safety Executive? Did they have qualifications in marine environment engineering, or were their qualifications limited to the normal work of Railtrack at Derby?

Mr. Norris: I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's question now, but I shall endeavour to do so in due course. I know him well and I have great respect for his experience and for his approach to these problems. I do not believe that either he or I would wish to question the integrity of the Health and Safety Executive. I am sure that that is not in question on either side of the House. Indeed, if I wished to strike a slightly discordant note, I would say that there have been many occasions when evidence from the HSE has been quoted by the Opposition against Ministers, precisely on the basis that such advice was independent and therefore could be relied on.

On the question whether the HSE was suitably qualified to carry out the work, I shall endeavour to find an answer to that, but I would be very surprised were there to be any foundation to an allegation that the HSE was not competent.

I want to reiterate that the Forth bridge was assessed by a wide range of engineering experts, including the HSE—which is an independent body—all of whom declared themselves satisfied with the structural integrity of the bridge.

Mr. Donohoe *rose—*

Mr. Norris: I shall give way, but I am trying to answer the debate.

Mr. Donohoe: I require only a yes or no answer. Will the Minister give my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) a copy of the report?

Mr. Norris: I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's request to the attention of the HSE. It is the HSE's report and, if it so wishes, I would be content for the report to be released. However, the Opposition are straying into unusual territory in questioning the integrity of the HSE. They have frequently used that body as a stick with which to beat the Government. I have no complaints about that in general. However, I do not believe that a case is very strong if it relies on a criticism or implied criticism of the work of the HSE. Therefore, I do not believe that the recent call for yet another independent engineers inquiry is valid.

Railtrack, using HSE-approved access arrangements, regularly inspects the more remote areas of the bridge more thoroughly than ever before. It is able to ensure, therefore, that attention can be concentrated on the areas of highest priority. I know that many people view the Forth bridge as a monument of national importance. The hon. Member for Midlothian rightly said that that was not the way in which he regarded it, and I am grateful to him for saying so, because that is a sensible position to adopt.

However, it is important to recognise that Railtrack's object is to maintain the structure as a working railway bridge, a vital transport artery, and it does not claim—nor indeed does it have a remit—to maintain the bridge as a gleaming national monument or a tourist attraction. Its priority is to maintain the bridge as economically as possible without compromising safety.

Railtrack's present maintenance and painting programme, approved by the Health and Safety Executive, is fully—I emphasise, fully—adequate to protect the structural integrity of the bridge. Railtrack is identifying and prioritising the painting of those areas that are of structural importance, rather than adopting a "quick fix" solution to appease critics which would be only temporary and not in the bridge's long-term interest.

Railtrack's maintenance programme is currently contracted to British Rail Infrastructure Services, which relies on expert metallurgical advice from British Rail Scientific Services in Derby. In the light of that advice, the old painting processes, which involved wire brush cleaning of the metal followed by two coats of paint, have been changed to a more modern technique, which involves shot-blasting the metal and applying five coats of paint.

Although it is true that shot-blasting can be used only on a small area of the bridge at a time, the results of that technique together with the new painting method are expected to last between 20 and 25 years, rather than the four to five years' life expectancy of the old method. What is more, the painters, who are meeting Health and Safety Executive requirements in their painting activity, can now gain access to the more inaccessible parts of the bridge, so generally improving the overall maintenance standards.

I tell the House, with some sense of personal disappointment, that the popular opinion that British Rail used continuous end-to-end painting methods on the Forth bridge is, sadly, a myth. Key areas of the bridge have always been prioritised for painting, while other non-essential areas have often been left for many years.

The House will also recognise that safety standards are becoming continuously more stringent, and in the past 20 years far more demanding standards have been applied by the Health and Safety Executive—on, for example, specialist scaffolding—than previously. Painting methods have been altered accordingly. We no longer allow the painters to dangle from rope above the structure as they carry out their painting work.

I can assure the House, importantly, that the metalwork of the bridge is, contrary to current scaremongering, in good condition. I will ensure that any allegations made by the hon. Member for Midlothian, or by constituents of his to whom he referred in his speech, are fully investigated, and I shall let him know the results of that investigation.

The metal is not, as some have claimed, devoid of all protective coatings in some parts of the bridge. The elements of tubular sections which appear to be most affected by flaking paint are covered by an undercoat of carboniferous material and black iron oxide, which continues to protect the metal. Surface corrosion on those elements has little significant impact on the structural integrity of the bridge.

Railtrack is concentrating on cleaning and repainting eight lattice tie-members. Those parts of the structure are very important to the integrity of the bridge, but it is difficult for one to see from a distance that they have been repainted. This year, Railtrack will also turn its attention to some of the central cantilever sections of the bridge.

British Rail Infrastructure Services also carries out routine maintenance. It removes the debris—dead birds, litter and so on—from the crevices of the bridge. In spite of recent criticism, there has been no change in that procedure under Railtrack's management.

I know that there has been some—

Mr. Eric Clarke: I am not questioning whether the maintenance is going on; I am questioning the lack of maintenance in other parts of the bridge. The maintenance that is taking place is first-class, but it is insufficient. An admission was made about timing, and I have witnesses—my hon. Friends who were with us when the question was asked. That is the question that I want the Minister to concentrate on—how long will it last?

Mr. Norris: I say to the hon. Gentleman, for whom I have great respect, that I fear that the conclusion that he has drawn is not the conclusion drawn by the Health and Safety Executive in respect of the structure or the conclusion drawn by Railtrack. Railtrack has never disguised the fact that it does not see itself as having a remit to produce a gleaming national monument. I agree, as does Railtrack, that one could, in essence, spend many more millions of pounds on improving the appearance of the structure, but Railtrack has maintained throughout that its real responsibility is to maintain a vital transport artery.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North) *rose—*

Mr. Norris: If I am to give way to the hon. Gentleman, I hope that it will take only a second.

Mr. Wilson: If Railtrack is not responsible for maintaining parts of the railway infrastructure that are also national monuments, who is?

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman knows that the structure is a working structure and part of the railway system. Railtrack maintains it in accordance with its responsibility to ensure the safe operation of the railways. If there are proposals to add to the work that is being done, and which the hon. Member for Midlothian says is excellent work, I have no doubt that my hon. Friends in the Scottish Office would be perfectly happy to discuss such arrangements, but I am saying that the structure must be retained as a safe structure.

Apart from the habitual maintenance functions that I have mentioned, which mean that Railtrack incurs regular maintenance costs—incidentally, spending no less on maintenance than was spent on it per annum by British Rail—a £4 million programme to replace the weighbeams and to renew the rails has been carried out. It was completed in July 1994 and it has meant that the speed of a train crossing the bridge is now 50 mph rather than the 20 mph restriction imposed in the early 1990s because of worn and splitting tracks. No one, as far as I am aware, denies that that is a vast improvement. It emphasises and demonstrates Railtrack's commitment to the bridge's future.

In spite of all that I have said about maintenance and safety aspects of the Forth bridge, and in answer specifically to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), may I say that Railtrack willingly accepts that, from a cosmetic point of view, the bridge could look better. Railtrack has, as I said, explained that it would cost tens of millions of pounds to paint it to the high cosmetic standards that some critics demand. I repeat that Railtrack is not in the business of maintaining a tourist attraction. Even if there were limitless funds, there is a physical limit to the area of the bridge that could be painted at any one time using current painting methods and complying with the Health and Safety Executive's important requirements.

I appreciate that many people, including many hon. Members, regard the bridge as a national monument, and no one denies that it is a great feat of Victorian engineering, but it is not in any sense threatened. I have no reason, and I do not believe that there is any good reason, to doubt Railtrack's evidence that the bridge is structurally sound.

Mr. Dalyell: When did the Health and Safety Executive last conduct its in-depth technical consideration of the problem? In what year did the Health and Safety Executive do that? I understand from Mr. Rimington's letter that it was 1989.

Mr. Norris: I shall advise the hon. Gentleman as soon as I can on whether there is a later date. It would be necessary to ascertain precisely what inspections had taken place, and I would not want to mislead the House or the hon. Gentleman. I understand his argument.

However, I emphasise the facts that I believe that hon. Members on both sides of the House need to know. Although many millions of pounds could be spent on cosmetic improvements to the bridge, the independent Health and Safety Executive has no doubt that the structure is sound, that it has been maintained at the same cost at which it was previously maintained by British Rail, that there are no structural defects, that reports of flakings or large pieces falling off are—as far as we are aware—as yet unsubstantiated, and that the bridge remains a vital part of our transport network and in an absolutely safe condition for that purpose. I do not believe that it is reasonable to expect Railtrack to paint the bridge simply for cosmetic purposes. It goes beyond its remit and resources.

I hope that what I have said has reassured the House that the bridge is being maintained and that it is a safe operational structure. I have no reason to doubt Railtrack's assurances that all the necessary steps are being taken to maintain the bridge in a sound condition. Railtrack has made clear its commitment to the Forth bridge and I am happy that we can look forward to another century of trains crossing it.

Mr. Dalyell: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke), the constituency Member of Parliament for the area, I am dismayed at the Minister's answer. We are talking about the greatest engineering structure of the 19th century. Baedeker of 1906 gave half a page to Salisbury cathedral and two pages to the Forth bridge. It is a great monument and it is not being treated as such. All this business of cosmetic—

It being half past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, pursuant to Order [19 December].

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Timber

1. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that the Forestry Commission grows timber suitable for the United Kingdom furniture industry; and what is his policy on import substitution for timber products.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Sir Hector Monro): The Forestry Commission grows timber for a wide range of markets, including the furniture industry. The Government are committed to expanding the woodland area in Britain, thereby reducing our dependence on timber imports.

Mr. Field: I thank my hon. Friend. Does he agree that it takes hours of careful craftsmanship to create a beautiful piece of furniture and just moments of vandalism to smash it to pieces? Is there not an analogy here with the centuries of statesmanship that have created the United Kingdom and the vandals on the Opposition Benches who want to destroy it with the hammer of devolution?

Sir Hector Monro: That is an original thought. The trees of the United Kingdom are a fine asset and I am glad that our hardwoods are manufactured into the finest furniture in the world. Quality has always been the watchword of the United Kingdom. It would be a crime to destroy it by going down the route towards independence.

Mr. Dunnachie: Does the Minister agree that the best place to plant trees would be in the Pollok estate in my constituency where hundred of trees have been vandalised and destroyed to make way for a road that endangers the health and lives of the people of my constituency? It has destroyed one of the greatest beauty spots in the south side. Does the Minister agree that work on that obnoxious road should stop and that the Eaglestone bypass should be considered?

Sir Hector Monro: That is rather far removed from furniture. I understand that the road is supported by a Labour council and by Labour Members of Parliament. When the route is completed, I hope that there will be excellent landscaping and that a large number of trees will be planted to replace those that have been felled.

Mr. Maclennan: Is not the Minister concerned at the poor take-up of grants for broadleaf trees and the relatively disappointing results of the Government's change of policy towards the support of those who wish to grow hardwood?

Sir Hector Monro: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman. Of the 34,000 hectares planted in the United Kingdom last year, 16,000 hectares were hardwood. That is a big improvement on anything that has happened recently. I believe that our increased grants for hardwood are working and I hope that that will continue in the future.

Mr. John D. Taylor: In view of the revised and improved grants for tree planting in Scotland over the past few years, can the Minister confirm that there has been an increase in tree planting in Scotland?

Sir Hector Monro: About 1 million hectares are owned by the Forestry Commission and a substantial number of hectares by private forestry owners. The level is about the same, but as our timber is maturing, more felling is taking place. All felling licences are matched to replanting licences.

Fishing

2. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet representatives of the Scottish fishing industry to discuss policy on drift net fishing for salmon and other migratory fish.

Sir Hector Monro: As my hon. Friend knows, there is no drift netting for salmon in Scottish waters. However, I am in touch with angling interests and will be discussing the subject of the north-east drift net fishery for salmon with representatives of the Association of Scottish District Salmon Fishery Boards shortly.

Mr. Bellingham: Is the Minister aware that all civilised countries, apart from England and Ireland, have banned drift net fishing for salmon? Is he also aware that a drift net-caught salmon is worth whatever Billingsgate will pay for it, whereas a rod-caught salmon is worth hundreds of pounds to the Scottish economy? In light of that, is it not sheer folly to allow the north-east drift net fishery to continue? Should it not be bought out immediately with proper compensation?

Sir Hector Monro: I appreciate my hon. Friend's strong view, which I share in regard to the economy of Scotland. There is no doubt at all that the tourist industry—our hotels and so on—in the areas through which the salmon rivers run is seriously affected by the drop in the number of salmon coming into the rivers because of the north-east drift net fishery, but we have to proceed on scientific grounds. We are having further consultations and it is at least welcome that between 1992 and 1994 the number of licences in the north-east drift net fishery fell by 19 per cent.

Dr. Reid: Does the Minister have any plans to change the antiquated laws prohibiting the domestic production of salmon roe in Scotland? Is it not ridiculous that we can sell and consume imported salmon roe but we are prohibited in Scotland from producing our own? Would it not be a lively source of jobs for many people in Scotland?

Sir Hector Monro: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but I would not want to over-estimate the number of jobs that may be involved. We are having urgent consultations to try to resolve the matter, but it is not quite as simple as it looks.

Community Care

3. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairmen and chief executives of NHS trusts to discuss matters relating to care in the community.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): My noble and learned Friend the Minister of State met the

chairmen of national health service trusts on 20 January to discuss a range of issues including care in the community. The chief executive of the NHS in Scotland held one of his periodic meetings with chief executives of NHS trusts yesterday.

Mr. Graham: The Secretary of State will be aware of the proposals to close Ravenscraig, Dykebar, Merchiston and Bridge of Weir hospitals in my constituency and the constituencies of other hon. Members. He will also be aware of the concern felt by many of the parents and relatives of patients in those hospitals. They are very worried. Therefore, will the Secretary of State support vigorously the Carers (Recognition and Service) Bill which will have its Second Reading on 3 March? Will he guarantee that Ministers will back it completely to ensure that thousands of hard-pressed carers receive the service and support from the Government that they need and rightly deserve?

Mr. Lang: I shall certainly study the terms of the Bill to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The Government's policy of care in the community has been widely welcomed as being a considerable advance in that area. The possible closures to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and any such proposal, would be subject to widespread consultation and any proposed closure of a hospital would come to me. I would ensure that all proposals were given the most careful scrutiny possible, taking account not only of any planned closures, but any planned extensions and developments.

Mr. Gallie: Does my right hon. Friend agree that devolving the responsibility of funding for the care of the elderly in residential and nursing homes to local authorities has discriminated against private nursing and residential homes?

Mr. Lang: I hope that that is not so. If my hon. Friend has any examples that he can bring to my attention, I shall certainly ensure that they are examined. What matters is providing the best possible care for the individuals concerned at the most cost-effective price to taxpayers, who are, after all, funding the programme to the extent of many millions of pounds. It is important that all agencies involved—local authorities, health boards, the private sector, the voluntary sector, Scottish Homes and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—work together on an inter-agency basis, and we have given them guidance to that effect.

Mrs. Ewing: Given the importance attached to the link between social services and health services in guaranteeing the delivery of care in the community, does the Secretary of State accept that there must be confidence among members of the community in those who are charged with ensuring the delivery of the service? What action is being taken by the Scottish Office with respect to Moray health services trust board and the as yet unexplained resignation of the chief executive and two non-executive directors?

Mr. Lang: That is essentially a matter for the board, but if the hon. Lady has any anxieties that she would like to bring to the attention of myself or my noble Friend the Minister for Health, we shall look into them. To answer her general question—yes, I have confidence in the way in which the general policy is being delivered.

Mr. George Robertson: On the subject of health and care in the community, is the Secretary of State aware that the Government propose that, under the framework document on Northern Ireland published this morning, those subjects will be the responsibility of a legislative Assembly in Northern Ireland? Are not the Government revealing the stark contrast and double standards in their position when they offer a legislative Assembly to Northern Ireland but, despite its special features, they offer nothing to Scotland? Now that the Government have conceded the key principle that devolution inside the United Kingdom is perfectly compatible with a reformed constitution how can they, with any credibility, continue to attack Labour's plans for a devolved legislature for Scotland?

Mr. Lang: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should be so keen to fall so far below the level of events. If the hon. Gentleman cannot understand the differences between the circumstances in Scotland and Northern Ireland—with its history and traditions, and the great issues at stake in the Prime Minister's initiative announced today—he has much homework still to do.

Unemployment, Highlands

4. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the prospects of unemployment falling in the highlands in 1995-96.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. George Kynoch): The Scottish Office does not produce unemployment forecasts for either Scotland as a whole or for parts of Scotland. However, independent forecasters have predicted further falls in Scottish unemployment in 1995-1996 and I trust that the highlands will also follow that trend.

Mr. Macdonald: Two weeks ago, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) gave a clear undertaking on behalf of the Government that there would be a full, formal consultation, as required under the Railways Act 1993, before the closure of any rail or Motorail services affecting Fort William, and on the implications of that for employment in the highlands. Will the Minister confirm the Government's commitment to formal consultation? What discussions has he had with his colleagues in the Department of Transport to get the consultations under way?

Mr. Kynoch: I recognise the importance of transport links with the Western Isles. Future services to that part of Scotland depend on providing services geared towards the customer. The proper way forward is to ensure privatisation as quickly as possible to achieve improved services and improved usage and, therefore, better links with the area. To answer the hon. Gentleman's question, the franchising director is required, under guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Transport—under the Railways Act 1993—to consult formally the rail users consultative committees and local authorities on the pattern and quality of services to be provided through franchising. Consultations on the ScotRail franchise, of

which the passenger service requirement is a key component, will start after the PSR is published—probably in May.

Mr. Stewart: Will my hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman is being given a warm welcome.

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. Can my hon. Friend confirm to the House that unemployment in the highlands has been, and is, falling because of the strength of the Scottish economy, of which the highlands are an integral part? More specifically, is the answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) yes or no?

Mr. Kynoch: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, and shall take the first part first. He is right: unemployment in the highlands and islands area has been falling—it has fallen in seven out of the previous 12 months. On the latter part of my hon. Friend's question, I suggest that he waits for a later question to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will give a full answer.

Mrs. Ray Michie: Given that the unemployment figures in my constituency, particularly in the Kintyre area, are certainly not falling, how does the Minister think that the objective 1 funding will help unemployment figures? He should remember that, out of more than 214 projects, Argyle and Bute received only 20 in the past. In view of the recent criticism of the piecemeal approach to objective 1 funding, can the Minister say what the overall strategic development policy is for the whole of the highlands and islands?

Mr. Kynoch: In 1994, a total of 58 projects for the highlands and islands were approved for support from the European regional development fund under the objective 1 programme. The hon. Lady will be aware that there is also a geographical targeting programme, but that comes secondary in the selection procedure.

The first procedure is very clear: every application is assessed against a set of common criteria, with a view to selecting the best projects, whatever their location. There is then a secondary procedure whereby geographical targeting is taken into account. I am sure that, if the hon. Lady were to encourage her local enterprise companies to support projects which are worth-while, money would be forthcoming.

Mr. George Robertson: The House will notice how the new Minister dodges and weaves around a straight question which was also asked by his predecessor, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart). The fact is that unemployment in the highlands will be affected dramatically if railway privatisation leads, as it will, to a reduction in services throughout that area.

A Minister of the Crown gave a categorical assurance in the Scottish Grand Committee that there would be formal consultation on the issue of the Motorail and sleeper services to the north of Scotland. The Minister must not pass the buck to another Minister or to his boss. He must answer the question: will there be formal consultation before the services are withdrawn—yes or no?

Mr. Kynoch: I have already answered that question in relation to the passenger service requirement's formal consultation. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and I differ significantly in our views about the benefits of privatisation. I believe that British Rail must improve its service, and the only way to do that is by introducing private enterprise into the network. By attracting more people who will use the railways the service will improve, costs will come down and the number of services will increase.

Mr. Wallace: As the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) gave an assurance to me, will the Minister accept that an answer which refers to the passenger service requirement obligation is not relevant because it depends on the existing timetable when the passenger service requirement is brought forward? We are concerned that the services should be in place when the consultation period starts. I do not want the Minister to put up any blinds with references to passenger service requirements. Will the Minister give a clear answer—yes or no? Will there be formal consultation before the services are withdrawn?

Mr. Kynoch: I believe that I have answered the question very fully with regard to the statement by my hon. Friend last week.

Housing

5. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of Scottish Homes to discuss housing in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I meet the board of Scottish Homes from time to time to discuss a range of issues, the last occasion being on 7 November 1994. I have no immediate plans for a further meeting.

Mr. McMaster: Does the Secretary of State recall that, when Scottish Homes was founded as Scotland's national housing agency, he told the House that it would be founded on the twin principles of efficiency and tenant choice? Is it efficient for Scottish Homes to empty a 56-flat multi-storey building in my constituency—Waverley court—for a redevelopment which we are still awaiting six years later? Is it democracy or tenant choice to offer tenants, like it or lump it, take it or leave it, no choice of landlord? Is it not time that the Secretary of State told Sir James Mellon, the chairman of Scottish Homes, to start concentrating on problems like that, instead of using Scottish Homes as a machine for party political propaganda?

Mr. Lang: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should make those comments about Scottish Homes. According to a letter that I have seen, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said that much of what Scottish Homes had achieved was "commendable" and that Scottish Homes had been a "breath of fresh air" for housing in Scotland.

I believe that Scottish Homes has created an enormous number of achievements in Scotland. So far as individual cases are concerned, if the matter to which the hon. Gentleman refers has been running for as long as the hon. Gentleman suggests, I am surprised that he has not been in touch with the Government or with Scottish Homes to clarify it earlier.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in my constituency, Scottish Homes has acted as a catalyst in bringing the private and public sectors

together in the Aberdeen city centre partnership to transform and rejuvenate the centre of Aberdeen by an imaginative policy of building new homes and refurbishing old properties? Is he also aware that that policy is encouraging up to 2,000 people to come back to live in the centre of the great city of Aberdeen? Does he agree that that is more typical of the excellent work being done up and down the country by Scottish Homes?

Mr. Lang: Indeed I do. I gather that some £6.5 million has been invested in that project, and it is a good example of the kind of partnership which Scottish Homes makes the keynote of its activities. The project involves Grampian regional council, Aberdeen district council and the local enterprise company. That is exactly the kind of catalytic partnership which can do so much to improve Scottish housing.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: We all know what a good job Scottish Homes does, and that is why we do not want to see it broken up by hatchet men such as Mr. Mackinlay. Can the Secretary of State give an assurance that, if tenants in my constituency and others vote to stay with Scottish Homes, they will be entitled to the same high standards from that landlord?

Mr. Lang: I am certain that Scottish Homes would never distinguish between different categories of tenants in terms of the service it offered them.

Mr. McLoughlin: When my right hon. Friend next meets representatives of Scottish Homes, could he ask for an updated report on the right to buy in Scotland? Will he inform the House about the success of that policy in giving tenants the right to buy their own homes?

Mr. Lang: The right to buy has been enormously successful, and Scottish Homes has been at the forefront of disposing houses to sitting tenants as well. We have sold some 300,000 council houses in Scotland since the policy began. The policy had to be fought through in the teeth of fierce opposition from the Opposition. Thus, 300,000 tenants and their families have had the kind of housing that they wanted.

Mr. David Marshall: Does the Secretary of State agree that there is a shortage of special needs housing in Scotland, especially in the city of Glasgow? If he does agree, will he make adequate resources available to Scottish Homes to ensure that there is a substantial increase in the number of special needs houses available? If not, why not?

Mr. Lang: Scottish Homes makes a feature of meeting special needs in its housing programme, and it has embarked upon a programme of providing 2,000 community care and other special needs houses.

Water Authorities (Chairmen)

6. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet the chairmen of the new water authorities to discuss their salary levels.

Mr. Lang: I shall meet the chairmen of the new water authorities as appropriate to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Mr. Welsh: Why is the Secretary of State defying economics and democracy by paying £40,000 a year to water board chairmen for a two-day week, when the services are being run by unpaid, democratically elected local authority conveners who offer a high-quality, low-cost service, which is what people want? How can the right hon. Gentleman justify his extravagance upon those part-time water rustlers when the Government are offering a few pennies more to qualified nurses for a full week's work?

Mr. Lang: I have no doubt that the skills and business experience gained from their involvement in other public bodies which the new chairmen will bring to their posts will stand in good stead the services which are delivered to people in their respective areas.

As to the economics of the matter, the combined salaries of the present directors of water and sewerage add up to £770,000. The combined salaries of the new chief executives and chairmen add up to only £344,000. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman needs a lesson in economics.

Mr. Donohoe: When the Secretary of State meets the chairmen, will he discuss with them why questions addressed by hon. Members to the right hon. Gentleman have been dealt with by those quango chairmen? When one writes to the quango chairmen, one discovers that they do not reply for months. Will the right hon. Gentleman do something about that intolerable situation?

Mr. Lang: It is entirely standard for questions of fact, administration and procedure to be dealt with by the chairmen and chief executives of non-departmental public bodies, and for their answers to be deposited in the Library. As far as policy matters are concerned, those are for Ministers to deal with. I am not aware of any delay of the kind referred to by the hon. Gentleman, but if he would like to draw to my attention to such a delay I shall follow it up.

Mr. Allason: In view of the relatively insignificant cost of salaries in the overall budgets of the water authorities, will my right hon. Friend tell the House what representations he has made to the European Commission, bearing in mind that most of the additional costs imposed on water companies come from the European drinking water and clean bathing water directives?

Mr. Lang: These are indeed directives that impose substantial burdens on water and sewerage services in Scotland, as they do elsewhere. It is, however, the Government's desire to ensure that water and sewerage standards in this country are of the very highest; and it will be the purpose of the new public authorities to achieve that.

Mr. McAllion: With bungs on transfer deals dominating the headlines this morning, will the right hon. Gentleman try to justify the £100,000 bung that he is paying as part of the transfer of water and sewerage services away from elected local councils? How does he justify paying £40,000 a year to unelected part-time placemen, when those whom they will supplant, the elected conveners of water services committees, currently get £900 a year in councillors' allowances? What is the public interest argument that justifies ditching the people's choice to run water and sewerage while the right hon. Gentleman lines the pockets of the people he chooses?

Is it not true that only paid hirelings will do the dirty work that the Minister wants them to do: putting up prices and paving the way for water privatisation? The right hon. Gentleman should remember that there are some things that money cannot buy—among them, the votes of the Scottish people who, at the next election, will sweep him, his water quangos and his chairmen into the dustbin of history where they all belong.

Mr. Lang: The payment levels offered to these chairmen are entirely comparable with those of other public sector body chairmen. The appointment of these chairmen is entirely compatible with the procedures adopted by the last Labour Government.

As for the benefits to the public: the benefits come from the most cost-effective and efficient delivery of water and sewerage services in Scotland. I am sure that that will result.

Forth Rail Bridge

7. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from the department of offshore engineering at the Heriot Watt university on the condition of the Forth rail bridge.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): No representations from the department of offshore engineering about the condition of the Forth rail bridge have been received.

Mr. Dalyell: Can the Minister help the House by dealing with two questions of fact which somehow eluded the Under-Secretary of State for Transport? In what year did the Health and Safety Executive last conduct an in-depth investigation into the bridge? And what are the qualifications in offshore engineering or the marine environment of those who are giving the advice that all is well with the Forth rail bridge?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that W. A. Fairhurst, consulting engineers, carried out a review of the painting strategy for ScotRail in 1992 and endorsed ScotRail's method of painting. The company has recently confirmed that Railtrack's strategy is satisfactory.

I cannot state the qualifications of all the engineers concerned off hand, but I have no doubt that Railtrack will have been relying on expert evidence. As the hon. Gentleman heard in the Adjournment debate, the Health and Safety Executive has said that it is satisfied with Railtrack's maintenance programme for the bridge, and that the structural integrity of the bridge is not at risk.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) said that he would make inquiries about the most recent investigation and would contact the hon. Gentleman. The crux of the matter is that the elements of the tubular sections which appear to be most affected by flaking paint are still covered by an undercoat of carboniferous material and black iron oxide which is protecting the structure. It is not at risk, contrary to the scaremongering by some Opposition Members.

Local Government Finance

8. **Mr. Chisholm:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what criteria he took into account when setting the capping limit for Lothian region for the financial year 1995-96.

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend's provisional capping principles for all regional and islands councils take into account the overall level of the 1995-96 local government finance settlement; the additional provision which is being made for the police service; and the categories of expenditure which will be disregarded for capping purposes.

Mr. Chisholm: Why are the Government cutting their contribution to Lothian's budget and setting the cap only £4 million above the present one, when £9 million is required to cover inflation and an additional £17 million is needed to meet agreed pay awards? Does the Minister realise that many teaching posts in Lothian will have to go at a time when school rolls there are set to increase by 2,500 in August, and when the pupil:teacher ratio is already the highest in Scotland? Why is the Minister sacrificing the children of Lothian to the Government's economic incompetence and to the intended tax breaks of next year?

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that he accepts that the capping regime for next year is very tight. But it is clearly not unrealistic when one takes into account the level of inflation and for as long as local authorities fund pay increases from efficiency savings—as the rest of the public sector has had to do.

It is wrong to calculate that a specific number of extra teachers will necessarily be required simply because of a rise in pupil rolls. Obviously the impact will vary considerably from school to school. I suggest that local councils thoroughly examine their budgets before they assume that services will have to be cut. Greater efficiency is always possible.

Mrs. Fyfe: What answer does the Minister have to the Forum on Scottish Education, which warned this week that Scotland's education service is facing its most severe cuts for more than a decade? Yesterday, the Prime Minister advised education authorities to look for efficiencies to fund pay deals. Is the Minister aware that the Rev. John Taylor, chairman of the Forum on Scottish Education, has said that there is no conceivable efficiency that could meet the extra costs and that, therefore, class sizes would increase, support services would diminish and community, outdoor and pre-five education would be cut drastically or even abolished? It is disappointing to hear the Minister regurgitate the Prime Minister's platitudes, dodging and weaving on a major issue. Will he answer parents' worries about their children's education?

Mr. Kynoch: I am amazed by the hon. Lady's reluctance to accept that improvements can be made in any form of local government expenditure. The teachers' settlement was negotiated by the Scottish joint negotiating committee, and many district regional authorities took part. I assume that negotiators on the management side took full account of the likely budgetary provision when agreeing the pay deal. It is now up to them to deliver within that pay deal.

Rail Sleeper Services

9. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his Department's policy towards the maintenance of overnight rail sleeper services between London and the principal Scottish cities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Office welcomes the Franchising Director's intention to safeguard the four most heavily used Anglo-Scottish sleeper services by including them in the passenger service requirement for the future ScotRail franchise.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Is my right hon. Friend aware that people who indulge in field sports, in which Scotland is supreme—grouse shooting, salmon fishing and stalking—need to arrive at their destination well and truly refreshed? Would it not be a great loss to Scotland if these sleeper services were denied to such people? Would there not also be a loss to Scotland? Does my right hon. Friend agree that our balance of payments would suffer, as would all business men who use these vital services? Should not British Rail be able to run these services more profitably without needing a £400 subsidy on the Fort William service from the taxpayer?

Mr. Lang: I am sure that all those concerned will have heard what my hon. Friend has said. The subsidy is £180 per passenger on the Fort William sleeper service and £453 per passenger trip when account is taken of access charges to the track. It is clear that these are substantial figures. I am as concerned as anyone that the services remain as extensive as possible. Following privatisation, I have no doubt that they will expand and succeed, as all other privatisations have succeeded. I am sure that those responsible for taking decisions will have heard my hon. Friend's comments.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Is the Secretary of State aware that the week before his recent meeting with Sir Bob Reid I tried to make a forward booking on a Motorail service from Aberdeen. I was told that the services were cancelled and were being withdrawn. What credence can we give to the right hon. Gentleman's assurances about future services when British Rail treats him and his Ministers with such contempt? Does that not mean that we are facing a serious problem in respect of north-south rail services once franchising gets under way?

Mr. Lang: I do not believe that we are. The circumstances of the Carlisle and Fort William sleeper and the Motorail services to which the hon. Gentleman referred are those where there is an indication of a diminution of service. That is clearly to the detriment of those who have relied upon them. All closures consequent upon the passenger service requirement would be subject to formal consultation under the Railways Act 1993. That has already been made plain.

Mr. Charles Kennedy: On his last point, does the Secretary of State not understand that what was promised and confirmed in *Hansard*, thanks to the efforts of the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), and in the Scottish Office's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace)—full and formal consultation under the terms of the Act—is not the same as the consultation that the Minister was hiding behind today and which the Secretary of State for Transport has just written to me to confirm, which is that consultation will follow the issuing of passenger service requirements? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm what he promised to the Scottish Grand Committee—that consultation will be under the terms of the Act, not based on services that have already been axed?

Mr. Lang: Formal consultation under the 1993 Act follows the PSR publication. Consultation is required with local authorities and with the rail users consultative committee. That is the consultation to which my hon. Friend referred in the Grand Committee debate.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Secretary of State accept that many of us who are used to hearing weasel-worded performances from him believe that, even by those standards, today's performance was a disgrace? Does he accept that, by his actions, he is shaming and making his hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who gave an assurance in good faith, look a fool? That assurance was omitted from the official record and was reinstated at the request of some of us. There is no doubt about what the hon. Member for Dumfries said or meant, and that has been confirmed by the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart). That is the opinion and the knowledge of every right-thinking, decent person who heard it. Is the Secretary of State now repudiating the hon. Member for Dumfries? If he is, let all shame be upon him from this House. It is a disgusting performance.

Mr. Lang: Far from repudiating my hon. Friend, I am confirming what he said. As to the entry in *Hansard*, my officials sought to ensure that what my hon. Friend said was entered on the record of the debate. The hon. Gentleman will have had a letter from the Chairman of the Committee, explaining why the *Hansard* officials had failed initially to include the relevant words.

Mr. Salmond: The House believes that, having failed to rewrite the record, the Secretary of State is now engaged in a process of rewriting history. Why cannot we have a straight answer to the question: will the services still be available when the formal consultation exercise starts—yes or no?

Mr. Lang: That is a different question and is a matter for British Rail and ScotRail. If the services are not available—if British Rail were to contemplate their removal—it, too, would engage in consultation with the rail users consultative committee. If closure had taken place, the assets would still be in place and, in response to subsequent PSR consultations, could, if necessary, be reinstated.

Mr. McFall: Is the Secretary of State aware of the inauspicious comments of the director of ScotRail, Mr. John Ellis, who, two short months ago, as production director, said that Railtrack could not take into account social issues? He could not see much being done to equip branch lines. Does the Secretary of State not realise that those comments mean a debilitating future for economic development, tourism and community life in the highlands? Will the right hon. Gentleman make it clear whether services will be shut before there is consultation? Labour Members are asking for a one-word answer with either two letters or three: yes or no?

Mr. Lang: I have already answered the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question. On the first part, I had a

meeting with the chairman of Railtrack last week and am confident that he is extremely positive and ambitious to maintain and, indeed, expand services in Scotland.

Scottish Economy

10. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss the Scottish economy.

11. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will urgently meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss recent manufacturing job losses in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend meets representatives of the Scottish Trades Union Congress from time to time to discuss a range of matters concerning the Scottish economy.

Mr. McKelvey: When the Secretary of States gets the opportunity to discuss with the STUC the economy of Scotland and the important part that the economy of Ayrshire can play, will he explain to it that, for 25 years, the people of Ayrshire have been desperate for a road that can lead them down to the south but have been landlocked? When he meets the STUC, will he be able to say that the M77 is either completed or that it is near completion and that the A77 will be upgraded to meet the M77, to release the people of Ayrshire so that they may travel south?

Mr. Kynoch: We are very well aware of the strong feelings of hon. Members from Ayrshire about road links. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the roads will proceed, and on schedule. I certainly hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to report positively in answer to the question.

Mr. Galloway: Will the Minister test on the STUC the absurd equation often canvassed by the Government in the House between the proliferation in Scotland of temporary, low-paid, short-term and often contract jobs assembling other people's manufactures or forklifting other people's goods around empty warehouses, and the jobs that have been lost designing aircraft, building ships, mining coal and making steel—real manufacturing jobs that have been lost to Scotland during these dismal, bitter Tory years?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman lives in a rather unreal world. He must accept that conditions change from day to day and that businesses in Scotland have to adapt to those changing circumstances, but that what is important is that the Government put in place the right economic factors to guarantee that business can thrive. I would argue strongly that the Government have achieved just that and that with unemployment steadily falling that is being proved time and again. The worry of business in Scotland today is that the tax rises and cost increases that are likely to come from the Opposition's proposal for a devolved, tax-raising Scottish Parliament will drive business away from Scotland and not be in the best interests of the Scottish economy.

Mr. Gallie: Bearing in mind the massive investment of the Government and Strathclyde in the M77, is my hon. Friend aware of the disruption being caused to the work there by protesters? Will he do what he can to protect that investment by ensuring that the new law on aggravated trespass, which he and I supported last year, is in force to ensure that the road goes ahead?

Mr. Kynoch: Of course I am aware of the instances referred to by my hon. Friend, but it is a matter for the police authorities. I can assure my hon. Friend that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for roads will keep a careful eye on progress.

Mr. Stewart: When my hon. Friend meets the STUC, will he re-emphasise the importance of business rates to jobs in Scotland? Will he seek the valuable assistance of the STUC in attempting to clarify what on earth is the Labour party's policy on that?

Mr. Kynoch: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) seeking clarification of the Labour party's policy. If it wishes to return business rates to the control of local government, I would argue strongly that that bodes badly for Scottish business. Under the Government, business rates have been brought down from 76p to 43p, which is good news for Scottish business.

Mr. Davidson: Does the Minister accept that the state of the Scottish economy will be one of the issues under discussion in the forthcoming by-election in Scotland? Does he further accept that the anticipated defeat of the Conservative party by the Scottish National party by a majority of at least 10,000 to 15,000 reflects the view that the Scottish people seek to serve upon the Government that enough is enough and that Scots will unite behind any party which wishes and is able to defeat the Government?

Mr. Kynoch: I am confident that the economy will play a significant part in any forthcoming by-election. I am equally confident that the Government's argument is sound. The policies of the Scottish National party and the Labour party, to which I referred earlier, clearly point to increasing costs and taxes for Scottish business, which bodes badly for investment, both inward and within Scottish business.

Council House Sales

12. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many council houses have been sold under right-to-buy legislation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: At the end of September 1994, more than 300,000 houses had been sold by public sector landlords in Scotland to sitting tenants under the right-to-buy legislation. This has opened up the opportunity for home ownership for many people, and I am delighted that the Government overcame opposition from the Labour party to secure it for them.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, which confirms that every fifth Scottish family is living in a home bought under the right-to-buy legislation. Is that not remarkable progress from the days when Labour local authorities were loth to co-operate and Labour Members said that no one would want to buy? Does that not show that Conservative policies work to the benefit of the people of Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If one takes into account voluntary sales

as well as right-to-buy sales, the figure is nearly 310,000. We have now substantially overtaken England, as 30 per cent. of Scottish public sector stock has now been sold compared with 27.6 per cent. in England. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), who is in his place, should remember when he and his party strongly opposed the right to buy. I believe that they now regret the stance that they once took.

Mr. Watson: The Minister has given us the figures for right-to-buy legislation, but what about those people who choose not to buy but want the right to rent? Will the Minister provide the figures for the number of council houses that have been built since the Conservatives came to power in 1979? Why does he consider it necessary to narrow the right to rent to those authorities that the Government have established? Many people wish to remain council house tenants and want the right to rent a modern house. How many have been built since 1979?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of houses built in Scotland since 1979 is nearly 300,000; the number of council houses runs into many tens of thousands. If local authorities wish to choose as their priority to build more council houses, they have the right to do so. Of course, Scottish Homes is giving priority to providing rented housing through housing associations that are especially geared to the needs of priority groups throughout Scotland.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Minister aware that large rent increases have turned the right to buy into the need to buy? Is he aware that Scottish Homes has increased rents by 4.2 per cent.—twice the rate of inflation? How does he expect ordinary working people, whose wages are either pegged or reduced, to pay those huge rent increases?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that some £800 million a year is being spent on housing benefit targeted on those who need it and who are paying rent. The hon. Gentleman wishes to reduce rents in Scotland, which on average are £7 or £8 below those south of the border, but if less rent is paid, less will be spent on management and maintenance and the housing stock will suffer. If rents are reasonable, management and maintenance can also be reasonable and houses will be in better condition.

Rules and Regulations

13. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the rules and regulations in his Department which have been withdrawn in the last 12 months, or which his Department plans to withdraw in the next 12 months; and what assessment he has made of the impact that this will have on his Department's manpower.

Mr. Lang: I have arranged for information about the Department's deregulation programme to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Steen: Is the Secretary of State aware that more rules and regulations are being passed by the House than are being repealed? Does he agree that the problem is not just Europe, but the interpretation of those rules and regulations by officials in Scotland and elsewhere? How will the Secretary of State increase the deregulation initiative in Scotland and reduce the number of rules and regulations being considered by the House?

Mr. Lang: I assure my hon. Friend that I am entirely in sympathy with the thrust of his question. It is highly desirable that we reduce the number of regulations as they impose a burden not only on their own administration, but also on those who are obliged, sometimes unnecessarily, to comply with their terms. It is important that they are constantly reviewed and I am ensuring that my Department is fully involved in the deregulation initiative running through all Departments.

Mr. Worthington: Does the Secretary of State set any rules and regulations for the response times of his Ministers to letters? Do those regulations apply to the noble Lord Fraser, and how is it possible to get an answer from the noble Lord in less than two to three months?

Mr. Lang: I am certain that my right hon. and noble Friend responds in far less time to the vast majority of letters sent to him, but I shall certainly draw to his attention the fact that the hon. Gentleman is awaiting a reply to a letter that has been outstanding for that period.

Rail Services

14. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the outcome of his consultations with British Rail on the proposed withdrawal of sleeper and Motorail services from Scotland and Carlisle.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend and I have discussed a wide range of topics with British Rail relating to railway matters affecting Scotland, including sleeper and Motorail services.

Sir David Steel: Why are Ministers reneging on the undertaking given to the Scottish Grand Committee that consultation would take place before any services were withdrawn? Is the Minister aware that the phrase used by the Secretary of State this afternoon—"diminution of service"—will go down in history, along with "economical with the truth", as a euphemism for the complete destruction of the Motorail service? Does the Minister recognise that it is perverse to cancel Motorail services to Scotland just when we are opening them under the channel?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Following publication of the passenger service requirement, the Franchising Director will consult formally—as the right hon. Gentleman has already been told—with both the rail users consultative committee for Scotland and local authorities before making final decisions on the PSR. Both under nationalisation and now, British Rail has had the power to stop a service at any time if that is its resolve and determination, but I have made it clear, both now and in the past, that final decisions will be made at the end of that formal consultation.

Incidentally, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) was entirely wrong: *Hansard* was not tampered with. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), who chaired the Grand Committee, has written to every member making the facts absolutely clear. The hon. Gentleman cannot get away with presenting facts that obviously do not accord with reality.

Taxation and Spending

15. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the proportion of United Kingdom local and national taxation raised in Scotland; and what is the proportion of local and national Government spending in Scotland.

16. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current annual value of net transfer payments made to Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lang: The Government collect revenue on a United Kingdom basis. In 1992-93, the latest year for which data are available, the revenue raised in Scotland through the four main sources of income tax, national insurance contributions, VAT and local government revenues formed approximately 8.3 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. The Government estimate that in the same year Scotland's share of identifiable Government expenditure was 10 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. That figure excludes expenditure incurred on behalf of the United Kingdom as a whole, or which cannot readily be identified as incurred on behalf of particular countries.

Mr. Bruce: Has my hon. Friend considered the idea of establishing a separate Scottish Parliament with revenue-raising powers? Has his Department calculated the extent to which the balance would shift as a result of both the additional costs of such a Parliament and a possible reduction of the positivity with which costs are currently dealt with by the United Kingdom Parliament?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right to identify the potential danger to Scotland if a tax-raising Scottish Parliament were established. With 8.8 per cent. of the United Kingdom's population, Scotland generates less in revenue than her population share and receives more from the United Kingdom Treasury. Consequently, if any tax-raising powers were taken by a Scottish Parliament—as threatened by the Labour party—Scotland's existing funding arrangements would inevitably come under closer scrutiny, and might well lead to the reduction referred to by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Duncan: Given my right hon. Friend's answer, if those net transfer payments to Scotland were removed would not Scotland have far fewer resources to spend on its needs? Is it not also a grave deceit to pretend to the people of Scotland that any shortfall would be made up by payments from the European Union? Is it not abundantly clear that any proposal to devolve tax-raising powers to Scotland would ensure that the people of Scotland ended up poorer?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In this country, we seek to ensure the delivery of comparable standards of public services in all parts of the United Kingdom. That necessarily and properly leads to higher expenditure in some parts of the United Kingdom—such as Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales—that have greater needs. Such expenditure would, however, be put at risk if a tax-raising Parliament were set up in Scotland.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Secretary of State be honest, and confirm that, if it were not for the oil revenues from the Scottish sector of the North sea and the benefit to the Treasury from the privatisation of Scotland's public assets, the Government's economic policy would be down the plughole?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong. In the last year for which North sea figures are available—1993-94—revenue amounted to some £1.2 billion. That would not begin to bridge the funding gap that Scotland would experience in the circumstances threatened by the Labour party.

Mr. McAvoy: Does the Secretary of State accept that many factors must be taken into account when forming a judgment on the disposal of national assets, especially by the Treasury, and that mortgage tax relief subsidy is one of the most important factors? Does he agree that, in that regard, south-east England receives far more from the national Exchequer than Scotland?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is right on that point, but if he considers income tax revenue, VAT revenue, local government revenue and national insurance contributions, he will find that the equation tilts heavily in the other direction.

Culture

18. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures his Department takes to promote interest about Scotland's life and culture amongst the Scottish diaspora.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A range of Scottish Office-funded bodies promote international interest in Scottish life and culture, although their activities are not targeted specifically at the Scots diaspora. For example, the Scottish tourist board's marketing and promotional activities continue to foster historical and cultural links in the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where ties with Scotland remain.

Mr. Mackinlay: Does the Secretary of State understand that the monopoly that his Government gave the British Airports Authority over the principal airports of the UK means that people who wish to visit the UK always visit Heathrow first? Should he not have put some time, energy and resources into encouraging people from North America and Australasia to visit Scotland as the first port of call, rather than the overcrowded Heathrow airport?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have great sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's point. Tourism is the largest employer in Scotland. We have agreed to contribute £20,000 towards the production of a British Council-Scottish Arts Council guide to the arts in Scotland, which is aimed primarily at overseas tourists. The Scotland international register is an initiative to encourage the private sector to develop contacts with distinguished Scots and business men abroad. We hope that those contacts will strengthen enterprise, development and tourism in Scotland.

Manufacturing Industry

19. **Mrs. Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet representatives of the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss manufacturing industry in Scotland.

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend meets representatives of the Scottish TUC from time to time to discuss a range of matters concerning the Scottish economy.

Mrs. Adams: Does the Minister realise that, since his party came to power in 1979, my constituency has lost some 80 per cent. of its manufacturing jobs? In the light of his inadequate answer to my hon. Friends the Members for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) and for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), when will the Government realise that a strong economy cannot be built by people selling each other hamburgers? It will be built only when the Government start to deal with the disasters that have taken place in manufacturing industry.

Mr. Kynoch: I hoped that the hon. Lady might have welcomed the fact that, last month, Babcock Energy Ltd. in her constituency announced that the jobs of its 700-strong work force would be secured as a result of a £125 million order for boilers from a power station in China. She is doing her businesses a great disservice by selling Scotland down the river.

Mr. Ingram: Does the Minister accept that that is the most complacent answer that he could possibly give on one of the key issues facing Scotland? Since the Government came to power, 50 per cent. of all aerospace jobs have been lost to the Scotish economy. Is he aware that Rolls-Royce intends to cut another 600 highly skilled jobs in that economy? Why have the Government remained silent on that announcement? Is it because they do not understand its impact, because they do not care, or both?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman must place the changes in Rolls-Royce in the context of world affairs. He might be interested to know that Rolls-Royce is not alone in its problems. Its two major competitors, General Electric and Pratt and Whitney, have made massive job cuts, including 14,000 redundancies that were announced in 1993. At the same time, Boeing announced 80,000 job losses. He might also like to know that Rolls-Royce in East Kilbride has recently announced two major, long-term repair and maintenance contracts with Cyprus Airways and China Eastern Airlines. The hon. Gentleman should start talking Scottish prospects up rather than down.

Water Authorities

20. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet the chairmen of the new water authorities to discuss their investment plans.

Mr. Kynoch: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer my right hon. Friend gave earlier to the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh).

Mr. Salmond: As we are about to have a discussion founded on the principle of democratic consent, can the Minister point to what area of democratic consent in Scotland justifies the removal of Scottish water from local democratic control?

Mr. Kynoch: The hon. Gentleman should realise that in Scotland over the next 10 to 15 years we have to find some £5 billion of capital expenditure to improve services. My right hon. Friend has set up structures with the intention of ensuring that we get the best value for money. We believe in ensuring that we get the best possible services at the lowest possible cost—something that the hon. Gentleman will never understand.

Higher Education

21. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet the Secretary of State for Education to discuss entry requirements for institutions of higher education.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend and I liaise closely with our colleagues in the other education Departments. Requirements for entry to higher education, however, are a matter for the institutions themselves to determine.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my hon. Friend agree that the England and Wales Department for Education has a lot to learn from Scotland? Does he believe, as I do, that there are too many scientists who are inarticulate and too many managers and, perhaps, Members of Parliament too, who are innumerate? Should not we have a broader base of education in England and Wales for entry to university, as in Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We have a great deal to learn from each other. Access to higher education is being enormously increased, which is to the benefit of students throughout the United Kingdom. We intend to play our full part in that.

Northern Ireland (Framework Documents)

3.31 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement on Northern Ireland.

Almost every day there brings new evidence of the benefits of peace. The conditions taken for granted elsewhere in the United Kingdom are gradually returning. But a return to normal life in Northern Ireland requires much more than just a paramilitary ceasefire, important though that step is. It requires a permanent end to violence; and it requires a balanced political settlement under which all parts of the community can live alongside each other without fear or antagonism.

That is the purpose of the talks process, started in 1991. We need to seek new arrangements for the internal government of Northern Ireland, for the relationship between north and south, and for the relationship between the two Governments.

The British Government have discussed these matters at length with the Northern Ireland political parties and with the Irish Government. I should like to pay tribute to the role played by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and my hon. Friend the Minister of State. Today we have published proposals in two framework documents, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Let me make it clear from the outset that nothing in these documents will be imposed. The aim is to assist discussion and negotiation with the parties in Northern Ireland. It is not an immutable blueprint.

I urge all hon. Members and people across Northern Ireland to read and study the documents carefully. The proposals in them have been the subject of a number of leaks and misrepresentations, which have resurrected old fears. When people study and consider the documents, I believe that they will come to see that those fears are unfounded. They will see that these proposals are based throughout on the principle of consent. It is made absolutely clear that Northern Ireland will remain a part of the United Kingdom for so long as that is the expressed wish of the people of Northern Ireland.

I am a Unionist who wants peace for all the people of the Union. I cherish Northern Ireland's role within the Union. I have no intention whatsoever of letting that role change, unless it is the democratic wish of the people of Northern Ireland to do so.

I turn to the documents published today. I begin with strand 1, which sets out the Government's ideas for restoring local democracy in Northern Ireland as part of a full political settlement. That paper has been prepared after consultation and talks with the main political parties in Northern Ireland. The Irish Government played no part in its formulation.

The circumstances in Northern Ireland are widely recognised to be unique in the United Kingdom. There are two traditions with very different political aspirations. What is needed is a structure of government that combines democratic legitimacy with a system of checks and balances. That calls for mechanisms different from those appropriate in the rest of the United Kingdom.

It was those historic differences that meant that, until 1972, there was a Northern Ireland Assembly with a wide range of functions. Since then, however, those functions have been the direct responsibility of central Government—unlike anywhere else in the United Kingdom, where many of them are carried out by elected local authorities. In Northern Ireland, local accountability has been lost, and political talent has been unused.

That is why the Government are now putting forward plans for a new elected Assembly, with responsibilities for a range of subjects at least as wide as those in 1972. The proposals envisage that the Assembly might have a single chamber of about 90 members, elected for a four or five year term. To reflect the special circumstances of Northern Ireland, they would be elected by a form of proportional representation. Where appropriate, decisions in the Assembly would be taken by a weighted majority.

There would be a system of committees to oversee the work of the Northern Ireland Departments, and there would be a separate panel, elected from throughout the whole of Northern Ireland, with a consultative, monitoring and representational role.

The new Assembly would not have tax-raising powers, and would receive its funding from central Government. It would have legislative powers for the functions transferred to it, although it would be for consideration whether it would assume legislative powers from day one, or whether such responsibility would be transferred progressively.

The Assembly would have responsibility for functions that are, in many cases, devolved to local government elsewhere in the United Kingdom, including education and housing. Policing and security matters would, however, remain the responsibility of the United Kingdom Government and of this Parliament, at least for as long as the terrorist threat makes the active support of the Army necessary in Northern Ireland.

I now turn to strand 2, the arrangements for north-south co-operation. We have today published a joint framework document, "Frameworks for the Future", which has been agreed with the Irish Government. That sets out a series of proposals as a basis for further discussion.

One crucial component is that, as part of an overall settlement, the Irish Government have committed themselves to introducing and to supporting proposals to amend article 2 and article 3 of their constitution. Those amendments would fully reflect the principle of consent in Northern Ireland.

Paragraph 21 of the joint framework document spells out that they would

"demonstrably be such that no territorial claim of right to jurisdiction over Northern Ireland contrary to the will of a majority of its people is asserted".

That intention is unambiguous, and was reaffirmed by the Taoiseach this morning.

For their part, the British Government would, in those circumstances, enshrine in our legislation the principle that Northern Ireland's future should reflect the wishes of its people. That would be done either by amending existing legislation or by introducing new legislation. That would not affect the United Kingdom's sovereignty over Northern Ireland, which could only be changed by further primary legislation.

[The Prime Minister]

The joint framework document also sets out proposals for a new north-south body, which could carry out a range of consultative, harmonising or executive functions. It would not have free-standing authority: it would be accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly and to the Irish Parliament respectively. The Northern Ireland members of the body would be drawn from relevant elected heads of Department from the Northern Ireland Assembly, and would naturally reflect policies determined by that Northern Ireland Assembly.

Fears have been expressed that this body would, in effect, give the Irish Government joint sovereignty over Northern Ireland. That is emphatically not the case. It is a proposal for co-operation by agreement between Northern Ireland's representatives and their counterparts in the Republic. Decisions in the body could only be taken where there was agreement north and south. There is no question of a majority outvoting a minority. The Northern Ireland Assembly and the Irish Parliament would each therefore have an absolute safeguard against proposals it did not approve of.

The north-south body would be established by legislation in this Parliament and in the Irish Parliament. It would discharge or oversee only such functions as were designated for it. There is no predetermined list of those functions: that would be decided only after discussion and agreement with the political parties in Northern Ireland. It would be for the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Irish Parliament to decide whether any additional functions should subsequently be designated.

The document also sets out how European Community programmes might be handled in a north-south body. It envisages that the north-south body would be responsible for implementing and managing those programmes which are explicitly designed on a cross-border or island-wide basis. There are currently very few such programmes. Otherwise, the north-south body would have primarily an advisory role.

The House will wish to be reassured that responsibility for determining policy towards the European Union would remain, as now, with the United Kingdom Government.

Let me now turn to strand 3, where the joint framework document sets out proposals for future relations between the British and Irish Governments.

These envisage that the Anglo-Irish Agreement would be replaced by a new agreement between the two Governments. As now, there would be a continuing intergovernmental conference, with a permanent secretariat. The intergovernmental conference would be the forum in which the two Governments would jointly keep the new arrangements under review.

It would be open to either Government to bring up concerns about breaches of the new arrangements and to discuss how they might be resolved. This is the so-called "default mechanism." But there is no question of this process giving the Irish Government the right to take action in respect of the internal government of Northern Ireland. The framework document explicitly sets out that

"There would be no derogation from the sovereignty of either Government; each will retain responsibility for the decisions and administration of Government within its own jurisdiction."

As I have sought to emphasise, these documents are intended as a contribution to the talks process. They set out ideas that the Government believe represent a balanced and realistic way forward that could command support across a wide political spectrum in Northern Ireland.

The next step will be for further negotiations to take place with the political parties in Northern Ireland. In those negotiations, others will be naturally be free to put forward their own proposals. I very much hope that everyone will agree to negotiate seriously. There is too much at stake for anyone to stand aside from these discussions.

If agreement is reached in the negotiations, the outcome will be put for approval to the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum. I should equally make it clear that there is no question of putting proposals to a referendum before there is agreement between the main political parties.

There is a triple safeguard against any proposals being imposed on Northern Ireland: first, any proposals must command the support of the political parties in Northern Ireland; secondly, any proposals must then be approved by the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum; and thirdly, any necessary legislation must be passed by this Parliament. That provides a triple lock designed to ensure that nothing is implemented without consent.

The prize from a successful outcome to the peace process is immense. We want to see the people of Northern Ireland permanently free from the fear of terrorist violence. We want to see institutions that reflect the different traditions in Northern Ireland in a manner acceptable to all, and we want to enshrine the principle, both north and south, that no change in Northern Ireland's constitutional position can take place without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland.

I believe that these documents make an important contribution to that process, and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement, and I welcome it. As he knows, we have supported the Government throughout the peace process, in times of difficulty as well as in times of progress, and we do so again today without hesitation. People in Northern Ireland should know that, whatever party is in government, this process will continue, pursued, I hope, with the same patience and determination, and motivated by the same desire for peace.

I also applaud the courage and skill of the British and Irish Governments, and, indeed, all those politicians and people who have contributed to this process. In particular, I salute the courage and fortitude of the people of Northern Ireland, who, throughout all those dark years of terrorism, none the less kept faith with peace.

I emphasise too that these are documents for consultation; they are not diktats. They seek balance; they threaten no one's fundamental interests, and therefore no one should fear discussing or debating them.

May I put to the Prime Minister the following points of detail on the document which outlines the new institutions in Northern Ireland, and on the joint framework document? I would make one preliminary point. Although, of course, the Government will want to negotiate on the basis of their own documents, will the

right hon. Gentleman confirm that any other documents tabled by other parties will be seriously examined and taken into account in this process?

On the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly, the Prime Minister will not, of course, expect me to agree with his assertion that devolution is suitable only for one part of the United Kingdom. Will the right hon. Gentleman say what legislative powers he envisages, not only executive powers, for the devolved Northern Ireland Assembly, and over what specified areas? When he says that the funding will come from central Government, is it to come in block, or will specific sums be earmarked for particular areas?

As to the north-south body, again as a preliminary point, will the Prime Minister confirm—I think that it may be helpful—that the principle of cross-border co-operation already exists in certain areas such as transport and tourism and energy? It is therefore not an unknown concept.

Can we be clear about the functions of this new body? In respect of the executive functions, am I right in thinking that the new body will be responsible for European Union programmes, but only those designated as covering both north and south? In implementing those programmes, will it deal directly with the European Union or only through the Governments? In that connection, will it have its own executive officers and civil servants?

Will the right hon. Gentleman also spell out the difference between the north-south body's executive functions and what are called its harmonising functions? Is it right that, in respect of the harmonising areas, such as education or industry or agriculture, the obligation is to try to agree a common policy, but in specified parts of those areas only, and that, in any event, that implementation is through either the Assembly or the Dail?

As to the third strand, relations between the Irish and UK Governments, the document talks of both Governments seeking ways of enshrining the protection of civil rights in their respective jurisdictions. What does the right hon. Gentleman envisage that the UK will do to implement that, and is it by way of legislation? Will he be a little more precise about the reciprocal constitutional change needed in the UK as a result of the package that he has announced? What will be the next step? When does he foresee talks beginning, and between whom?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that none of those proposals will come about at all without consent? Parties must agree, people must agree, Parliament must agree. Consent, as I think that he was saying, is of the absolute essence. It has at its core the principle of self-determination. The people of Northern Ireland will choose their own future. There lies the power and there lies, also, the responsibility—a responsibility to be exercised not just for today, but for future generations.

The house of peace has stayed shut and locked in Northern Ireland for too many years. The agreement is the key to its door. I have no doubt that entering in will pose its own risks and challenges, but how much better that will be than to stay for ever outside, battered by the elements of hatred and mistrust. Today, therefore, across the House of Commons, let hope shape history—the hope of the ordinary, decent people in Northern Ireland, of both traditions, that they should be freed from the tyranny of violence, to enjoy the peace which they deserve and which we have all sought for so long.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his support, and for the unqualified manner in which he expressed that support. He is entirely right to illustrate to the House that nothing in the document is a diktat—nothing seeks to be imposed, nothing seeks to be threatening, and everything is there to be determined by consent and agreement.

I shall deal with the specific questions that the right hon. Gentleman has posed. Will the Government, in the talks yet to continue, be prepared to accept and consider other documents? The answer, in unqualified terms, is, yes, we will welcome other contributions to the debate, and we shall wish to explore them in the discussions that lie ahead.

The devolved Assembly will deal with many matters traditionally dealt with in local government, and some beyond. It will deal with education, health and agriculture—broadly, the range of responsibilities that existed in 1972 when Northern Ireland, for historic reasons, had its own Assembly. Funding is not for each individual aspect of responsibility, but will come in a block, as the right hon. Gentleman anticipated.

As the right hon. Gentleman said, cross-border functions currently exist.

The right hon. Gentleman's description of the executive element was entirely correct, so I need not reiterate that. The Executive will deal with the European Union through the Government and will have its own secretariat, drawn jointly from north and south—answerable to the body and to the Northern Ireland Assembly and to the Dail.

The right hon. Gentleman was entirely right about the obligation to try to agree, and I need add nothing more to that.

The straight answer to the hon. Gentleman's question about civil rights is, yes, we shall seek to determine civil rights. That was a matter raised by each of the political parties—I think, without exception—with whom we had discussions. There is much work still to be done beyond the principle that we shall seek to enshrine such rights.

Bits of the document may require legislation, but it is as yet unclear precisely which ones. Where necessary, we shall proceed, with agreement, towards such legislation.

On the subject of reciprocal changes, we shall seek to enshrine the principle of consent in the joint declaration—which was echoed again in the documents this morning—in British legislation. That could be done by amendment to the Government of Ireland Act 1920 or by fresh legislation. It will not affect Britain's sovereign right to govern Northern Ireland.

I reiterate that the right hon. Gentleman is entirely right to say that the principle of consent is writ large through every page, every action and every purpose that exists within the document.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the most common criticism made of the Anglo-Irish agreement by people in Northern Ireland was that it was imposed, and that it would have been far better if it had been advanced on the basis of a contribution to further discussions between the parties in Northern Ireland? Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in my

[Mr. Tom King]

judgment, the basis on which he has announced the framework document today precisely meets the criticisms made at that time? I congratulate him on that.

Are not my right hon. Friend and all the brave people of Northern Ireland, to whom the Leader of the Opposition rightly referred, entitled to expect that the political leaders of those people should now carry out the undertaking that they claimed to me to be capable of discharging? They should now recognise the document as a basis for discussion and as an opportunity to negotiate and achieve a sensible and lasting agreement.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I think that he is entirely right about the resentment and concern that was felt in Northern Ireland over the manner of the birth of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I think that that legacy has haunted subsequent efforts to move towards finding a better way forward in Northern Ireland.

As my right hon. Friend says, the new legislation will be discussed. I hope that it will remove the difficulties that existed at the time of the Anglo-Irish Agreement precisely because it will be discussed and, if legislation proceeds, it will proceed only after that discussion.

I am grateful that we have already received some written proposals from some political parties—the Democratic Unionist party and the Ulster Unionist party—for consideration alongside the framework document. Of course we are prepared to consider them. I hope that we will have the opportunity to consider them with the political leaders themselves, and consider also the propositions that we were asked to provide, and have now provided, in the framework document.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Is the Prime Minister confident that the Irish Republican Army has fully understood his message which is enshrined in the framework document: that, when it resumes its violence, it should not bomb the Baltic Exchange, since his Government have now distanced themselves from 90 per cent. of the people in Northern Ireland who have eschewed violence over the past 20 years and who have vested their faith in the ballot box?

How can the Prime Minister endorse paragraph 9 of the document? It says:

> "The primary objective . . . is to promote and establish agreement among the people of the island of Ireland".

What does that have to do with Northern Ireland? How can the Prime Minister endorse harmonisation of policies between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic when Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom by the will of its people demonstrated at the ballot box?

When the Prime Minister comes to write his memoirs, does he believe that, like his predecessor, he will regret his part in driving Northern Ireland back at least 10 years by promoting this dishonourable blueprint for a united Ireland?

The Prime Minister: I understand the strong feelings that the hon. Gentleman has about this matter, but I beg him to examine more carefully what is in the document, and the way in which the document intends to proceed. I cannot accept that it drives Northern Ireland back 10 years to try to seek a peace which may be entrenched permanently in Northern Ireland after generations of mistrust and hatred. That is the purpose which underlies all the actions in the document.

As far as the Irish Republican Army and a message to it are concerned, I simply say to the hon. Gentleman and to everyone in Northern Ireland that our determination to resist terrorism has always been there, it is there now and it will remain there. That is why we have had British troops on the streets of Northern Ireland for a quarter of a century. That is why I increased the number of British troops in Northern Ireland. That is why I am prepared to say to the hon. Gentleman at this moment that, for so long as I am here, I will keep troops on the streets of Northern Ireland for as long as it is necessary to protect the people of Northern Ireland against terrorism, from whatever source it may come.

If the hon. Gentleman seeks my message to the Irish Republican Army, it is this. While it bombs and kills, it has an implacable opponent in Downing street and in the Government. If it is prepared to talk and return to democratic politics, we will offer it a ready ear. We will discuss with it how it may return to democratic politics, so that the next generation in the hon. Gentleman's constituency may not face the privations, the murders, the sorrows, the hardships, the deaths and the funerals year after year that he and his constituents have suffered in the past.

That is the game in which we are engaged at the moment. Where do I find myself in Northern Ireland? I place myself alongside 100 per cent. of the people in Northern Ireland and believe that it is right to take action to move out of the spiral of despair that existed there and move towards the possibility of a permanent peace. I know that it will be difficult; I know that it cannot be done without difficulty, and perhaps it cannot be done without disagreements, setbacks and problems. But I say to the hon. Gentleman that it is right to try. I do not believe that any Prime Minister of the United Kingdom—Conservative or non-Conservative—could or should sit in Downing street without actively trying to find a way out of the problems which have existed for so long.

As for harmonisation, when the hon. Gentleman studies the document he will not find things in it which will cause him fear. I happily say to the hon. Gentleman that I will sit down with him and go through the document paragraph by paragraph, line by line and word by word to try to reassure him that there is nothing in it for him to fear, and everything in it which may make progress to what he wishes for his constituents and for Northern Ireland and what I and this House wish for his constituents and for Northern Ireland—a permanent peace and a prosperous future.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): As my right hon. Friend tries to reassure those with misgivings about the document, will he take every opportunity to emphasise that it imposes nothing but rather suggests a possible way forward, that its primary purpose is to promote meaningful debate between the political parties in Northern Ireland, and that those parties may, if they wish, during bilateral talks with each other or with the Government, bring forward alternative suggestions?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The document seeks to impose nothing, and its primary purpose is debate. My hon. Friend touches on a very important point when he talks about the possibility of

further bilateral discussions with the political parties. It will be necessary for further bilateral meetings with the parties, both to discuss proposals which they may have and to seek wherever necessary to take the parties through our proposals and discuss with them any fears which they may have about the proposals in the document. My door is open, as are those of my Ministers, for those bilateral discussions, which could start at any moment.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Could I begin by placing on record on behalf of myself, my party and the people we represent our deepest appreciation to the Prime Minister and the Government for the enormous effort they have made, and for putting this problem at centre stage and at the top of their agenda, because this is the greatest human problem facing the Government and the peoples of these islands? May I also pay tribute to the leaders of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties for placing the matter above party politics—where it belongs—so that we can have a totally unanimous approach to tackling this serious problem?

Does the Prime Minister agree that, when all the words have been taken away from the document published today, the fundamental message is that the problem we must solve in Ireland is not that we are a divided piece of earth but that we are a divided people? Does he agree that that can be resolved only by agreement, and that all the resources to which both Governments are now committing themselves should be committed to promoting that agreement? Agreement threatens no section of our people.

I say to the Unionist people that I understand their fears and tensions, given the 25 years which we have been through. We have said before that this problem cannot be resolved without the participation and agreement of the Unionist people, because of their geography and numbers. We know that they do not trust Governments. All they are now being asked to do is trust themselves, and to come to the table. If they do not agree with this, they should come to the table and join all the parties and both Governments as soon as possible, to begin the difficult process of reaching agreement.

Let us all recognise that all our past attitudes have brought us to where we are, and have built those terrible walls in Belfast. If those walls are ever to come down, all sides must re-examine those past attitudes and come forward with new arrangements and relationships, which respect our differences but which at last harness all our energies to spill our sweat together, and not our blood, so that the next century will be the first century in the island's history in which we have no killings on our streets, and no young people have to go to other lands to earn a living.

The Prime Minister: I know that that has long been the dream of the hon. Gentleman, and the whole House knows the role that he has played in moving towards it.

The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise the fact that there cannot be an agreement without taking the majority tradition in Northern Ireland entirely with it. Agreement cannot be imposed; it will not be imposed; it would not work if anyone sought to impose it.

One of the problems that one needs to try to deal with is the problem of old fears and of trust. That requires consensus, agreement and a lot of discussion. I know that some people are pessimistic about whether such agreements can be reached, and whether such progress can be made. If those pessimists had been confronted two years ago with today's situation, they would not have believed the changes that have taken place in Northern Ireland in the past two years.

They would not have believed that the joint declaration could be agreed; they would not have accepted that the joint framework document would be agreed, or that we would have six months of peace, or that it would be possible for any British Government to sit down and talk to the political representatives of the paramilitaries of both sides.

These are but a small example of the changes in Northern Ireland over the past two years. Heaven alone knows, there are difficulties enough ahead, but if we look at what has been done in the past two years and take the hurdles in the future one by one, with patience I believe that they can be overcome, trust can be forged and the old fears can be diluted. That is how I hope we shall all be able to move forward.

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): Will my right hon. Friend accept the wholehearted support of the members of the British-Irish inter-parliamentary body, British and Irish alike, for this historic process? Will he firmly reiterate yet again that sovereignty is not at stake, and that the principle of consent reigns paramount? Finally, does he agree that it is now for the people of Northern Ireland to seize this opportunity, and to ensure that the changes that will secure the peace are made on their behalf?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and for the role that he has played for many years in Anglo-Irish relations. He is right to stress the fact that consent is paramount. I guarantee that it will remain so in the future.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Prime Minister recognise that, while there are bound to be differences between the parties about the details of these proposals—we, for example, feel that a Bill of Rights should have been part of the framework—the discussion process is there to consider differences and to work out an agreement that will win the votes of the people of Northern Ireland? It is they who will decide. Is it not also clear that, when it comes to determination to maintain this peace process, the three largest parties in this House are—unusually, but absolutely—united?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what he had to say. The most clear-cut exposition of the fact that he is right—that the people of Northern Ireland must decide, for without them there can be no agreement—and of the fact that that is the view of the British Government, is the guarantee that I have given that, after the political parties have reached an agreement—if they can—we shall put the outcome of their discussions to the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum, so that all the people of Northern Ireland will have the chance to express their view on the proposals that will affect their future.

Sir Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): As this remains the sovereign Parliament of the people of Northern Ireland, can my right hon. Friend, whose

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

courageous persistence I salute, say what role he envisages for elected Members of this House in the parliamentary forum?

The Prime Minister: There is of course a parliamentary forum now; it will continue. As the talks process proceeds—this follows from what the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) just said from the Liberal Bench—the Government are open to propositions that would be helpful to these discussions from every hon. Member. I hope that those with positive points to put will make them. In due course, provided we get through the first hurdles of agreement between the parties and the referendum, it will of course be for this House to determine the legislation that will be laid before it.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Although there is much in these framework documents that will not be welcomed by Unionists throughout Northern Ireland, I think it only right on behalf of my constituents to place on record our appreciation of the fact that the Prime Minister is giving such priority to the problems of Northern Ireland. In addition, I add the concern and interest that the Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition is equally taking in matters affecting peace in our Province.

In the Prime Minister's statement, he said that he was a Unionist. He has repeatedly said that throughout this morning. Can he therefore assure the people of Northern Ireland this afternoon, as the Union and the maintenance of the Union is the key to progress and peace within Northern Ireland, that, as a result of his new policy announced today, the Union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland is more secure today than it was yesterday?

The Prime Minister: There are three points that I would make to the right hon. Gentleman. First, I would thank him for his initial words. Secondly, I would say to him that the guarantee of the Union for the people of Northern Ireland lies within their own will. For so long as the people of Northern Ireland share the view that they wish to be part of the United Kingdom, they will remain part of the United Kingdom.

Thirdly, the right hon. Gentleman will also have heard the Taoiseach make it clear this morning that he was removing the claim to territory that exists in articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution. He set out the point about jurisdiction quite clearly this morning. That has been a source of great friction in Northern Ireland.

I believe and hope that we are now in a position where we shall be able to remove some of the old fears that have existed, as the immediate hubbub settles around the publication of this document, and look at a practical route forward. I am willing to do that. I think that it is clear from what the Leader of the Opposition and the deputy leader of the Liberal party have said that there is widespread consensus among rt hon. and hon. Members across the House, who would be prepared to give as much time, trouble and interest as is necessary to try to solve the problems that have bedevilled Northern Ireland for so long.

Sir James Kilfedder (North Down): May I preface my question to the Prime Minister by stating my passionate dedication to reconciliation between the two sections of our community in Northern Ireland and between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic? But the Prime Minister will understand—the Leader of the Opposition referred to this—that many have died over 26 years of terrorism in Northern Ireland. My mind goes out to all those who have been murdered by the terrorists, men who now pose as peacemakers.

With regard to the last Northern Ireland Assembly, my right hon. Friend gave the date as 1972. The last Northern Ireland Assembly lasted from 1982 to 1986, when it was brought to an end by the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I was the Speaker of that Assembly. It was my regret that the SDLP and other nationalists boycotted that Assembly, which was, in fact, a good basis for political progress in Northern Ireland. If that had not happened in 1982 to 1986, imagine just where we would be today.

I ask my right hon. Friend to bear in mind that the surest foundation for political progress in Northern Ireland, as indeed anywhere else in the world, is trust and good will as well as consent. Will he therefore consider the establishment of another Assembly as soon as possible, without all the details to which I see reference in the document, which would allow elected representatives to get together, to get to know each other and to work out their own problems? As a matter of good will—I believe that that exists today in Northern Ireland—they could develop good relations with their opposite numbers in the Dublin Parliament.

The Prime Minister: Of course, if that is the wish of the parties, we would respect and honour that wish. That is certainly a wish that may legitimately be put on the table for discussion in the manner that my hon. Friend has mentioned.

My hon. Friend mentioned the two sections of the community for which he has affection. I believe that the best thing we can do for the two sections of the community is to continue to try to remove the strife and the problems that have divided them for so long.

My hon. Friend referred to those who died in the many years of terrorism. We all feel strongly about that—hon. Members from Northern Ireland understandably more strongly, from more direct involvement than others. Our aim surely must be that no more people are killed in that fashion. I very much hope that we will be able to ensure that there are not.

My hon. Friend referred to the Assembly, in which, as Speaker, he played a distinguished role for a long time. Of course, the surest foundation for the future is trust and goodwill. Trust and good will is what I ask for and what I seek, and what I hope will carry these talks forward.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The Prime Minister and the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic signed the joint declaration on 15 December two years ago. They gave themselves an awesome responsibility when they committed themselves to remove the causes of the conflict, to overcome the legacy of history and to heal the divisions that have resulted.

Does the Prime Minister agree that those responsibilities have been furthered by the framework document, which was published today, which is based on consent and which can be implemented only through agreement? Does he further agree that that primary agreement—not exclusively—will be between those people represented by the Ulster Unionist party and by

our own party within Northern Ireland; and that, as two parties representing the vast majority of the people in the north of Ireland, of both traditions, we also have an awesome responsibility to pursue the noble objective of peace and to make the concessions which are going to be required, not just from Unionism but from nationalism as well; and that, if we pursue that line, then we will all be fulfilling those responsibilities?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and am grateful for what he had to say. He is entirely right that the principle determinants of a permanent peace, if it is achievable, will have been the political parties and the people of Northern Ireland. The role of any British Government, and the role of documents like the framework document, is the role of a facilitator. We will put in front of people ideas that we hope will bring them together, but it is for the political parties to decide whether those are the right ideas for their constituents and for their future, and that is what I hope that they will do.

I will make the point, if I may, even more clearly about the joint framework document. It is not, as the hon. Gentleman implied, there on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. It is not a diktat. It is there for the political parties and the people to accept it, to reject it, or to change it. But it is there for discussion, to bring the parties together, in the way that the hon. Gentleman speaks of.

Sir John Cope (Northavon): In supporting my right hon. Friend, which I do wholeheartedly, could I ask him to emphasise to the Irish Government that the changes proposed to the Republic's constitution are not only of the greatest constitutional importance, as has been emphasised, but are an essential prerequisite before any new north-south body can be set up, because that should be a meeting between representatives of equal administrations trying to co-operate and not with one side committed to trying to interfere in and take over the other, which is what some people fear?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is entirely right about that, and of course he speaks with great knowledge, from his own distinguished period at the Northern Ireland Office. I agree with him about the importance of the changes proposed in articles 2 and 3 of the constitution. I think that many people anticipated that there might be some change in article 3. I think that far fewer people imagined that there would be change in article 2. That is what has been agreed, and confirmed again this morning.

The change that is proposed will address both articles 2 and 3 of the constitution. The purpose of the change will be to remove any jurisdiction or territorial claim of right over the territory of Northern Ireland, and that will remain the position while it is contrary to the will of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): The Prime Minister referred to the need for the approval of the main—the main—political parties before any proposal is put to the people by way of a referendum. Will the Prime Minister spell out precisely what he means by "the main political parties"? Will he make it absolutely clear that the threat of a boycott by any party will not be allowed to jeopardise this historic, and perhaps unique, opportunity for a peaceful settlement?

The Prime Minister: While I seek the widest possible consensus to this agreement, what I do not wish to do is seek to place any political party, large or small, beyond the pale of these discussions, providing that they are a legitimate and democratic political party. We seek this wide agreement for the very practical reason that, if we can get the wide agreement, we will win the peace.

What we have learnt from the history of Northern Ireland is that any significant part of the community, if it dissents, can in practice frustrate a move forward. We have learnt that from experience time and time again in recent years. It is for that reason that we will seek the widest possible agreement. I do not wish to specify which particular parties and run through them: I think that we know which the main political parties are. But there are other distinguished voices in Northern Ireland whom one might not regard as a main political party. We would seek to ensure that those distinguished voices were also heard.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I commend my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on his immense courage and determination in seeking to achieve a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. I think that I speak on behalf of not only everyone in the Chamber but those outside in wishing him success in his initiative and that of the Government.

However, can he perhaps explain to me, bearing in mind that those responsible for the killing and bombing in Northern Ireland during the past 25 to 26 years have stated through their spokesman, Mr. Gerry Adams, that their sole objective is to get the United Kingdom out of Northern Ireland, how the two objectives of the peace that we all want and the union in which I and, dare I say to my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister of this country believes, can be achieved?

The Prime Minister: I think what needs to be done as far as the paramilitaries are concerned—the IRA and, indeed, the Protestant paramilitaries as well—is to disattach them from the legitimate support of the people of Northern Ireland; to disattach those who legitimately wish for a nationalist future from the violent men of the IRA. I think that that has significantly happened in the period since the joint declaration.

It is certainly equally the case that the joint declaration has made a remarkable difference in the support that the IRA had previously received from many sources outside Northern Ireland. There is a changing tide of opinion towards those who wish to pursue by violence an end that is not legitimate.

The other great change, of course, is that the change in the Irish constitution actually enshrines the legitimacy of Northern Ireland's position. It is not easy to over-emphasise the significant changes that we have seen in Northern Ireland during the past few years. It is not all that long ago that the only people who would have agreed with the principle of consent in Northern Ireland would have been the Unionist parties in Northern Ireland and the British Government. The principle of consent is now

[The Prime Minister]

accepted almost everywhere. That is one illustration of the changing nature of debate in Northern Ireland that I believe will meet the point that my hon. Friend raises.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I join in congratulating the right hon. Gentleman and his Government, and the Government of the Republic, and not least the former Taoiseach, Mr. Reynolds, on the work that they have done in achieving the publication of this quite historic document today.

Is he aware that, on reading that document, careful attention is paid to the dignity, the rightful aspirations and the integrity of each of the traditional communities within Northern Ireland and, on the basis of that document, nobody has anything to fear when entering freely into discussions with the right hon. Gentleman and his Government and with the other parties in Northern Ireland; that the essence of consent is very much there? Is he also aware that, should this brave initiative, this try which is well worth making, sadly fail, at the end of the day people will have to return to the same principles that are enshrined in the documents published today?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he has to say. I agree that there is nothing to fear from continuing in these discussions, precisely for the reason that has been spelt out by hon. Member after hon. Member on both sides of the House—that we proceed with consent and by agreement. It is a rational way to proceed. I believe in the politics of reason, and proceeding in this way is an illustration of the politics of reason.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend and his colleagues in the Northern Ireland Office for their considerable achievement in producing the document. My right hon. Friend has stated wisely that the state of emergency will continue, and that law and order will continue to be administered by the British Government. Does he agree that the state of emergency can end only when all the weapons on all sides of the conflict in Northern Ireland are surrendered? Will he further reassure the House, as he did in his statement on the Downing street declaration in December 1993, that there are no political prisoners in Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I am happy to reaffirm to my hon. Friend that there are no political prisoners in Northern Ireland, and we do not accept that term in any sense. The purpose of removing weapons is crucial to ensuring that significant progress is made in future. That, of course, is not directly dealt with in the documents published today. It is a matter under discussion with the political representatives of the paramilitary groups in the discussions that the Government are having with them at present. We are moving towards discussing such issues as the decommissioning of arms, and my hon. Friend is entirely right to draw attention to the central importance of success in that role.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): May I say on behalf of Plaid Cymru that we support unconditionally and wish well the important step that has been taken by the Prime Minister and the Government today?

May I press the Prime Minister to clarify the role of the Northern Ireland Assembly? He mentioned that it would have functions that belonged to local government, but he also said that it was to be a legislative assembly. Local government is not a legislative tier of government. Will he confirm that there will be full law-making powers in the Northern Ireland Assembly over the functions that fall into its remit, and that we are talking about a powerful assembly for Northern Ireland, not a glorified county council?

The Prime Minister: Yes, if that is what is wished. What we have put forward today are ideas for the political parties themselves to determine. I reiterate that it is not a prescription. The Northern Ireland Assembly would have legislative functions, it would not have tax-raising powers, and it would bid for its money in terms of block grant and utilise that money.

For many of the functions that would be devolved to it—although the hon. Gentleman makes the point about legislation, as opposed to the order-making and byelaw powers that often exist with local authorities—the Northern Ireland Assembly would have legislative authority, but it would need to bid for the money, and that would be provided to it in block grant form. It would not have the power to raise resources, and it would emphatically not be a tax-raising assembly.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, far from driving Northern Ireland back by 10 years, what he has achieved over the 14 short months since the signing of the Downing street declaration is to drive the peace process forward in a way which many people said was literally impossible at the time? He, the Secretary of State and the Minister of State are to be congratulated on that. Although the north-south body refers to the designation of delegated functions, because that section also talks about the agreement of the parties, as the document does throughout, there is really no reason why all the parties should not participate in the talks on that basis.

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend, as he knows from his own period as a Northern Ireland Minister precisely how people feel about those issues, and precisely what the difficulties are; I am particular grateful to him for his comments with that in mind. As far as the designation of authorities is concerned, it is worth spelling out the point clearly, so that it cannot be misunderstood by people in Northern Ireland, and I would not wish it to be.

In the first instance, this would be discussed among the political parties. If they agreed, there would be a referendum. After the referendum, there would be legislation in the House. The Assembly would then be set up, and any changes—any further powers that might then be devolved to the north-south body—would be devolved by the Northern Ireland Assembly itself. Agreement in the north-south body could be reached only with the agreement of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The fear that arose at one stage in the past that this would be an entirely independent, entirely autonomous, high-powered executive body that would rapidly change the mode of existence and way of life across a great swathe of functions in Northern Ireland is self-evidently wrong. I hope that that fear has been well and truly put at rest by the documents published today.

Madam Speaker: Thank you, Prime Minister. I now bring this session to an end.

BILL PRESENTED

Criminal Appeal

Mr. Secretary Howard, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew, Mr. Attorney-General, Mr. David Maclean and Mr. Nicholas Baker, presented a Bill to amend provisions relating to appeals and references to the Court of Appeal in criminal cases; to establish a Criminal Cases Review Commission and confer functions on, and make other provision in relation to, the Commission; to amend section 142 of the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980 and introduce in Northern Ireland provisions similar to those of that section; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 57.]

Breast Cancer (National Plan)

4.30 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to formulate a national plan for combating breast cancer.

The incidence of breast cancer in the United Kingdom is the highest in the world. Government statistics show that each year there are 30,000 new cases. There are nearly 16,000 deaths from breast cancer per year, and the United Kingdom has poorer five-year survival rates than any other European country or the United States. Those statistics signal a clear need for action, and that is what my Bill is intended to achieve.

The Bill will require the Government to call a conference to establish a national action plan on breast cancer, based on the plan that is now so successful in America. The conference to formulate such a response there was called by President Clinton shortly after his inauguration, following a great deal of pressure which resulted in the presentation to the White House of a petition with 2.5 million signatures. The conference that I want the Government to call must embrace and involve the full spectrum of individuals, groups and organisations concerned with breast cancer.

In America, invitations were extended to 150 representatives—members of advocacy groups, breast cancer sufferers, representatives of private industry, academics, scientists, doctors and people from the media, education and specialist cancer units, as well as many others with a legitimate interest. The action plan that was drawn up at the conference stated:

"these invited participants worked together in a unique and unprecedented partnership that combined scientific and technical expertise with social insights and personal and professional experience and commitment."

I have no doubt that that experience could be repeated here: indeed, we have already seen many exciting new initiatives, such as the launch of the Macmillan breast cancer registry on Monday, and many others.

The United States came up with its plan at about the time when the Army Medical Command diverted $210 million from the defence budget to breast cancer. Thus, the action plan had an immediate budget. Just imagine if we could use some of the money from the Trident programme to help women to combat this dreadful disease. In the United States the political commitment was there, and so was the money. That was very important.

On 14 December last year, the all-party group on breast cancer held a seminar which many eminent professors and medical professionals attended, as did many user groups comprising those connected with breast cancer. The purpose of the seminar was to discuss the merits of a national plan. I believe that it was a huge success, and I pay tribute to all who attended and contributed.

At the end of the seminar, people were unanimous in their support for a national action plan. It should be noted that hon. Members from all parties attended, and that all parties in the House support my Bill.

As I have said, superb initiatives are already under way, and some excellent work is already being undertaken. Much of it, however, is fragmented. As we heard on Monday, services, in particular, are a lottery—the Macmillan document makes that clear.

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

The abolition of the regional health authorities is causing great concern. The British Breast Group recommends access to specialist facilities—it is a keynote of its recommendations—but uncertainty of funding remains. Who will guarantee, for instance, that purchasers will pay for the use of such facilities if they are established?

The document produced in the United States of America is a blueprint drawn to highlight opportunities to advance and apply knowledge about the causes, diagnosis, prevention, treatment and ultimate eradication of this dreadful disease. That document has acted as a catalyst in co-ordinating actions relating to breast cancer. There is no reason why we cannot do the same here.

The first part of such a plan would concentrate on improving access to services. That is at the core of British Breast Group's report, which is clear in its demands. It says that all patients with breast disease should have access to high-quality care. The characteristics of such care should include accurate and timely diagnosis, appropriate treatment and follow-up, effective communication, skilled psychosocial support, immediate access to other specialist facilities as required, and collection of data on outcome measures.

The importance of improving co-ordination and information management among providers cannot be overstated. It is also vital to increase participation of under-served and at-risk populations in breast cancer programmes dealing with risk factors. Early detection, diagnosis and treatment are essential. That would mean targeting and working with educationists and the media, which would be important if the Government were to adopt a national strategy.

Part two of a national plan should involve research into the causes and cures of breast cancer. That research must be properly funded. I would make the same demands of a Labour Government, were they in power.

In the United States, the following plan was put into operation. It aims to identify and to foster promising new areas of basic research through interagency, inter-disciplinary and private and public collaboration; to facilitate collaboration among basic, clinical behavioural, epidemiological and health services, plus scientists across the disciplines—which has been successful in some ways; and to organise and support multi-disciplinary research and collaborative efforts, using a wide range of mechanisms that maximise individual and group efforts.

Part three of the national plan would, as in the United States, establish comprehensive patient data registries and material banks as research tools. That would need national funding. The infrastructure must be put in place; more important, it must be paid for.

Part four of the plan would increase opportunities for research training in sectors related to breast cancer. The United States, for example, is expanding the scope and breadth of biomedical and behavioural research activities relating to breast cancer. It is providing adequate resources and mechanisms to speed the translation from the lab to the clinic of new therapeutic opportunities. It is making clinical trials more widely available to women with breast cancer, and women who are at risk from breast cancer.

At our seminar in December, Alison Coates from Bosom Friends, a Bradford-based support group, commented:

"I was diagnosed breast cancer at the age of 24. Personally, what I would like to know is what research and trials are taking place to prevent cancer occurring in women outside the screening age group. I have not been invited to take part in any clinical trials, although I have put myself forward on numerous occasions."

My plan would utilise such women, who want to take part in finding the causes of breast cancer.

Most important, the United States is supporting research on the prevention of the causes of breast cancer. Clearly, we need to persuade the Government that a national action plan is necessary. That means picking up the bill for research, and not leaving it to the charities. There is a serious need to support and fund clinical trials, and to support an infrastructure. The British Breast Group has made many recommendations that should be implemented, as has the Calman and Culyer report.

I give the final word to a 32-year-old woman from Bosom Friends in Bradford, Sue Patterson, who told the seminar held by the all-party group that, after suffering this dreadful disease, she was told in follow-up advice to lie on her back and think of England. She told us:

"I am thinking of England and we do have a public voice. Women are coming forward. We are prepared to be mobilised. We are prepared even to go on the streets. We really do feel we are being forgotten, that is why we call upon this Government to establish a National Plan of Action on Breast Cancer."

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Malcolm Chisholm, Mrs. Ann Winterton, Ms Liz Lynne, Mrs. Audrey Wise, Mr. Harold Elletson, Ms Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Bernard Jenkin, Mrs. Ann Clwyd, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Ms Jean Corston and Mr. Eric Illsley.

BREAST CANCER (NATIONAL PLAN)

Mrs. Alice Mahon accordingly presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to formulate a national plan for combating breast cancer: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 31 March, and to be printed. [Bill 56.]

Value Added Tax

4.41 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I beg to move,

That the Value Added Tax (Construction of Buildings) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 280), dated 8th February 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the Value Added Tax (Protected Buildings) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 283), dated 8th February 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.

That the Value Added Tax (Input Tax) (Amendment) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 281), dated 8th February 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.

That the Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 279), dated 8th February 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.

That the Value Added Tax (Payments on Account) (Amendment) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 291), dated 8th February 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9th February, be approved.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There are five value added tax orders before the House. I shall first introduce three of them and then speak to the remaining two separately. The first three are closely related and deal with VAT on the construction industry. It is a difficult and contentious area of VAT liability, but these measures together would deregulate, simplify and give greater certainty to the law. They also address many points of criticism made by VAT tribunals in recent years.

The majority of the changes were the subject of an announcement by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 21 July last year. Draft legislation was then exposed for comment and an extra-statutory concession was announced at that time which granted some of the main changes immediately.

The initial reaction to the changes from the building industry was very positive, in that many issues that had been the subject of innumerable, costly and time-consuming disputes were about to be resolved. Indeed, the president of the construction industry joint taxation committee wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend in the following terms:

"I and the whole of my committee were delighted with the news on the 21st July about these VAT changes to be introduced in your next Budget. It is particularly pleasing that the reforms have been given immediate effect by way of extra-statutory concession."

Following the consultation exercise, the Government noted a number of good suggestions and also some legitimate concerns expressed by the industry. We have therefore made some suitable changes to the construction order which is now before the House.

The present law allows for the zero-rating of most goods and services in the course of the construction of a new house or flat and certain other limited categories of building. That and other provisions mean that the sale of all new houses is effectively VAT-free. Conversely, any work to an existing building, with the notable exception of listed buildings, is taxable. That means that a person who enlarges his house pays 17.5 per cent. on the cost of the work, as does the entrepreneur who converts a derelict factory into flats or the couple who convert a disused barn into a house. That has been the position.

The major change in the new construction order is to extend zero-rating to the conversion of non-residential buildings into houses and flats. That is a significant and welcome boost to the hard-pressed construction industry. It would also help the regeneration of inner-city areas by the creation of new, affordable housing.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the Minister take into consideration the position of some charitable organisations which acquire buildings that need to be adapted into day centres? Is the Minister saying that, under the changed orders for VAT on building, any charitable organisation that acquires a building which requires alteration so that it may be used as a day centre to accommodate disabled people, elderly people and so on will not pay VAT on those conversions?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The new concession covers the conversion of a non-residential building into a dwelling or collection of dwellings or residential accommodation. Therefore, it does not extend to the creation of a day centre. It is a major concession, but, if the hon. Gentleman believes that it does not go far enough, Madam Deputy Speaker, he may catch your eye and explain how far he would like it to go, and I shall endeavour, at the end of the debate, to tell the hon. Gentleman of the further reasoning that caused us to stop at dwellings and residential accommodation.

Usually, the benefit of zero-rating will be obtained when the property in question is sold for the first time, but we have made special provision for housing associations, which are often subject to restrictions on selling their housing stock. In those cases, the order will allow the builder to zero-rate his services. Likewise, someone who himself converts a building, such as a barn, into a dwelling will be able to recover the VAT that he has paid under an amended DIY housebuilders scheme.

I have mentioned that we aim for all houses to be effectively free of VAT, but that cannot necessarily apply to the contents of those houses. It would be grossly unfair to the general public and retailers, and very expensive in revenue terms, if a new house could be sold with tax-free items such as carpets, curtains or white goods such as refrigerators and freezers. Since 1973, we have therefore blocked the VAT relief on certain items incorporated into a house.

The order relaxes that list of blocked goods and now reflects the requirements of the building regulations. Whereas previously all electrical items were blocked, developers can now obtain tax-free installation in a new building of all ventilation equipment, and safety equipment such as burglar alarms, lifts, hoists and waste disposal units. Those changes have been warmly welcomed.

The order changes the tax treatment of new charity annexes to an existing building. Currently, when a new annexe is built for non-business charity purposes which is detached from any other building and can function independently of that building, the construction is zero-rated for VAT purposes. Alternatively, if the annexe is built adjacent to the original building and connected by doors or corridors, the construction is deemed to be work to an existing building and is taxed. Effectively, the change of law will ignore the connecting door or corridor and apply the same tax treatment to both types of annexes. It is not, however, intended to give tax-free treatment to enlargements or extensions to charity buildings.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

The order also addresses a particular difficulty that tribunals have experienced in deciding whether an existing building remained following dereliction or part demolition. If there was a building, the work to it was taxable, but if the tribunal decided that no building remained, the new building could be zero rated.

There is no definition in law and tribunals have tried to rely on the facts of each case and their perception of the final building. The order gives a legal definition of when a building ceases to be an existing building. The original draft, published last July, required a clear site to be left following demolition. Following representations received from the industry, the order now allows one facade, or, on a corner site, two facades, to be retained if they are required by local planning permission.

Because of the new rules on conversions, the bulk of the problem has been resolved. The effect of the change is, therefore, limited to work to existing dwellings. In the past VAT tribunals have been persuaded that zero rating is proper for the creation of a new house by, for example, incorporating a small house into a much larger one. That will no longer be possible and, generally, any work of whatever degree to an existing dwelling will be taxable.

The second order deals with protected or, to use a more common term, listed buildings. A new order is necessary as this group has always reflected the main conditions contained in the construction group that I have just discussed. In addition, two changes have been made. Religious bodies that wish to alter a listed building are exempt from planning permission provided that they set up internal procedures that satisfy the Department of National Heritage. Other denominations must seek normal listed building approval from the local planning authorities. The order incorporates recent changes in this ecclesiastical exemption.

The order clarifies the definition of approved alterations to a listed building. It has always been the case that repairs are taxable but that alterations are zero-rated. Some hon. Members will recall that when Chancellor Lawson abolished zero rating for alterations to most buildings in 1984, the House was persuaded that listed buildings should retain such zero rating. The borderline has always been difficult. Tax advisers increasingly claim that all work that changes the fabric of a building to any minute degree is an alteration, provided that it has been approved by the local authority.

Some confusion now reigns because some VAT tribunal chairman have agreed with that argument while others have not. I can give the House a few examples of the difficulties caused. When a thatched roof is replaced with one of a different reed, it has been claimed that the new type of reed alters the roof rather than repairs it. In another case, the replacement of a leaky flat roof covered by a single lead sheet with a sectional roof using modern methods was claimed to be an alteration rather than a repair. An even more bizarre example is where the chemical impregnation of a wall for damp-proofing purposes, which changed the molecular structure of the bricks, was claimed to be an alteration not a repair and was therefore eligible for different VAT treatment.

I have mentioned the tax-free new house and the need to tax some of the contents such as fridges, carpets and so on. The input tax order closes a tax loophole whereby a procedure has been devised by tax advisers to allow commercial nursing homes in the private sector to acquire all their fixtures and fittings tax-free. I am sure that removing that avoidance device will excite little controversy in the House.

The first three orders form a package of measures that have been widely welcomed by the industry. In addition to significant new concessions, a general tidying-up exercise has resulted in considerable simplification and greater clarity of the law, which will be most helpful to the industry and administrators and will reduce costs on both sides. Contentious and costly litigation to tribunals and the courts will certainly be reduced.

The Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land) Order results from a consultation undertaken by Customs with businesses and professional advisers to see how the VAT treatment of commercial property transactions could be simplified. The order makes significant changes, which will be welcomed by businesses large and small. It is deregulatory and will cause pages of complex legislation to disappear.

I shall set out what the order seeks to achieve. In a sentence, the order makes simpler and more flexible the election to waive exemption, which is sometimes called the option to tax, and abolishes the self-supply of commercial property. The option to tax is a relieving measure. By allowing landlords to choose to tax supplies of their property, it permits recovery of input tax that could not otherwise be reclaimed.

First, existing provisions do not allow the cancellation of an option. The order assists those who opt to tax in haste and those who, in the fullness of time, wish to change their minds. It will allow withdrawal of an option to tax within three months, if it has not been put into practical effect, and cancellation in any case after 20 years subject to Customs' permission.

Secondly, the order offers businesses more discretion in determining the scope of their option. Currently, an option automatically covers most groups of buildings and entire estates. From 1 March 1995, businesses will be able to tax more selectively so that, for example, each building at a business park and discrete areas of agricultural land can be separately taxed.

I have decided to discontinue the complicated special rules for determining how much tax is due when an option to tax is first made. The normal rules will now apply. I also propose that an option can no longer be used to tax the pitch rent for a residential caravan, or the mooring fee for a residential houseboat, and to put those charges on the same footing as the ground rent for an ordinary dwelling.

Turning to the self-supply provisions briefly, the existing provisions require businesses making exempt supplies of, for instance, finance, insurance, health or education, to pay VAT to customs on the full cost of any building that they construct themselves. Usually that tax can be recovered only in part. The vast majority of responses to the Customs consultation asked for the abolition of those provisions and I have decided to abolish them altogether for any developments starting on or after 1 March 1995. Transitional provisions for existing buildings and those still under construction will continue until 1 March 1997. Those will protect in particular people who pointed out that they had secured funding for developments currently in progress on the basis of the existing rules.

The order greatly simplifies a difficult area of the tax within a framework that gives businesses the greatest possible choice. It abolishes a complicated and generally unpopular measure. The result is less regulation and greater flexibility for businesses, and I commend the order to the House.

Finally, I turn to the Value Added Tax (Payments on Account) (Amendment) Order. The existing payments on account scheme requires the largest VAT payers to make payments by monthly instalments of their VAT liability. The scheme was originally introduced to prevent an increase in the public sector borrowing requirement as a result of changes necessitated by the United Kingdom's entry into the single market. To maintain the PSBR position, it is necessary for the scheme to continue.

The order updates the 1993 payments on account order so that entry to the scheme and the amounts payable for 1995-96 are determined by the tax liability in the year 1993-94 rather than 1992-93. It also provides that, in future, the scheme will roll forward automatically on an annual basis, thus removing the need to lay fresh statutory instruments before the House each year to update the scheme.

In July last year, the Chancellor announced that the scheme would be aligned with the fiscal year so that businesses could start making payments on account for VAT periods beginning in April, May and June of each year rather than October, November and December. To effect that change, the current scheme was allowed to run for a further six months—to March this year-rather than being updated as previously. The Chancellor also announced that, when the scheme was next updated, the order would be amended to provide that future updates of the scheme would happen automatically each year. That would remove the need to lay fresh statutory instruments before the House.

The Value Added Tax (Payments on Account) (Amendment) Order 1995 gives effect to the two changes, and I commend the order to the House.

5.2 pm

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): As the House will have realised from the Paymaster General's speech, the series of five VAT orders is highly complex. Understanding the orders—particularly their impact on the building industry and housing market—is akin to trying to wade through treacle, but there are specific issues that we wish to raise involving the Value Added Tax (Construction of Buildings) Order 1995. As the Paymaster General said, the orders result from tribunal cases, appeals and legal action, which can be fraught.

I specifically wish to refer to the impact of the orders on public sector housing. The homeless or destitute are not frequently seen at VAT tribunals appealing against the impact of the legislation on their rent levels—they are not seen at such tribunals at all. I want to explain why we believe that the construction of buildings order is detrimental to housing associations and why the Government, in trying to resolve one set of anomalies, have created another. I know that Customs and Excise officials have worked hard on the orders and have done their best to take on a range of issues, but we are not satisfied on several points and we shall oppose the order for those reasons.

To demonstrate the impact on public sector housing it is important to stress a number of points. Public sector housing is made of two sorts of housing: local authority housing stock and housing association housing stock. Their relationship is important and it is being drawn more tightly by the Government's housing policy, which enforces the transfer from local authorities to housing associations of the management of that stock.

Local authority housing stock is declining because it is being sold off through the right-to-buy scheme. Almost no new building is taking place in that sector. Housing associations account for 25 per cent. of all new dwellings in the UK and are developed partly through public funds, through the Housing Corporation, and partly through private finance. There are two sorts of housing association and the order affects them in different ways. There are those that are registered with the Housing Corporation under charitable rules and those that are registered under Housing Corporation rules as industrial and provident societies.

Housing associations are competitive, but their ethos is to help other housing associations, which are known as embryonic housing associations—social housing that cannot initially secure the finance needed to develop premises. The embryonic housing association piggy-backs on the larger housing association in order to secure the private finance that it needs. It is that relationship which is in danger of being undermined and damaged by the order if it is passed today.

Housing associations' core income is exempt from value added tax, which means that they cannot claim VAT on input costs. Housing associations suffer VAT on repairs, maintenance, major refurbishment and professional fees for developing new dwellings. That is a consequence of the VAT orders, and the same is not true for local authorities, which are excluded. That consequence has a detrimental affect on housing rent.

In future, housing associations are expected to take on local authority stock as local authorities are expected to divest themselves of that stock. There will be an increasing role for housing associations. The movement has two distinct ways of trying to deal with the VAT environment and how it places its contracts.

Housing associations are expected to cope with a VAT environment in which they are considered to be in the mainstream of VAT law. There are certain unique legislative concessions to their status. Because they are in the main stream, they are considered as businesses—the activity of collecting rental income from their tenants is their business. Their core income is exempt. Housing associations thus suffer from VAT. The ones that are VAT registered because of activities ancillary to their core income may claim credit or recover the tax only on costs associated directly or indirectly with generating that taxed income.

I do not want to go into too much detail about the specific provisions of the order. I want to show its impact and give some examples of how it could undermine new developments in housing associations.

Because of various factors, housing associations find that speculatively built housing is unsuitable for their tenants. Invariably, they are not converting a country barn into a country residence or worrying about different sorts of roofing but considering specific designs to meet the constraints of sites—which frequently involve

[Ms Dawn Primarolo]

difficulties—or to meet the specific needs of, for example, disabled people or people with special needs. Although housing associations develop some green-field sites, most developments are in urban areas, and carry difficulties. Professional fees and on costs can amount to 10 per cent. of the development cost.

The housing associations' traditional approach has been to opt for two sorts of building contracts. The first is the traditional contract, whereby one set of providers supplies professional services and a second set of providers undertakes the building work. That building work is zero-rated, but value added tax is imposed on professional services. The second type of contract is the design and build contract. Housing associations opt for a specific company which can provide all the professional and building services, and in that way the VAT can be absorbed.

However, that distorts the housing construction market because only contractors who can fulfil both functions can tender for the contracts. At a time when the Government and the Opposition want to see expansion of the construction sector, it is remiss of the Government to introduce an anomaly which will lock out a section of the building industry.

The legislation affects major interest for leases and will thus have a detrimental effect on housing associations. A "major interest" for leases is considered to be a period of 21 years or more. By granting a long lease, the developer of a dwelling can apply for a zero rate of VAT on the first rental payment, which allows all the VAT that is paid on professional fees to be recovered.

However, housing associations come under the control of the Housing Corporation and its rules prevent the granting of a major interest lease, except for shared ownership and right to buy. Therefore, housing associations that have assured and secured tenancies are exempt from VAT because of their short leaseholds. There is an obvious way around that problem, but the Government choose not to see it.

It is accepted that the current legislation is weak, and its interpretation has been stretched by various VAT tribunal decisions. However, the zero rating of dwellings has resulted in lower rental charges, and anything that disturbs or undermines that situation is clearly undesirable. By changing the legislation in effect to reverse tribunal decisions, which in many instances have provided the relief that the housing associations need, the Government are inadvertently damaging those associations. The strict interpretation of the new legislation could prohibit zero rating because the raft extends above ground level. That concerns the development and conversion of buildings as well as their rehabilitation.

The effect of the VAT rules—particularly those in the building and construction order—will mean that, although local authorities could recover VAT, they are prohibited from raising the finance to redevelop their properties and they are expected to transfer some of their properties to housing associations. However, housing associations could be inhibited in developing that stock because the private lender will be concerned that, as a result of the additional VAT imposed on refurbishment, the level of rent that would need to be charged could make the property unviable.

The legislation also inserts the word "first" in item 1, which means that the first tranche payment for the freehold sales will be exempt from VAT, allowing no VAT recovery. In Scotland, the law prohibits the granting of a longer lease for a residential building. Therefore, the shared ownership developments in Scotland will not be able to recover VAT incurred on the initial development, while their English equivalents can. That seems to be an unnecessary provision.

There are other instances where housing associations recover dwellings from long-lease holders as a contractual obligation. Those dwellings are then let on a further long lease and currently all the grants of long leases are zero-rated. In future, only the first will be zero-rated and the resultant cost could be as much as £400 per dwelling in irrecoverable VAT.

I have already explained the detrimental effect that the legislation could have on embryonic housing associations. The process involves a lead housing association taking on the development of property—the purchase of the land and the building of the dwellings—and then allowing the smaller housing association to manage that activity. The ownership is finally transferred to the smaller housing association when it is able to raise the necessary finance. The order will require VAT to be passed on in the cost to the embryonic associations, which, in turn, would push up their costs.

The question of homelessness and the role of housing associations as well as local authorities should be important to all hon. Members in the House. We regret that the Government are able to damage an already very fragile relationship through complex VAT legislation and, unfortunately, we believe that that is what the order does.

The concept of VAT seems to be flawed in the Value Added Tax (Protected Buildings) Order also. The order is specifically aimed at buildings of national heritage significance and it requires that relief be geared at alteration rather than preservation. The concept of that section of VAT law seeks to encourage the alteration of our national heritage buildings in order to claim back VAT, rather than maintain them through repairs.

The problem is that the zero-rating relief extends only to alterations. That is an historic problem and it is difficult to see how it could be solved. I am sure that many hon. Members have been lobbied recently by bishops, church wardens and others associated with the church about the terrible burden of paying VAT on repairs and maintenance. That measure has skewed access to our national heritage as many churches and cathedrals have now established an entry payment. The money is not collected particularly rigorously, but establishing the structure to collect it enables the churches to try to offset and reclaim some of their VAT payments.

I ask the Paymaster General to re-examine that issue because we are out of line with our European partners who protect their national heritage. It seems ridiculous that we seek to protect our national heritage by encouraging people to alter it.

In conclusion, the orders presented today—particularly the construction order—will damage housing associations, whether they are registered under charitable rules or not, and they could lead to higher rental charges. The Government have dressed them up as a series of technical changes, and technical changes are included in the orders as well. However, we intend to oppose the Value Added

Tax (Construction of Buildings) Order because we believe that nothing should be allowed to undermine our crusade to tackle the scourge of homelessness and poor housing in our society. By undermining housing associations, the Government make our task more difficult.

5.20 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): May I first declare an interest that is not in the Register of Members' Interests? I live and have my constituency office in a listed building or, as Treasury-speak would have it, a protected building. I must say that, when the tide comes over our garden wall and the wind is in the north—the building sways with it—it feels extraordinarily like an unprotected building to me. I would prefer that the term "listed building" be used.

My hon. Friend the Paymaster General and I have been in correspondence about the anomalies to which the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) referred. There appears to be a tax incentive to alter a listed building, rather than to preserve it. The most celebrated case of that recently was when His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh berated the local authority on the Isle of Wight for taking the Royal Yacht Squadron to task for fitting plastic windows into a listed building.

The extraordinary anomaly is that the Royal Yacht Squadron could recover the VAT for fitting the plastic windows because it was an alteration to a listed building, but it cannot—like many of us who occupy listed buildings—get any help with the additional costs of maintaining a part of our nation's heritage.

In correspondence, my hon. Friend prays in aid to me the fact that EC rules do not allow for an alteration to VAT once we have departed as a nation from the zero rate. He will recall the exchanges we had on Second Reading of the Finance Bill. I am sure he appreciates that I fully understand that rule.

The question about this order is whether he has actually tested that position with the EC. Has he suggested to the EC that, while we understand the rule that there should be no return, there could be a substitution? In the case to which I am referring, it would make so much more sense to substitute VAT relief for the maintenance of a protected building rather than for its alteration, for reasons which I am sure the House is aware of. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to answer that point when he winds up.

I shall now transfer my attention to order No. 279 which, as my hon. Friend indicated, is known as the option to tax. The proposal is to retain the option as applying to buildings and all subsequent supplies, while introducing an ability to revoke the option after 20 years. The British Property Federation has sought to apply the option to individual supplies of a building, effectively at lease level. Revocation would automatically occur on expiry of the lease. The BPF also seeks revocation after ten years where the lease term is greater.

There have in the past been significant problems in defining the extent of a building for the purpose of the option, particularly in the context of complexes of buildings. The current proposals perpetuate the problems, although an attempt has been made to clarify the definition of a complex. It is the BPF's view that the new proposals will not simplify matters at all, since Customs has had great difficulty in drafting the new rules and litigation likely to be necessary to define them.

The BPF put forward proposals—echoed by many commentators in the property world—for an option at lease level, as it would entirely remove this area of uncertainty, while at the same time offering the property industry far greater flexibility to negotiate lease terms freely according to economic factors such as the tenants' ability to recover VAT, as happens successfully elsewhere in the EC.

The Minister's response to the proposal has been that it would be almost impossible to police. The BPF does not share that view. The necessary calculations to apportion input tax for buildings with mixed taxable and exempt supplies are already carried out for buildings of mixed commercial and non-commercial use, so many taxpayers and VAT control officers will be familiar with them.

Furthermore, Customs has expressed concern that smaller taxpayers will not be able to cope with such arrangements. The BPF points out that the taxpayer could opt for all his supplies of a building if he considered a mixture too complicated or could not otherwise satisfy Customs' requirements. The change to an option at lease level could be introduced in a way which took gradual effect as leases expired or new leases were granted.

Finally, the Minister's argument that revenue will suffer is—in the BPF's view—unfounded, since as many taxpayers are likely to opt in the knowledge that it would not bind them permanently as will de-opt. The 20-year revocation period currently offered will not take effect until the year 2009, and will therefore be of no practical value for many years to come. The BPF suggested a 10-year period would still not have immediate effect, but would allow scope for planning to meet changing economic circumstances in the shorter term.

The reason for refusing the 10-year period has been the fear of avoidance schemes which have been experienced by some EC members, principally where a lease—which must be negotiated between the parties at arm's length—provides no significant rent flowing until after the expiry of an initial ten-year option period, thus permitting the recovery of substantial input tax, while attracting minimal output tax.

The BPF's view is that the capital goods scheme contained in the general regulations enacted in accordance with article 20 of the EC's sixth directive which provides for input tax adjustments according to supplies made up to ten years after incurring the input tax affords protection for Customs.

In addition, the new orders propose that consent for revocation would have to be obtained through Customs (Article 4 (b) (5) (c)). Therefore, in cases of perceived avoidance, Customs could withhold its consent and the revenue would effectively be protected. My hon. Friend sees the orders as a measure of deregulation. I have to say to him that, having recently had personal experienced of this particular VAT minefield, I believe the proposals will almost inevitably have the opposite effect.

5.26 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) said that dealing with the orders was like wading through treacle, and I congratulate her on her perseverance. She highlighted a number of concerns, and there are one or two others which I wish to touch on.

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

It was also interesting to hear the comment of the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) about the fact that the order has been introduced as a form of deregulation. It would appear to be a difficult nettle to grasp, because, as soon as Ministers bring in variations, they are in danger of creating other anomalies and confusions and altering the balance, which would not be their intention.

Unfortunately, these are statutory instruments which are not amendable, which is the reason why—if we are dissatisfied with any of them—we are forced to vote against the whole instrument in an attempt to persuade the Government to come back with some revised thinking.

There are one or two questions which I would like to address to the Minister which might help to clarify the situation. It has been suggested that housing associations could be disadvantaged by the measure, because they will transfer from being *exempt to zero rating*, and consequently will be unable to reclaim VAT.

If that is the case, the first problem which arises is that housing associations are funded from the taxpayer. I hope that the Government acknowledge that it does not make a lot of sense to give those associations money from the taxpayer and then put them in a position where they have to pay, in effect, excess tax, in as much as they will be unable to recover what they otherwise would have done.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In order to stop this point gathering momentum and being based on a wrong premise, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the position of housing associations will improve as a result of these orders. They will be able to zero-rate conversions—that is not open to them now—and in no other way will their tax position deteriorate. So if the hon. Gentleman opposes this collection of orders, he must explain to the housing associations precisely why he feels that they are being disadvantaged.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to the Minister. If his assurance means that housing associations will in all circumstances be better off under the order, I obviously welcome that.

In my constituency, there is an old mill, which, in spite of several attempts to revive it, is on its last legs and no longer producing. All the signs are that it is likely to be acquired by a housing association and converted to use as residential accommodation—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Erewash (Mrs. Knight) suggests that I am discussing Scotland, and that Scottish law on long-term tenure differs from English law. Can the Minister assure me that a housing association seeking to develop the mill will qualify for zero rating and thus be able to claim full relief? That would be a welcome assurance.

Three hundred yards away the said mill is another empty building in the same town. It has been derelict for many years, and there is a wish to convert it to a day care centre for the elderly. I am sure that all hon. Members who take an interest have received a briefing from the Charities Tax Reform Group—I am sure that the Minister is aware of it—in which the group says that the exclusion of conversions of commercial buildings to non-residential relevant charitable use represents an unfair anomaly. One can only wonder why the Government have decided to implement it.

Across the country, conversions of old buildings to new dwellings or for community purposes are to be actively encouraged. They reinvigorate derelict sites and provide many benefits to the community—laudable activities which are at all times to be encouraged. In response to an earlier intervention the Minister seemed to confirm that such conversions will be at a disadvantage.

I claim no expertise in this area. I have read the orders, but without knowing all the details of the background law, it is difficult to understand what they are getting at. Hence I rely on the people most directly affected to communicate their views to Members of this House—and they say that the order creates an unfair anomaly.

I ask the Minister to respond to these concerns at the end of the debate. Why should not such conversions benefit; why cannot the Government extend to them the benefits that the order entails? If the Minister cannot give me a satisfactory answer, it will be quite legitimate to vote against the orders.

The difficulty we always face with such instruments is that they are to be taken as a whole. It is quite legitimate to vote against them this evening, not because we disagree with the tidying-up measures and extensions in them, but because we say that they have not satisfactorily dealt with an anomaly, which I have described. The Government should go away and come back with improved orders, or at least assure us that another instrument may be in the offing to deal with the problem. That seems entirely reasonable.

My last point relates to listed buildings. The Minister touched on certain anomalies that have resulted from VAT tribunal findings, to the effect that certain building works that most people would regard as repairs have been treated as alterations. When people repair old buildings, they will inevitably consider whether that can be done in a manner that is in character with what is already there, while improving on the old materials. Obviously, they consider whether the improvements will be in keeping with the old appearance. Suggesting that, in so doing, they should fail to qualify for relief seems to me to be applying the rules too strictly.

Much more seriously, as the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) said, this may act as a positive encouragement not to preserve our heritage and to change it simply in order to qualify for VAT relief. The Government cannot really believe that to be sensible or desirable.

It should not be too difficult to give directions to Customs and Excise officers or VAT officers, making it clear that there are reasonable boundaries. The point is that VAT relief for listed buildings should be designed to ensure that they are properly repaired, in character, not to encourage people to alter buildings' character simply to qualify for tax benefits. That clearly pushes in the wrong direction, and creates an unnecessary tension in the tax system, which the Government should remove.

I know that other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall curtail my remarks. I hope that the Minister will answer my questions, and that he will understand that, if we vote against the orders, it will not be because of an objection to their fundamental reforms; it will be because some important points have not been dealt with.

5.35 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Most of the points about the orders were fully ventilated by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), who dealt particularly with housing matters. I shall therefore not go over them again.

Earlier I intervened on the Minister to make a point about the effect that the first order will have on charitable organisations. It is difficult to understand the Government's reasoning. They allow VAT to be disregarded when converting a derelict dwelling to a house or residential dwelling, but they deny the same concession to charitable organisations that want to convert derelict dwellings to day centres for the elderly, the disabled, the young disabled or the chronically sick.

Many of those organisations work to provide respite care for the less fortunate people in our community. Most of them do the work voluntarily, thus helping health authorities and social services departments. Yet the Minister tells us tonight that these charitable organisations will receive no assistance under the order in the form of relief from VAT. I consider that shameful.

We have no chance of amending the orders: they are a case of all or nothing. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South correctly said—outlining the complications in this bunch of orders—that because of the unfairness of the first order we have no option but to vote against them. Had more Conservative Members been here to hear the Minister say that charitable organisations will receive no assistance for converting derelict dwellings to day centres, I assume that they too would have voted against the orders.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South also discussed large-scale repairs to church buildings and to historic buildings owned by local authorities, churches and other charitable organisations. Those who wish to repair and maintain historic buildings such as churches and cathedrals will face the imposition of value added tax at 17.5 per cent. In general, it is the community that cares for such buildings and promotes improvements. The Minister is saying that there will be no concession when repairs and improvements are undertaken.

I have corresponded with the Treasury on behalf of the Bishop of Wakefield, who has made representations in the past. It is disappointing to hear the Minister reiterate his opposition to my arguments.

My concern is heightened by the Minister saying that the Government do not intend to assist charitable organisations, churches and religious organisations in the maintenance and conversion of buildings that would be to the benefit of the community generally.

If the Minister cannot give any assurances this evening, I hope that he will understand that we are saying that the orders do not help people who are in great need. Disabled and elderly people will suffer because the Government are not prepared to give any serious consideration to their needs.

As my colleagues have said, we shall vote against the orders. I hope that in doing so we shall impress upon the Government the need to propose further orders to give relief to charitable organisations and religious organisations that are working hard to maintain communities and historic buildings while providing care and attention.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, relating to the accountability of the Secretary of State for Health to the House. We debated health care on Monday and we spent all day yesterday on health care issues when debating the Health Authorities Bill on Report and on Third Reading. The Secretary of State spoke in both debates.

This afternoon, in answer to a written question, the right hon. Lady has announced a rise in prescription charges of three times the rate of inflation. She could not possibly have made the decision this morning. She must have known about it on Monday and she certainly must have known about it on Tuesday, yet she did not share the information with the House. Perhaps you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will advise me whether the Secretary of State has sought to make a statement on this important matter. Perhaps you will also advise me on whether it was treating the House with due and proper respect for the right hon. Lady to have withheld a statement from us yesterday.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is not for the Chair to dictate to members of the Government or any hon. Member what they should or should not say to the House. I gather that the announcement has been made in the form of a written answer, which is a well-precedented method of providing information to the House. There are Ministers on the Treasury Bench, and I have no doubt that they will convey the views of the House to the Secretary of State for Health. I am sure that there will be other ways of dealing with the matter. I am confident that hon. Members will try to find apposite ways in which to raise it properly. We cannot do more now.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is it on the same point of order?

Mr. Evans: Yes. Would you agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it is a bit rich for Opposition Members to talk about prescription charges when it was a Labour Government who introduced them in the first place?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Is it on the same point?

Mr. McCartney: Yes; it is a genuine point of order.

When I was a member of the Opposition Front-Bench team with responsibilities for health, the issue before us was raised on a point of order last year. I remember that a ruling was given by Madam Speaker on the way in which such information should be released. Until last year, there was a precedent that information about increased prescription charges was not released in the form of a written answer. Following Madam Speaker's ruling, I believe that the Secretary of State for Health made a statement. Perhaps a check should be made to ascertain whether Madam Speaker's ruling has been broken by the Secretary of State's written answer.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am not aware that any rule has been broken. However, in the light of the hon. Member's remarks, I shall have the matter checked.

Mr. McCartney: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have spoken from my recollection. If I have misled you, I apologise in advance. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for taking up a serious and important matter.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Let us continue with the debate.

5.46 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I shall take up the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench about housing associations. There is concern given the current climate. For example, only 500 local authority homes were built last year. The number of people on the housing waiting list in my constituency is rising all the time. They are waiting for homes to rent because they cannot afford to buy as the economy stands. In reality, their only hope is to look to housing associations, of which there are many in my constituency. The associations wish to develop new homes or substantially to improve existing properties.

Only yesterday, the Committee considering the Finance Bill discussed Government policy, which sometimes, inadvertently, can have a detrimental effect on housing policies. We discussed rather complex matters, which included qualified indexed securities and how the withdrawing of the tax advantages that those securities enjoy could lead to additional costs for housing associations. There is a real financial problem for the associations. The reduction of housing association grant towards the costs of development has put pressure on the associations. The Government probably intended that to happen. They want the associations to go into the private sector to raise money.

The additional costs that have to be borne by housing associations in raising more private sector finance have forced up rents to a point where the Government are becoming worried about the benefits that they are having to pay tenants. A poverty trap is developing. People can enter housing association properties as tenants only if they are on benefit or they can afford to pay high rents of £70 or more that the associations have to charge. Any measure that causes extra costs to fall upon the associations will ultimately bear upon their tenants.

If the tenants are on benefit, they can pass the costs back to the Government, which means that the Government will not save anything. At the same time, some people who are not on benefit will not be able to pay increased rents. Our concern is whether housing associations will incur additional costs because of these orders and, if so, whether the Government understand what those costs are. If the Government accept that the costs exist—associations have given me evidence that they do—are they prepared to reconsider the matter rather than simply continue with orders that could have a considerable impact?

I received a letter from Northern Counties Housing Association Ltd., which is very active in the Sheffield area. It provides a number of high-quality homes, from which my constituents and many others in the north benefit. It says that, having assessed its development programme, this year some £5 million of the programme will be affected by the order, which comes into effect on 1 March 1995. It concluded that, for a full development year, the order would cost it between £750,000 and £1 million.

I am not sure whether the Paymaster General heard those figures or whether he is otherwise engaged on the Front Bench, so I shall repeat them for his benefit. Northern Counties Housing Association Ltd. says that the impact of the order on its finances will be £750,000 to £1 million a year in extra VAT, which it will have to pay. That is its own assessment of the complications of the order. The Minister must respond to that issue, because if that housing association is affected, I cannot believe that other associations will not have similar problems.

Embryonic associations are, by their very nature, small. Many of them are just starting and they will not necessarily have people with the accountancy skills and expertise to interpret the orders to determine precisely the VAT impact for their own accounts. No doubt, once they begin to recognise the effect of the orders, the information given to us by Northern Counties will come through from the other associations and will show the costs, which will fall not only on the associations but their tenants. Those costs will restrict some people becoming housing association tenants in new properties.

Mr. McCartney: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise to hon. Members on both sides of the House and to you personally, but it is related to the point of order that I raised earlier. I have been to the Library, to assist the House, and have obtained a copy of the ruling that was made by Madam Speaker, in relation to a matter that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett).

Madam Speaker issued quite a stern warning and made it clear how she expected the matter to be dealt with in future. Madam Speaker had this to say:

"The written answer given yesterday, which is in columns *95* and *96* of *Hansard*, is concerned almost entirely with the proposed level of prescription charges for the year 1993-94, and is described as 'pursuant to' an answer of 15 February to the hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett), which is at column *162*.

I have noted that the Select Committee on Procedure, in its third report of Session 1990-91, stated its belief that

'the use by Ministers of "pursuant" answers is inherently undesirable.'

The report goes on to say:

'The offence is compounded when . . . an answer is given which claims to be "pursuant" to an earlier reply but which in fact has only the most tenuous link with it.'

As we well know, the House has not had the opportunity to debate the Procedure Committee's recommendations on how the practice should be dealt with. But I wish to make it clear that I deprecate the use of the 'pursuant' device by Ministers to make written statements such as this without giving proper notice to the House. I hope that that clears up the points of order, and that we can now get on with our business."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 1993; Vol. 220, c. 301-302.]

Madam Speaker made it clear how she wished matters to be dealt with in future. I hope that that is helpful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the House. Perhaps the Secretary of State for Health will now come to the

House—the business could be rearranged—and make an appropriate statement to my hon. Friend who raised the original point of order.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As I just explained to the hon. Gentleman, I am causing my own inquiries to be made. I would not wish to make any further point on the matter at the moment.

Mr. Betts: The point that I am making on behalf of the housing associations is that there appears to have been a change of practice. Housing associations fear that work that they had carried out that was previously zero-rated will now not be zero-rated because it is not covered by the order. I would like the Minister to respond to that.

He seemed to be saying earlier, when justifying the order, that there have been examples in the private sector of people trying to claim that different reeds on thatched cottages meant that the property was being converted. Anyone can reach the rational judgment that that is not so. I presume that more substantial conversion works that have been carried out by housing associations have been zero-rated in the past but will not be in future as result of the orders. In an attempt to clear up one or two obvious anomalies, it appears that the Government are changing the approach, which will have an effect on genuine conversion works and mean they will be subject to VAT at the full rate in future.

No doubt the Minister will tell us that these matters must be consistent with practice in the rest of the European Union, that the Commission will take a dim view of it or that the European Court will pass judgment if the Government act in any other way. I remind the Minister that, when the European Court looked into UK policy in 1985, it ruled that the Government's stated policy of facilitating wider home ownership was a legitimate social goal. It did not in any way challenge the zero-rating and relief on new buildings to be used for domestic, relevant residential or relevant charitable purposes. The Government probably have more room to manoeuvre in that area than they have so far led us to believe.

I do not want to give the impression that zero-rating of conversions of non-residential properties to residential properties is opposed by the Opposition. There are many derelict ex-industrial and commercial properties that can be converted for residential purposes, and we support zero-rating of those conversions to encourage that process. I would argue, however, that, in many parts of the country, there are simply no such old industrial and commercial properties. They may be prevalent in the old textile areas, but they certainly are not in steel areas like my own, where ex-steel buildings were often little more than tin sheds, which certainly cannot be converted in any meaningful way.

The conversion work that takes place in my area tends to be of residential rather than commercial buildings and therefore would be subject to VAT at the full rate. I ask the Minister to reflect on that, because it seems that zero-rating might simply encourage people who convert barns into luxury homes rather than provide for the needs of people who need rented accommodation in our city areas.

I now deal with the issue of piggy-backing of embryonic associations and the point about leases, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South. It is a serious point; it could stop that practice. It is the only way in which many small associations can get started, and I hope that the Minister will give it further thought. We cannot amend the orders, but at a later date the Minister could table some proposals to deal with that.

The order could lead to a nonsensical position. Options are open to local authorities to deal with rundown stock. I can think of one estate in my constituency that has now been renovated, but where difficult choices would be posed by the order. It is an estate of old maisonette blocks, and a number of options could be available. If the local authority had the money, it could choose simply to repair those properties and put in new central heating schemes and new windows, in which case it would not pay VAT. It could top the maisonettes and convert them into single-storey houses—that process is quite common now—and that would not be subject to VAT. It could raze the properties to the ground and build on the concrete bases, which would not be subject to VAT. It could demolish them completely and start again and build new homes, if it had the resources, which would not be subject to VAT.

If, however—this has happened—it wants to do a deal to raise money and sell some of the properties to a housing association and use the proceeds of the sale to refurbish its own properties, the housing association then has a different range of choices. If it demolished the properties completely and builds new properties on separate sites around the overall site, VAT would not be payable. However, if it simply made repairs or did small jobs such as installing new central heating systems that would be subject to VAT.

If the housing association decided to take the top off maisonettes and convert them to single-storey properties, would such work be zero rated or subject to VAT at 17.5 per cent? If a housing association demolished properties completely and built homes on the concrete base that was left, would that be a conversion or a new build and would it be zero rated or subject to VAT at 17.5 per cent?

It appears that housing associations' choices will be conditioned and directed by the VAT regime into which the order introduces distinctions. I am not sure whether those distinctions are helpful. I am not sure whether they help the process of rational choice for housing associations. Some of those choices will now carry full VAT where previously they did not and that means extra cost for housing associations. Will the Minister assure every housing association in Britain that the order will not mean any extra costs for them? Many of them believe that the costs will be substantial and that rents will rise as a result.

6 pm

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) and the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) referred to repairs to protected or listed buildings. I should like to restate what I set out at the start of my remarks about the distinction between alterations and repairs with regard to such buildings.

In 1984, alterations to buildings generally were made subject to VAT, but at that time, the relief for alterations was retained for protected buildings. Hon. Members may regard that as an anomaly, although I do not think that during the course of the debate any hon. Member has called for the withdrawal of that zero rate.

If it is an anomaly, it is one that is valued by the heritage lobby and it is quite distinct from the question about whether repairs to all buildings, whether listed or

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

not, should be zero-rated. At the moment, they are all subject to VAT at the standard rate. Because of the sixth Council directive, we cannot introduce new zero rates. That directive was negotiated and agreed in 1977 by the Labour Government, so Opposition Members would not wish to disown that.

With regard to a possible reduced rate for repairs, we have no plans to introduce any reduced rates beyond that obtaining for domestic fuel and power. I, as Minister responsible, receive many requests for new reduced rates for all sorts of goods and services. Recently, we had such a request for energy-efficient goods and equipment.

We resist those, partly because of the expense and the revenue lost, which would simply have to be made up elsewhere by taxing other people at a higher rate, but also because any reduced rate creates new distinctions and borderlines, which creates scope for disputes and litigation. Therefore, in the interests of administrative simplicity, we shall stick with our system of standard rates and a zero rate.

We can introduce reduced rates only if they are on annexe H of the sixth Council directive. Repairs to churches and ecclesiastical buildings do not appear on that annexe. The matter is being reviewed, and the Commission was required to bring forward proposals for consideration by the Council of Ministers. The Commission has reported, and it is not recommending any substantial change to that list of permitted reduced rates. In any case, the reduction would require unanimity by the Council of Ministers, so it is extremely unlikely, given the facts that I have outlined, that a reduced rate for repairs, whether to all or only listed buildings, will be introduced.

I do not have much time to answer the debate, but my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight raised the question of the option to tax, which he thought should be extended to individual leases as well as to whole buildings. I may not be able to answer all his points, and he will forgive me if I write to him about the detail, but I can say that to do as he requests would introduce a new element of complexity into the system at a time when we are trying to deregulate.

These orders are deregulatory in intent, and if we were to try to permit the option to tax to apply to individual leases, complications would be created in a single building when some are taxed and some are not. For example, how would VAT be attributed to common services such as lift repairs or the repointing of brickwork? That would be complex and regulatory at a time when we are trying to move in the opposite direction.

My hon. Friend complained that the revocation of the option of 20 years was too long. We shall continue to review that, but I think that he would be generous enough to agree that to allow revocation at all is at least an important first step, and that is provided for in the order.

Several hon. Members referred to housing associations. I should say at the outset that the Housing Corporation is providing capital of about £1.2 billion a year for the next three years for housing associations, and that will also lever in about £550 million a year of private sector capital to promote housing association projects and enable them to go ahead.

The main point that I wish to make is that the orders give housing associations a new opportunity to take advantage of conversions for the first time. The new relief will help housing associations to convert non-residential dwellings into student accommodation, hospices, children's and old people's homes and so on.

There would be some dismay in the outside world if a party in the House were to vote against the orders, because this is a relieving provision which has been welcomed by the housing association movement. I frankly could not understand the reasoning of the official Opposition or individual Opposition Members in apparently opposing this relieving order.

It is true that small housing associations often use larger ones as agents to undertake large building or conversion projects, but they are not put at a disadvantage as regards VAT. Under the present law—this is carried forward in the new order in item 3 of the construction order—architects' and surveyors' fees are not recoverable—there is nothing new or unusual about that—but no additional liability arises as a result. There is no extra cost to housing associations here. I can give that assurance to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), who asked me about that. This is a relieving measure.

Housing associations are being given a giant new opportunity to help revive and regenerate in urban areas by the use of conversion. They can take rundown, non-domestic buildings, such as warehouses or mills, as the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) instanced, and turn them into dwellings, flats, or residential accommodation for the old or the sick.

Ms Primarolo: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I am trying to answer a point that she made.

It is a new opportunity for housing associations, and for the first time it will all be zero-rated. If the order is not passed this evening, housing associations will not be able to take advantage of those new opportunities.

To answer another point that was raised in the debate, it is true that, during the construction of dwellings, a certificate has to be issued by the housing association concerned, that in effect self-regulates the zero-rated status of the work in question. It is therefore a requirement that the housing association is registered with one of the national associations, of which there are four.

In practice, that creates no difficulty, but in view of the hon. Lady's interest in the matter and because we all want housing associations to succeed, I shall ask Customs and Excise to keep under review registration and the working of the new concessions.

As they are relieving measures that empower housing associations to undertake new work, it is obviously not our intention that there should be any problem in practice with the working out of the orders and we shall keep them under review. I assert with absolute confidence, however, that the housing association movement as a whole will benefit and would require some explanation if any hon. Members or parties were to oppose the measures in the House.

The last point was raised by the hon. Member for Normanton who—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER

proceeded to put forthwith the Question necessary to dispose of them, pursuant to order [17 February].

The House divided: Ayes 281, Noes 254.

Division No. 82] **[6.11 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'clif)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'ire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mrs. Barbara Roche.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Value Added Tax (Construction of Buildings) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 280), dated 8th February 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I understand that, while this afternoon's statement about the future of Northern Ireland was being made, the Government announced that prescription charges would be raised. That was a deliberate sneaky venture on the Government's part, to hide a move that was reprehensible and highly

controversial. I wonder whether a Minister has been given an opportunity to make a statement announcing just what is involved in today's proposals.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman was clearly not in the House when the matter was first raised.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I understand that points of order were raised with you earlier about precedent. Are you now able to clarify the way in which such matters have been handled in the past, and can you also tell us whether the Secretary of State has expressed her intention to make a statement in the House? She spoke in the House on Monday—and, indeed, yesterday,, although there was no need for her to take part in yesterday's debate, because she had not served on the Standing Committee—but apparently did not feel able to raise an issue resulting from a question that can only have been tabled yesterday.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that I should deal with the points that have already been raised.

I have no knowledge of any intention to make a statement. No doubt Madam Speaker would be apprised of any such intention first in any event. As for the main issue that has been raised, I must tell hon. Members who have raised points of order in seeking a precedent that the present case is not on all fours with that precedent.

When the Speaker deplored a particular practice, that related to using a question that had already been answered and, at some later stage, giving information pursuant to that. That has not happened today. The question concerned was tabled straightforwardly; it is on the Order Paper, and was replied to by means of a written answer. Even if the present case had been on all fours with precedent, the fact remains that the Speaker—although she said that she deprecated it—did not rule it out of order; I gather that the matter is still being considered by the Procedure Committee.

I must therefore rule that what happened was perfectly in order, although hon. Members may not like that particular method of handling the provision of information.

Mrs. Beckett: Further to the point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I do not want to detain the House, but what worries Opposition Members particularly—apart from, as you say, the manner and the matter: a huge increase in prescription charges has been put through—is the fact that, although the question was tabled yesterday and it must have been known that it would be answered straight away, the House was not given the information.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I must make it clear that the Chair is not responsible for the content of any Minister's speech, or indeed for the speech of any hon. Member.

Mr. Canavan: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I return to the question of precedent? Have any British Government ever raised prescription charges by more than 2,500 per cent. without sending a Minister to the House to make a statement to try to justify such criminal taxation of the sick?

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I listened with interest to your explanation of the position relating to precedent. Is it not the case, however, that last year, when a rise in prescription charges was sneaked out in the way that Madam Speaker so deprecated, the Secretary of State for Health had to make a full statement in the House? Should she not do so again this week?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is not for the Chair to decide whether a Minister of the Crown should or should not make a statement. I understand, however, that this does not preclude the making of a statement.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Does the Speaker not have some right to tell the Procedure Committee that it should report on the matter as soon as possible? There is clearly concern, and a feeling that the procedure now being used is increasingly becoming an abuse of the rights of hon. Members to ask questions about important issues.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I cannot answer for what Madam Speaker may or may not wish to do, but it is open to the hon. Gentleman to raise the matter directly with the Procedure Committee.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. If prescriptions had gone up in line with inflation, they would now be 53p instead of £5.25. Is not it a discourtesy to the House and to yourself that the Secretary of State for Health has done this? Is not the decision a scandalous attack on the sick?

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. An important issue is involved here. It is possible that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health could help us, because we need to know that the standards that are being followed today were followed precisely by the Labour Government when they introduced prescription charges all those years ago. In 1976, they cut the hospital—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is clear that we are moving into a discussion of the merits or otherwise of the matter. That is not a matter on which I can rule, or on which I wish to take further points of order. I hope, therefore, that any further points of order will strictly relate to order and not to the merits or demerits of the decision.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance only in relation to the order. The next business of the House involves two one-and-a-half-hour orders, so an obvious opportunity exists for business to be interrupted and for the Leader of the House or the Secretary of State for Health to make a statement later tonight.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for me.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have just heard that the Secretary of State for Health

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

intends to put 15p on prescription charges. Many of our constituents can ill afford medicine at present. Surely it is in order for Back Benchers to debate such a measure.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the ingenuity of all Members will ensure that the matter is raised in various ways, but we cannot continue with the matter now. We must proceed with the next business.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Resolved,

That the Value Added Tax (Protected Buildings) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 283), dated 8th February 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Value Added Tax (Input Tax) (Amendment) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 281), dated 8th February 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 279), dated 8th February 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 8th February, be approved.

Resolved,

That the Value Added Tax (Payments on Account) (Amendment) Order 1995 (S.I., 1995, No. 291), dated 8th February 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9th February, be approved.

Avon (Structural Change)

6.32 pm

The Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration (Mr. David Curry): I beg to move,

That the draft Avon (Structural Change) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 9th February, be approved.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I convey to the House the decision of Madam Speaker to place a 10-minute limit on the speeches of Back Benchers. I am sure that she would also hope that Front-Bench spokesmen will not take too long either.

Mr. Curry: Apart from a few minor points, the order implements the Local Government Commission's recommendations for Avon. Its effect will be that, on 1 April 1996, Avon county council will disappear and its powers will be taken over by four unitary successor authorities. The existing authorities of Bristol and Woodspring will be given unitary powers. Woodspring is to be renamed North West Somerset. The existing authorities of Bath and Wansdyke will be abolished and comprise a single new unitary authority, to be called Bath and North East Somerset. The existing authorities of Kingswood and Northavon will also be abolished. They will comprise a further unitary authority to be called South Gloucestershire.

In the absence of clear agreement on alternative names for unitary authorities, we have concluded that we should not make any change to the names recommended by the commission. However, authorities retain the power to make changes to names if they resolve to do so. They may wish to consider that issue. There seems to be an increasing tendency—which I am not greatly in favour of—to give compass references to political names,

The order is not a judgment on the performance of the existing local authorities in the area. I made that clear during the Cleveland order debate and I make it clear now. That is not what the review was called on to judge. It involved finding the best form of local government for the future in each area.

In Avon, a generally constructive debate has taken place about reorganisation and the implementation of change. Of course, I have not agreed with every point put to me, but I have considered them all carefully and the debate has been conducted in a sensible and generally non-partisan way.

Authorities that are to assume unitary status should be given a fresh, democratic mandate to do so. There will therefore be whole council elections to all four unitary authorities in May this year. All four authorities will then have responsibility for planning and budgeting for change before they assume responsibility for the full range of local government functions on 1 April 1996.

In future, the three councils outside Bath will hold whole council elections every four years, although if local authorities wish to adopt a system of thirds, they may make representations. We do not hold any ideological view about which is preferable—we have always made that clear. Bristol will return to its current arrangements of elections by thirds from 1997. That follows Bristol's representations that it wished to retain elections by thirds

but that it did not wish to have an election in the year immediately after reorganisation. We have tried to accommodate what seems a sensible representation.

Warding arrangements for the two new authorities are as recommended by the commission, except for the correction of a technical error in South Gloucestershire. There are no changes to the current warding arrangements for Bristol and North West Somerset.

The commission also recommended the abolition of the county of Avon and its return to Somerset and Gloucestershire for ceremonial purposes. The order abolishes the county area of Avon and provides for Bristol to be a county in its own right, as it was before 1974, with its own lord lieutenancy and high sheriff.

As in the case of Cleveland, we shall be making separate provision to put into effect the commission's recommendations for ceremonial arrangements elsewhere in the present county of Avon. We shall therefore provide that, for ceremonial purposes, Bath and North East Somerset and North West Somerset will be part of Somerset and that South Gloucestershire will be part of Gloucestershire.

Once the order is made, all authorities in the area will have extra duties and powers to prepare for reorganisation. They will each be under a duty to co-operate in implementing change. Unitary authorities will have access to the information that they need. Once the new councils for the four unitary authorities have been elected, they will have further powers to make the necessary preparations, including setting budgets and recruiting staff for the functions that they take over on 1 April 1996. They will be required to consider whether any of their new functions would best be discharged through joint arrangements with other authorities. Taken together, those provisions will ensure that a smooth transition to the new structure takes place, with proper safeguards for essential services.

I am mindful of Madam Speaker's injunction for Front-Bench spokesmen to be brief, so I should like to deal quickly with some of the questions that have been raised during consultation. Where an existing authority, as a result of reorganisation, assumes responsibility for new functions but its area is unchanged, that is a continuing authority. We simply have no powers to abolish it. However, where a unitary authority has new boundaries, that authority is classified as a new authority. So Bristol and North West Somerset will be continuing authorities, and South Gloucestershire and Bath and North East Somerset will be new. It all sounds very theological but it is an important aspect of reorganisation.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Is the Minister aware of the anxiety of staff in, for example, a county authority, that they may not get a fair deal in applying for jobs in the new continuing authorities because, in effect, their existing staff are in a better position? The Minister said that he did not have the powers. I know that representations have been made for those powers to be taken.

Mr. Curry: As the hon. Gentleman has noted, it has been argued that continuing authorities will have an advantage and that they will have the inside track on recruitment. It is argued that they can get the recruitment process under way now, before the new authorities come into existence. I do not agree. All the authorities will be able to start planning for the reorganisation once the order is made. All four unitary authorities will get extra powers, for example, to make appointments once the elections have taken place, and the elections are scheduled for this May.

The existing authorities are being encouraged to think ahead on behalf of their successors. I could not stop them if I wanted to and it would be ridiculous to try. But that applies equally to continuing authorities such as Bristol, and authorities like Bath and Wansdyke, which are to be replaced by new ones. They cannot take decisions on behalf of their successors, but they can help, if they wish, to get them off to a proper start. There is nothing involved that sensible and honourable people cannot settle sensibly themselves. We have to make the assumption that we are dealing with sensible and honourable people in local government. I could not possibly justify placing artificial legal obstacles in the way of a sensible and well-planned transition from the old structure to the new.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): The Minister will be well aware that the two new authorities that are not continuing authorities are concerned about the point that he is making. Can he clarify the issue? Will the new authorities that are continuing authorities be unable to make decisions in respect of new services that they take on—for example, education—and of staff recruitment and appointment until after the elections?

Mr. Curry: That is exactly the position. The order confers upon the new authorities—whether they be shadow authorities or the authorities that will discharge both the functions of the old councils and prepare for the new council—powers that will not be endowed until such time as those new councils are in existence. Of course, we want existing councils to do some preparatory work. The whole purpose of doing that now is that the uncertainty is ended as soon as possible. There is a clear legal break and the legal right is conferred by the order that establishes the new councils, which come into existence in May.

Ms Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I do not quite understand the distinction that the Minister is drawing between a preparatory plan and an actual plan and when the authorities can take over. Is he saying that, for example, Bristol should be taking no decisions whatsoever for the continuity of the services until after the election?

Mr. Curry: I am saying that there are two classes of authority. I said earlier that this all sounds very theological, whether the authority is new or continuing. However, it is a material consideration, not a theological one. We are bound by the terms of the statutes to which we have to refer.

If an authority is a continuing authority, which means that it is being reorganised within its boundaries, it has a certain competence to be able to prepare. However, it does not have the legal ability to prepare—that comes with the new powers endowed upon that council after the election in May. The argument is that, because the core of that authority is not going to change, it will be able to do its preparation work more effectively. The gap is a narrow

[Mr. Curry]

one in any case. There is to be an election in May, so reasonable people should be able to sort things out. It is a problem without a reason.

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): Is making appointments part of the preparation or is it not? I understood the Minister to say specifically that it would be wrong for appointments to be made before vesting day; before the new authorities are established. Is that the case? Can we have that reassurance?

Mr. Curry: I shall try to clarify a complex issue.

Ms Primarolo: Yes or no.

Mr. Curry: There is a great tendency to ask for yes or no answers to complicated matters. I am trying to do my best.

With a continuing authority, the council that currently exists will have to undergo a new election in order to exercise its new powers. In the meantime, it is able to do preparation work for that. The old authorities—that is, those that will be reorganised—will, by dint of that reorganisation, have the powers conferred upon them to begin that work. *[Interruption.]* I can now give the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) a yes or no answer. On whether the authorities can make any appointments before the election of the new authorities, the answer is that they cannot. The answer is no.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Dead simple.

Mr. Curry: As the hon. Gentleman said, it is dead simple, but difficult to remember. I am glad that I have managed to cast light upon that difficult area. If any doubt remains, when I reply to the debate I shall do my best to clarify the issue further. It took me quite a long time to understand the matter. Once one has understood it for about three hours, it is difficult to retain the information much longer. I am being very honest.

We come to another theological subject in which the House is interested, but again it is a material theological subject. I have been asked why the authorities are to be unitary district councils, not unitary county councils. I sometimes wonder why people ask such questions. I genuinely do not understand this question. It makes no difference in terms of local services.

The only significance—I hope that this is not regarded as a mischievous statement—is that it has some bearing on to which local authority association the new councils choose to belong. *[Interruption.]* I thought I might have spotted that one. However, my understanding is that the local authority associations are to form one big happy family soon, so it is a rather short-term preoccupation.

Perhaps that is not to happen quite as soon as some thought it would. In any event, given that Bristol and North West Somerset are continuing and must therefore continue to be districts, it would be inconsistent and confusing to designate the other authorities in the area as counties. Therefore, all the successor authorities are districts.

The order also makes specific provision in respect of a number of services. For the police, articles 12 and 13 provide for the representatives of the four unitary authorities to replace Avon county council's nominees on the Avon and Somerset police authority from 1 October 1995 for certain purposes, essentially so that they can be involved in decisions on the budget for 1996-96 and on policing plans. Avon county council's representatives will remain on the authority for all other purposes until that council is abolished.

For the fire service, the order provides for each of the unitary authorities to be fire authority areas. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will, in due course, be bringing forward proposals for a fire combination scheme, so that the fire service will continue to be delivered over the present area.

As unitary authorities, the four Avon districts will be responsible for both strategic and local land use planning for their areas. We are determined that there should be adequate arrangements for strategic planning in areas where reorganisation takes place. In the case of Avon, the commission proposed that the four unitary authorities should maintain separate local plans but work together on a joint structure plan. We have accepted that recommendation.

The draft order gives effect to that by transferring the county's strategic planning responsibilities to the four district councils. We look to them to make the necessary voluntary arrangements for joint working on the structure plan. We expect that the authorities in Avon will establish satisfactory arrangements to fulfil that important planning function.

Our policy is that there should be statutory arrangements only where absolutely necessary; we believe that voluntary arrangements are more accountable. In addition, we do not think that we should tie the hands of the authorities which will be elected in May.

The local government review and reorganisation in Avon have been the subject of a long and vigorous discussion. This has, of course, resulted in uncertainty for all those involved with local government in the area. This order will end that uncertainty. What is important now is that authorities set aside their past differences and work together to make a success of reorganisation and future local government in the area. I am confident that they will do so, and I commend the order to the House.

6.48 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): As with the Cleveland order, it is probably worth reminding the House—especially those Conservative Members who either do not know or have forgotten—that this order from a Tory Government is intended to abolish the Avon county council, which was set up by a previous Tory Government. Some Conservative Members try to portray the Avon, Cleveland and Humberside councils as a Labour creation. However, they were created by a previous Tory Government, and they are now being dismembered by the party that brought them into being. We might describe what we are discussing tonight as a case of municipal infanticide.

The order is also a product of the Government's local government review. We have said before—we shall say it again, because it is true—that the review was conceived in malice against several Labour county councils. The Government do not like Labour councils, irrespective of whether local people vote for them. Perhaps they dislike Labour councils even more because they know that the councils are popular, and the Government have finally

decided that, if they cannot win elections to councils, the only answer is to get rid of the councils. They did it with the Greater London council and with the metropolitan counties and they are now setting about wiping out in a malignant way those county councils that they do not like.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I served on Avon county council; I opposed it when the Conservative Government suggested it; I opposed it when it was controlled by the Conservative party to which I belong and I am delighted to vote for its abolition tonight, irrespective of who controls it.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman would do well to hide his consistency, because any consistency will obviously prevent him ever reaching the Conservative Front Bench.

Mr. Wilshire: So I notice.

Mr. Dobson: I should not like to bet on it, and I am sure that my hon. Friends would not either.

Originally, the Government said that the review would cover the whole country. As the right hon. Gentleman who is now the President of the Board of Trade said in the House in January 1992:

"We know that most local authorities want unitary status and we believe that such status will provide a better structure for the future in most areas."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1992; Vol. 232, c. 37.]

If the review turns out as it appears it will, 230 or more of the 296 shire districts that existed before will continue to survive as shire districts with a county council above them, so that 80 per cent. of the councils that the Government intended to reform and to turn into unitary authorities will remain as they were. How have the Government selected the ones that are for the chop?

I return to the fact that the decision was obviously politically motivated, and go on from that to say that the conduct of the Local Government Commission for England, which should have been beyond reproach, has not been. It has not behaved in the quasi-judicial manner that one could expect from something called a Local Government Commission.

Conservative Members may not know about it, but Opposition Members are familiar with the letter from the boss of the Local Government commission for England to the Secretary of State, saying how important it was that the Government and the Commission received "an early wind". That is not usually regarded as a quasi-judicial point of view. I should not like to appear in a court where the judge was asking for an early wind for him and for the police.

That approach has been maintained throughout by the Local Government Commission. It has not conducted itself as it should have done. It has not taken a consistent approach in every part of the country. Its consultations have varied from place to place. As a result, there have been years of wrangling and vast expense. A great deal of money has been spent on court cases, and there has been a massive diversion of effort by local councillors, who would have done better, and no doubt would have preferred, to spend their time trying to ensure reasonable services.

At the end of that process, there are grotesque inconsistencies in the recommendations, ranging from Rutland, which will be a unitary all-purpose authority with 33,000 people, to Warrington and Northampton, with 180,000 people, which will not be given unitary status. Those are the recommendations of the Local Government Commission, before the Secretary of State brings his bizarre judgment to bear on those matters.

At least some progress has been made, in that the Government have conceded that they will bring all the final recommendations of the Commission to the House—a commitment that they previously refused to make.

That brings me to the Avon (Structural Change) Order. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and other hon. Friends may wish to speak about its detail, and they will no doubt do so in some depth and possibly at some length—not more than 10 minutes, of course—but we do not believe that the order creating four districts provides a good basis for future high-quality local government in the Avon area.

I am confident that councillors—not only Labour ones, but councillors of all parties—who are elected to the new authorities will do their best to make those arrangements work, but that will be difficult. For a start, it is significant that about 1,000 jobs are put at risk by the reorganisation. As we know from orders that the Government have passed through the House, the compensation terms for staff who may have to lose their jobs are less generous than those that prevailed in 1986 and certainly rather less generous than the severance arrangements that the boss of the Severn Trent water authority arranged for himself, getting about half a million quid for disappearing. That sort of money will not be available to the many staff who have put in a vast amount of dedicated effort on behalf of the people of Avon.

I expect that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood will explain his anxiety about the future of services in the Avon area. Doubts about the cost effects have been expressed by the various contending parties. I join with the Minister in having some doubts about various parts of the order. I also have doubts about anyone's predictions about savings or additional expenditure that will result from the reorganisation of local government, because I cannot think of any set of predictions that has ever been made in the House that turned out to be right.

My main worry is about the boundaries of Bristol. I am convinced that the boundaries of Bristol, as set out in the order, will leave Bristol too narrowly drawn. There are excellent Labour councillors in the city of Bristol.

Ms Primarolo: Even the Government agree that the boundaries drawn for Bristol are not sensible, because they have given an undertaking that they will review those boundaries in a few years' time. The good citizens of Bristol might find themselves having to waste their council tax yet again on bureaucratic change and butchering of their services when it should be spent on building up local democracy.

Mr. Dobson: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): The hon. Gentleman is too hasty in agreeing with the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo). He might like to study the details that the Government have announced, which show that there will be nothing other than minor, cosmetic change to the external boundary of Bristol.

Mr. Dobson: I understand that, unless the law is changed, if the Government ask the commission to consider any local government boundaries, the commission can decide for itself the extent or otherwise of the boundary changes. I am subject to correction by the Minister when he has received his information from the civil servants in the Box.

It is obvious that all candidates standing for election in Bristol would prefer the boundaries of Bristol to be wider than they are. The Labour council in Bristol accepts the proposition before us tonight, because it considers that it is confronted with Hobson's choice, so it is thanking the Lord for small mercies. It wants the powers returned to the city of Bristol, but it believes that the boundaries should be wider, so it accepts the best that is on offer.

It is understandable that the Labour council in Bristol should accept what is on offer, but I do not think that that can possibly excuse either the commission or Ministers for proposing boundaries that are plainly ridiculous in the eyes of almost everyone concerned.

That is not the opinion only of the Labour party. I quote from the opinions of the Bristol chamber of commerce. It says that it is

"of the view that local government in Avon has a critical role to play in providing the infrastructure necessary for promoting and maintaining economic prosperity—in partnership where appropriate with the private sector."

It says that it is concerned that

"Bristol in its historic boundaries would not have the critical mass to tackle the key strategic issues such as transport and planning, or to deal with acute urban problems and inner city degeneration".

In other words, it believes that the boundaries of Bristol will make it difficult for those elected to run that great city to do their jobs.

The Bristol council of social services shares that view. The south western regional council of the Confederation of British Industry is, if anything, even more strongly of the view that the boundaries are wrong. It said:

"It is vital that any restructuring of Local Government should produce a system which will facilitate the process of wealth creation for the benefit of the South Western Region."

It went on to say, in its original evidence to the Local Government Commission, that it

"favoured a division of the existing County of Avon into three unitary authorities"—

not the four that the Government are proposing—

"with the boundaries of the existing City of Bristol expanded to encompass the economic and social unit generally regarded as comprising Bristol."

It said that that is an area much larger than the area covered by the city council. It was concerned that

"full and specific consultation should take place on the exact location of the boundaries for an enlarged Bristol."

After the commission's proposals were published, the CBI's response was that the commission's proposals did not meet those needs. It believed that

"restricting the proposed Bristol unitary authority to the existing boundaries of the City Council would seriously inhibit economic growth and result in further inner-city degradation."

Since the publication of the recommendations, it has canvassed its members again. The CBI has been asked by its members to stress their belief that the commission's proposals would have a "damaging effect". It goes on to say:

"We firmly believe that the Commission has not given sufficient weight to the economic interests of the area."

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman has made a strong point about his belief that the boundaries for Bristol are inadequate. He has quoted at length business interests in Avon that have made the same point. Would the hon. Gentleman be kind enough to outline where he thinks the Bristol boundaries ought to lie and whether a Labour Government would review those boundaries with a view to creating a much wider Bristol? That is of great interest.

Mr. Dobson: My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) will deal with the question of where local people—*[Interruption.]* I am in favour of the people of Bristol and their locally elected representatives deciding where the boundaries should be. I do not have any doubt—scarcely anybody has any doubt—that the boundaries that the Government are putting forward leave Bristol "cabinn'd, cribb'd, confin'd". They are ridiculous boundaries and we should not vote them through.

The boundaries are drawn in that way because this is a political fix. I predict that next week the Government will produce a political fix in the other direction with the proposals for York. Against the views of the people in the area, including businesses, they will create a greater York. This order will produce a lesser Bristol. Both those moves are for squalid party political purposes. That is why I urge my hon. Friends to vote against the order.

We believe that the Government are still cherry picking. They are bopping the counties that they do not like. We believe that they should insist on annual elections for the new authorities that are being established. We believe that there is some sensible concern about the cost of reorganisation.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman said that the Government should insist on annual elections. He just said that the local people should decide where their boundaries lie, although he did not make it clear whether the people outside a boundary should have the same views as those inside. The current rules mean that if a local council wishes, it can ask to have the electoral system changed. Why does the hon. Gentleman believe that in one instance the local people should decide and that in another instance the Government have to tell them? I do not understand.

Mr. Dobson: Some basic principles are involved. It may be that some people who are currently running a council would like the idea of not having an election for another 10 years. We believe that a third or a quarter of the members of every council should face an election each year. It is a sound approach and it works well in the areas in which it exists already. We believe that it should operate everywhere.

We are concerned that the estimates about the cost or savings that will result from the reorganisation are unsound. We are concerned about the inadequate protection that is provided for the staff, but, above all, we believe that the boundaries of Bristol are harmful. We share the views of those who believe that it will make it harder than is necessary in these difficult times for whoever is elected to represent the people of Bristol to do

their job of looking after the interests of the people of Bristol as well as promoting the economic and social well-being of that great city and the neighbouring areas.

We expect that the Government will vote this through, but we are confident that Labour councillors will be elected to represent the people of Bristol and the other areas. We are confident that they will do their best, but it would be better if they were not doing it in such difficult circumstances.

7.5 pm

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I welcome the order and the changes that it puts in place. The commission made the right recommendations and the Government are right to agree to them. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) made a partisan speech and I do not wish to do that. However, I must respond to what he said. I believe that the commission's recommendation for the boundaries of Bristol was correct and the Government are right to follow it because it is what the people of my constituency want. They do not want to be taken over by Bristol. If the hon. Gentleman wants to follow what the people want, he should know that they want to be governed by South Gloucestershire. They support the proposals, as does the Northavon chamber of commerce.

I want to look back, because it is important to consider why Avon has not worked well as a county and why it scored so low in the public consultation organised by the Local Government Commission.

In the past I have criticised individual policies of Avon county council and its management, but I do not believe that the failure of the county to work is essentially a failure of the individuals involved—either the councillors or the officers—over the past 20 years. I believe that the fundamental flaw is the structure that was set up.

Administratively, it makes sense to govern the area around Bristol with the area of Bristol and that is why, in some cases, business people and others have viewed this in the way suggested by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras. The truth is that it defied people's feelings of place. The clashes between Avon and the six districts in particular have been acute for that reason. There has been particularly intense rivalry between the county of Avon and the city of Bristol. It is important to remember that the city of Bristol was not merely a county borough. It had been a county in its own right since 1373—over 600 years. The Local Government Act 1972 deprived it of that status which it had had for so long.

These matters, which are in some respects emotional matters, may seem unimportant when compared with administrative logic, but they are not. The deepest lesson of Avon's short life is that we neglect those roots at our peril. They go very deep into the fabric of British life. Today, 20 years after Avon was set up, people do not say that they live in Avon. They say that they live in Bristol, or Chipping Sodbury near Bristol. They do not say that they live in the county of Avon because that is not how they feel. The Local Government Commission proved that more scientifically through the opinion polls which it conducted. The old counties may be Anglo-Saxon in origin, but they are not outmoded in people's minds.

At the same time, administrative problems remain. It is undoubtedly more difficult to govern the areas north of Bristol, which I represent, from Gloucester, which is 30 miles away, than from Bristol, which is on our doorstep and far larger. That is why the right solution is the proposed unitary authorities. The new districts are an appropriate size and, apart from anything else, if Bristol were allowed against the wishes of the people concerned to extend its boundaries further north, it would leave a very awkward authority as a successor to South Gloucestershire. It is much more difficult to run a large, disparate authority with partial powers than it is a smaller, more geographically unified authority, with all the powers of local government.

There are messages, I may say to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, for those who want to foist on us an elected regional tier of government. The inhabitants of my constituency do not think that they live in the same part of the country as Bournemouth, even if both places are in the south-west economic planning district. That feeling is even more evident when comparing the inhabitants of Newent, for instance, in the Forest of Dean, with those of Newquay.

As I have said, it is important to consider the administrative complications of separate authorities in the relatively small area that has been the county of Avon. It is very important to stress that the new councils being set up under the order must work together on matters of common concern and, indeed, with neighbouring councils in the adjacent counties. I have every hope that that will work well, as my hon. Friend the Minister suggested when he moved the order.

There will be four councils instead of seven and they will be fully competent bodies dealing as equals with one another. In particular, there will be no more duplication of functions and overlapping rivalries, which have bedevilled the relationships between Avon and the districts within it. Incidentally, they will also be seen to be directly accountable to the electorate, with fewer excuses that their authority did the right thing and some other authority did not. If one asked the man in the street whether powers fell under the county council or the district council, he would have an awful job replying accurately.

My hon. Friend the Minister referred to the question of what is a county and what is a district. For ceremonial purposes, South Gloucestershire will go back to being part of Gloucestershire. There has been some correspondence about the duties of the lord lieutenant. I think that it is right for Bristol to have a separate lord lieutenant, even though in the past, when it did, it was usually held in plurality with the lord lieutenancy of Gloucestershire. It has in the past also been held in plurality with the lord lieutenancy of Somerset, which would not be a bad idea now. Certainly, Bristol should have a separate position of lord lieutenant, even if it is held in plurality with one of the adjacent counties.

I would like to say a word about the name of the district, to which my hon. Friend the Minister also referred. I believe strongly, as a result of my experience over the past few years, that old names are the best. I have found that, since 1983, when the name of my constituency was changed to Northavon, whenever I am more than a few miles away from the constituency and people ask me what constituency I represent and I reply Northavon, they invariably say, "Where is that?"

People do not take on board all these new names all over the country. Indeed, they have not even been taken on board by whoever drafted the order. There is a misprint on page four, which describes the district as Northwood

[Sir John Cope]

as opposed to Northavon. That would not have occurred with Bristol, for example—the proof reader would have spotted it at once—but because of all the invented names that we have had to put up with over the past few years, such mistakes occur.

I am therefore strongly in favour of using the old name where possible. The name South Gloucestershire used to cover the entire proposed authority. It should be the name of this district and I very much welcome the creation of it.

7.14 pm

Mr. Roger Berry (Kingswood): I opposed Conservative policy on the previous reorganisation of Avon and I oppose Conservative policy on the current reorganisation for exactly the same reasons. In 1972, when the House debated the Local Government Bill, the Conservatives reorganised matters quite specifically to take control of services such as education, social services and public transport away from Labour city councils, including Bristol. Of course the purpose of that exercise was not to improve services or local accountability; it was to achieve precisely the opposite. That is what we have before us today.

I could not imagine that anyone in the House or elsewhere would think that, after 15 years of the Conservatives attacking local democracy, reorganisation under this Government would do anything other than continue that process of service cuts and redundancies. We have had capping, we have had cuts in rate support grants then revenue support grants, we have had the poll tax, we have had the virtual dismantling of local education authorities and we have had compulsory competitive tendering. After 15 years of measure after measure designed to undermine local democracy, nobody can claim that reorganisation under this Government at this time is anything other than a continuation of that process.

I do not oppose the motion because I oppose in principle unitary local authorities, although I note that Sir John Banham, who chairs the Local Government Commission, told the Association of County Councils in November:

"I know of no evidence that smaller unitary authorities will be better placed than county councils to deliver effective and convenient local services".

Sir John Banham was on television—I think—yesterday advising us all about the importance of performance-related pay for senior executives. I would like to see a little performance-related pay for Sir John Banham based on the way in which he has dealt with the local government review.

Mr. Dobson: It would be a rebate.

Mr. Berry: My hon. Friend is right. It would be a rebate of gigantic proportions, which would help us preserve essential services.

I emphasise that I am speaking against the motion not because I oppose the principle of unitary authorities, but because I am opposed, as all sane people must be, to further cuts in essential local services and yet more redundancies which this Government policy will bring about.

There will be cuts because of the substantial costs of reorganisation, which should be met by central Government, but which will not. That is not only my view and the view of local councils in Avon, it is the view of the local branch of the Confederation of British Industry. In its submission to local government commissioners, the CBI said:

"In the event of structural changes being introduced, considerable transitional costs would be inevitable. Local revenue would not be in a position to absorb additional costs other than by means of an inordinately large increase in the Council Tax. This would entirely distort anticipated benefits of the structural changes and have the effect of discrediting any new arrangement."

I am sure that the Government have thought about that. The CBI continued:

"This paper summits, therefore, that the costs of changes should be funded by central Government."

The costs of reorganisation, to which the CBI and others refer, are substantial. The bids that the local councils in Avon submitted when seeking credit approval to cover the costs of reorganisation totalled £24 million for 1995-96 alone. I pause to contemplate what local services could be improved, or at least protected, if that £24 million were to be spent on services, not reorganisation. But that £24 million is already significantly higher than the total transitional costs estimated by the Local Government Commission for Avon. It said that over all the years that it could anticipate, the costs would be £13 million to £18 million. The local councils say that, in the year before reorganisation, transitional costs will come to £24 million.

Before anyone says, "They would say that, wouldn't they—they would put in bids on the basis of overestimates of expenditure," I should say that the people who are placing the bids are those who are likely to be responsible for running the unitary authorities afterwards. They are the people who believe in reorganisation. It is inconceivable that those who anticipate running a unitary authority and who want to make it work after reorganisation could submit bids that are overestimates. It is well known that, in Avon, the councils are collectively seeking about £50 million to cover the costs of local government reorganisation.

What has the Government's response been? In 1995-96, instead of meeting the £24 million bid, the Government are allocating £6.8 million—a little over a quarter of the amount required to fund reorganisation. That shortfall—let alone the repayment of debt in subsequent years—will inevitably mean service cuts and more redundancies. It is undeniable that there will be substantial redundancies as a result of the reorganisation—at a time when local government staff are frequently stretched to breaking point.

I have lost track of the number of senior officers in Avon who have left or retired, and the number of teachers and social workers who are leaving the profession for reasons of stress and overwork. The inevitable implication of not meeting the cost of reorganisation will be that Government policy will ensure further reductions in services and further redundancies.

The councils in Avon are aware of that. As part of the bid, they have already included an estimate of £7.5 million to cover redundancy costs in 1995-96—before reorganisation. In case anyone thinks that the amounts come from the existing Avon county council, that is not true—some £2.6 million is from Avon and £5 million

from existing district authorities. They anticipate, collectively, that £7.5 million will be spent on redundancy costs before reorganisation. It is as inevitable as night follows day that there will be more redundancies after reorganisation.

I spoke in the last debate on regulations on local government redundancy payments following reorganisation, and I do not want to repeat the points that I made—not least because I have only about two minutes left. The redundancy terms being offered to local government employees are, as my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, worse than in 1986 when the metropolitan counties were abolished. They are worse than under Mrs. Thatcher. Much has happened since 1986—it is not just that Ministers have given themselves better redundancy payments, but there is more unemployment. That is a shameful way to deal with staff who have given good service to their communities.

There are a number of technical issues that I should like to have commented on, but I clearly do not have the time. I am aware, as is the Minister, that Avon county council and the Association of County Councils have diligently pursued a number of technical points which I hope that the Minister will take on board. I pay tribute to the way in which Avon county council has pursued matters on behalf of services and the people who provide them. Councillor Valerie Davey and her colleagues deserve credit for dealing with difficult problems in the best interests of the services and those who provide them.

I came into politics to secure better, not worse, public services. I wanted to secure more employment opportunities, not fewer. These proposals are a recipe for more cuts in services and more redundancies. They constitute another nail in the coffin of local democracy. I urge the House to oppose the motion.

7.24 pm

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I have never made any secret of the fact that, when I was first elected to the House for Bristol, North-West in 1983, I had been living in Bristol for only a few months. During my first general election campaign, at my final election meeting on the night before I was elected, I said that one of my ambitions during my time in Parliament was to see the return of the city and county of Bristol. Like anyone embarking on a crusade, I did not expect to see that ambition realised in as little as 12 years. I am delighted to welcome the realisation of that ambition. Judging by the response to my comments, it was probably the most popular pledge of any that I made during that election campaign.

Much has been said tonight on the technical aspects of the change. I should like to look back further and try to explore why Avon never worked—clearly, it did not. I think that there are two reasons, both of which are inherent in the reasons for the moves to the successor authorities which we are contemplating tonight.

The first reason is that Avon clearly never had, and never had the hope of achieving, the consent of the people that it governed. As an authority, it was seen from its first day as being imposed on the people of Bristol and its surroundings. It was resented from the first day and, despite all the strong efforts of the officers and councillors to achieve acceptance for the county of Avon, the problems that beset it were inherent in its nature and the way in which it subsequently developed.

Many of the problems with us today—for example, the problems that I recently highlighted in the House on choice in secondary education—stem from the fact that a previous Conservative Government sought to impose on the people of Bristol and its surroundings a form of local government that they felt was alien to them.

There is another reason why Avon was such a conspicuous failure. It has often been said by councillors and officers of Avon that it was formed with no financial assets; it was stripped by the district councils of any assets that it might otherwise have chosen to inherit. Avon has not noticed that the same is true of many more successful councils in other parts of the county. As a result of Avon's belief that it had been hard done by, it developed a financial inferiority complex.

In my years in the House I have noticed that the effect of that attitude, which was developed in the early years of Avon's history, is that every year, without fail, instead of trying to plan financially on the basis of the resources that it had and knew it could achieve—as a more relaxed authority might have done—Avon put most of its effort into trying to obtain more. Like many fictional characters, Avon could not come to terms with the facts of its formation, particularly the financial facts. Every year, Avon's arguments for trying to find ways of obtaining more money for itself became more desperate, hopeless and unbelievable. Avon was doomed from its formation, and few people will mourn its passing.

The system with which we are replacing it has a number of advantages, and we must ensure that they are not squandered. The first advantage—in direct contradiction to the point made by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)—is that the new authorities have the clearly expressed support of the people whom they are being set up to govern. The hon. Gentleman suggested—in a manner of which the current dictator of Iraq would have been proud—that, because certain people in Bristol feel that they have a divine right to rule the surrounding areas, that view should be heard. The last thing that the people outside Bristol want is to be ruled by Bristol, but the hon. Gentleman suggested that their view should be ignored.

We shall be quoting the comments of the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras during the local election campaign in May in areas that have made it quite clear that the last thing they want is to be taken over by a city whose style of local government they regard as wholly alien. I strongly deprecate the hon. Gentleman's opinion—and, by implication, that of the Labour party—that only the view of Labour-controlled areas count and that the areas that they seek to govern are not entitled to hold a view at all.

I welcome the order. Tonight I am wearing a tie that bears the coat of arms of the city of Bristol. When the order is passed, I shall be wearing a tie that bears the arms of the city and the county of Bristol. I am the first Member for Bristol, North-West since the late Martin McLaren to be able to make that claim. Having achieved the abolition of the county of Avon, I shall go home and play a recording of Haydn's "Te Deum". As I listen to it, I shall reflect that, even after 22 years, it is possible for a Government to admit that they got something wrong and to make a determined effort to set it right.

7.31 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): We have said before that the local government reform programme has turned into a shambles, but it is obvious that this case is one of the most shambolic of all. The Government admitted that drafting errors in some of the original legislation caused real problems when considering the question of Avon and its future, and clearly areas of concern remain to be resolved.

We all agree that Avon is a very unpopular county, even after 20 years of existence. From the beginning, it was an artificial creation which was never well loved. As it moves towards its grave, the House should at least pay tribute to the valuable work performed by a number of Avon councillors and officers over the years. Their contribution should not be forgotten.

Serious points and questions about the order must be addressed, one of which taxed the Minister in his opening remarks. For the first time, the reorganisation involves two continuing authorities and two new authorities. That is clearly still causing problems for the Minister, and I for one do not accept the points that he made in reply to earlier interventions.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Is my hon. Friend concerned that, although the Minister appears to have moved in the right direction, he has not yet made it clear to the House whether any progress towards the appointment of new staff in either the new or the continuing authorities will be possible before vesting day? Perhaps my hon. Friend would like to put that question to the Minister.

Mr. Rendel: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point, and perhaps the Minister will respond to it straight away.

Mr. Curry: I realise that time is limited, but I shall make the position clear now in case I am not able to do so in my winding-up speech. As soon as the order is made, all the authorities involved will have new powers and duties to start preparing for reorganisation. They must co-operate because the order enjoins them to do so—for example, Bath and Wandsdyke can start working towards reorganisation at the same time as Bristol.

The decisions about how the new authorities will run their affairs should be made only after a new mandate has been obtained. The order says that authorities cannot make decisions or appointments until after the elections in May. In May, all four unitary authorities will have identical powers to do that. The essential point is that, when the new powers are provided, they are provided equally to all involved.

Mr. Rendel: As it will clearly be more difficult for the two authorities which are joining to form one authority to make even preparatory arrangements before that authority is set up, I believe that the situation is clearly unfair. The new authority which will be created from amalgamating two existing authorities will be disadvantaged compared with the continuing authorities. It is unfair to the staff concerned and to the authorities themselves. It is odd that, in spite of opting for unitaries, the Government have managed to make an enemy of not only the unitary authorities but the Association of District Councils, which is concerned about that point.

Various estimates of the short-term costs of the transition are circulating. The costs are ill-defined; that is perhaps not surprising when we consider what happened in Cleveland, when much higher estimates were made immediately after the order was passed. The Minister should promise—I hope that he will refer to the matter in his winding-up speech—that, if the costs turn out to be much higher than the Government and the commission expected, the Government will help the new authorities to meet the extra costs.

Consultation in this case was clearly inadequate and muddled. When the consultation process began, people were told that they would become part of Somerset or part of Gloucestershire, which later proved to be untrue. That must have been confusing for the people involved and the consultation process might have produced a different result if that point had been clear from the beginning. It is now impossible to gauge the extent to which that confusion might have affected people's view of the reorganisation, and I wish that the Government had engaged in more consultation after the point had been clarified fully.

The question of whether South Gloucestershire and North Somerset will become real counties has muddied the water further. I am glad that the Minister discussed that point earlier, although I do not believe that he clarified it fully.

The Government should have started from scratch in examining the role of the new authorities instead of simply talking about what areas they would cover. The fact that the Government did not consider the new authorities' role properly has led to other difficulties. They have not detailed how strategic services—strategic planning, transport, the fire service, the probation service and the police—will be managed or even how the coroner's office will work in the future.

The Government said today that they want the services to be handled in a voluntary manner because that is more flexible. I suspect that they really mean that they do not know how the services will be handled and they intend to go ahead on a wing and a prayer. That will only increase the administrative burden of those who eventually become the unitary councillors.

There are also points in favour of the order. It looks as though it will produce at least some long-term cost savings. I welcome the extra efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery which may be created as government is brought closer to the people. It is a long-standing principle of my party that government should be brought closer to the people and I look forward to seeing that happen with the new authorities.

Mr. Berry: Can the hon. Gentleman explain to the House why the Liberal Democrats in Avon do not support the order?

Mr. Rendel: I am not sure to whom the hon. Gentleman refers. There are members of all three parties who are for and against every local government order we have had so far.

Mr. Berry: The hon. Gentleman just said that it was a matter of principle.

Mr. Rendel: It is a matter of principle that we should bring government down to the lowest possible level.

A further point which must be made in favour of the order—perhaps the most important point—is that there is clear public support for it. Some 72 per cent. of people made it clear that they were in favour of the principle of unitary authorities in the area, while only 16 per cent. were against. That is very telling.

The fact that representations to the commission came out four to one favour was also a telling point in favour of the order. Some people said that that was a self-selected sample, and so it was. What was interesting in this case was that the self-selected sample was in favour of something. Usually, such a sample is unreliable only when it is made up of protesters.

In summary, the Government have made a mess of the order, as they made a mess of the reform of Avon. It is also clear that the public in general are behind the order and want it to be passed. There are many uncertainties about the order and, therefore, as it is passed many of its supporters—including, no doubt, the Government—will say a silent prayer that the worst fears of those who oppose it will not come true.

7.40 pm

Sir Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): This is a day of great rejoicing for Weston-super-Mare. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on tabling the order. I also congratulate the Boundary Commission, and in particular the two commissioners responsible who took an immense amount of trouble to see that all the appropriate people were visited, and who came up with the right answer.

In olden days, there would be dancing in the streets, the church bells would be ringing and the fountains would be running with best Somerset cider. Dare I say, if I could claim any credit, a small public subscription would have raised a modest statue to the Member in gratitude for the death of the ogre of Avon county council.

Avon has been disliked and derided ever since it came into being in 1974. I am the only Member in the Chamber who was in the House at the time that local government was reorganised in 1974. As a junior and thrusting parliamentary private secretary, I abstained on the vote which brought the council into being. My only regret over many years has been that I did not vote against, and hand in my cards. This order means that my conscience is clear again.

At long last, we will be back to running our own affairs. Weston-super-Mare is the largest town in Somerset, and it does not want to be run from Taunton. It definitely does not want to be run from Bristol. I believe that my hon. Friends have analysed most sensibly the reason for the failure of Avon—it was the domination of Bristol. When a town the size of Weston-super-Mare is made to feel like a second-rate suburb, it is hardly surprising that its residents would wish to make a change.

I think that I also speak on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), who, despite being silenced by his high ministerial office, will know that opinion also runs similarly in the north part of what is to be the new district.

Of course, we do want a little more money for the costs of transition. We have had a supplementary credit approval for £2.5 million, but we asked for £5 million. I am told by those in the know that there is still £27 million in the national pot, so we are hoping for some more money.

There is a minor dispute in my constituency about second-tier councils. Having got rid of Avon, there was a recommendation by the Boundary Commission for a town council. I think that that was a misapprehension. Previously, the charter trustees were told that they could not survive, and they opted naturally for the only alternative. Town councils are normally only given to towns with a population of less than 20,000, and having three town councils would be disastrous for the town.

I was delighted to learn that the Minister has allowed the charter trustees to continue. We need a mayor for a seaside town, and we need a body from which to elect him or her. If that body were to be consulted on planning permissions and have a touch more power, everybody would be totally satisfied. There is pressure to go for a town council on the basis that, if one asks somebody whether they want a town council, they will say yes. But there is no logic in having another tier of government in a town the size of Weston-super-Mare.

Once again, I express my strong support for the introduction of this order. It is something which I have looked forward to for 20 years, and I am delighted to be able to speed it on its way tonight.

7.46 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I consider myself to be very fortunate indeed, as I was born in Somerset and lived there for 30 years. That idyll was only blighted in 1974, when my bit of Somerset was moved into Avon. Every morning for the following 18 years until I moved, I had the discomfort of getting up, drawing my bedroom curtains and looking across my garden to the field next door, which was still in Somerset. That made me vow every morning to do everything in my power to wipe Avon from the map at the earliest possible opportunity.

During my time in Somerset, I had the great privilege of representing Somerset folk as an Avon county councillor for four years and as a Wansdyke district councillor for 11 years, six of those as leader. At every election, I stood both as a Conservative candidate and as a Back to Somerset candidate.

My mention of Wansdyke leads to me digress to mention my hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke (Mr. Aspinwall). I am sure that the whole House wishes him well in hospital, and understands why he is not here tonight.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) is here, and, until he took his trappist vows, he too enthused about the abolition of Avon. If he could speak tonight, he might just make the point to the Minister that he would prefer Nempnett Thrubwell to be in north-west Somerset rather than north-east Somerset, but no doubt that debate can continue outside the Chamber.

The order is not just about local issues; it raises a whole range of general issues as well. The constraints of time limit me to mentioning just three of those. First, local government only works well if it is structured on how people feel about themselves. Avon was imposed for administrative and service provision reasons. It was artificial and unloved, and it was never going to work. It proves the point that natural communities are what local government is all about, and I wish that the Local Government Commission had paid more attention to natural communities.

[Mr. David Wilshire]

Secondly, the order abolishes two-tier local government in parts of Somerset and Gloucestershire. The results will be better services, clearer accountability and stronger local government. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to reject all other two-tier solutions which have been suggested elsewhere.

Thirdly, the changes recognise the importance of history. My home town of Midsomer Norton has been in Somerset for 1,000 years, just as my constituency of Spelthorne has been in Middlesex for 1,000 years. I would urge the Government to do for the people of Spelthorne what they are doing for the people of Midsomer Norton. They must restore us to the historic county of Middlesex and abandon the status quo proposals for Surrey.

There are occasions when hon. Members do their duty with little enthusiasm, and when we vote out of loyalty rather than conviction. But tonight I need no persuasion. I do not need the help of the Whips, nor do I require any arm-twisting. I shall vote to abolish Avon with conviction and delight. Avon is unloved. It will not be mourned, and I rejoice at its abolition.

Finally, I send a message to friends in all political parties in Wansdyke. I note that they will have more seats on the new authority than Bath and, in my biased view—I am sure that the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) will understand—that is exactly how it should be. I look forward to watching my friends restore pride in local government and pride in Somerset. I wish them well.

7.49 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): One wonders where the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) has been. He accuses the Government of a conspiracy against Labour-controlled county councils, quietly forgetting that the county council on the Isle of Wight was Liberal-controlled and campaigned for a unitary authority. The Liberal Democrat spokesman seems now oblivious to the points that he made in the debate on that occasion.

The Local Government Act 1972 clearly states that a council can be a county council authority or a district council authority. As has been explained many times, the Local Government Act 1992 stipulates that an authority can be a successor authority only if it is not to be abolished and reorganised—that is the glitch in the legislation.

I promised the Minister when we debated the Cleveland order, and before that the Isle of Wight order, that I would try to attend each of these debates to make similar points about parish and town councils. Under this order, I am told that 131 parish and town councils are covered. Of that number, six are parish meetings and five are town councils.

During the Cleveland debate, I promised to keep raising the matter with my hon. Friend until I got a result—and I think that I am getting close to a result now.

I learn from the order that there is to be a different electoral cycle for Bristol, which has no parish or town councils; it will therefore not be affected by the order, because it will be on the county council election cycle, whereas all the other authorities affected will be on the district council cycle—1995 plus four years. The county election cycle is 1997 plus four years. As a result, all the parish and town councils will, under the order, be able to come up for elections together with their local authorities, thus saving local taxpayers considerable sums of money.

My hon. Friend has heard me say often enough that the election costs for many parish and town councils amount to more than their precepts; so combining the election cycles is a good idea.

I await the day when the Minister will tell us how he intends to get out of the conundrum facing the Isle of Wight.

7.51 pm

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I urge Members on both sides of the House to support this order. It is essential for local democracy that we have unitary authorities and do not continue with a two-tier system that nobody understands. In 1977, as an adopted candidate for the Greater London Council elections, I went to see Conservative Central Office and said that, having discovered what the GLC did, we ought to abolish it. I was assured that mine was a disgraceful, heretical suggestion: under no circumstances would it be abolished. Now that the GLC has been abolished, things are better for all Londoners, and the benefits have been immediately visible.

People understand what unitary authorities mean—a one-stop opportunity for local accountability and local democracy. I urge the Minister, as he sees this important flagship provision passing into law this evening, to remember that Torbay was recommended by the Local Government Commission for unitary status. I hope that he will bear in mind too that the Liberals, the Labour party and all Conservatives in Torbay are united—unlike those concerned with this order—in hoping that it will also receive unitary status, as recommended by Sir John Banham.

7.52 pm

Mr. Curry: I agreed with my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope), and with my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who spoke not as a Member representing this part of the world but on the basis of personal experience of it. I heard what he said about Middlesex. It is an example of a county that still exists in ceremonial and sporting terms and which usefully shows that a county can carry on even without a local authority being associated with its name.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) concentrated on the importance of service delivery. This move has been all about service delivery—bringing services to the people, rationally organising services and trying to overcome some of the difficulties of a two-tier structure. This solution would not commend itself in all circumstances, but the commission recommended it in this case, and we thought it the right thing to do.

I well remember the representations made by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Sir J. Wiggin) on the problem that he faced with the parish council, or the charter trustees. I am delighted that we were able to find an outcome that enabled the charter trustees to continue in Weston-super-Mare. I agree with him that it is important that such towns have their ancient traditions confirmed, and have people who can be seen to represent them in their ceremonial functions.

As many of my hon. Friends have said, continuity is an important aspect of local traditions and democracy. We are trying to reach down to ancient roots and give them modern shape so that they may continue to flourish. That is why local government has always been subject to reform and change, drawing on the best traditions and bringing it into a world in which it can use modern techniques to deliver the services that are now in demand.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare also mentioned resources. Of the £50 million that we have nationally for 1995-96, I have deliberately held back more than half, so that we can allocate it later in the year when the authorities have had a chance to develop their plans. So further resources will be allocated to the Avon authorities. Of course I cannot promise to meet in full what they estimate to be their needs, but some additional resources will be available. I thought it sensible to wait and see how their plans developed, and then make the allocations. We shall keep the matter under close scrutiny.

We have made it clear that this reorganisation will be economically financed. We do not intend people to take the opportunity to see whether it would be nice to have a new town hall on the back of the reorganisation. Indeed, one local authority already decided that that would be a good wheeze. We shall ensure that authorities do what is necessary. As everyone agrees, the money needs to go to services. There is little point in reorganisation to improve services if the resources are diverted to structural agglomeration.

Mr. Don Foster: I am sure that many people listening will be delighted to hear that. When should bids be made for the additional money?

Mr. Curry: When the new authorities have been constituted—once the elections are over and the new authorities are in place—I would expect to receive the additional bids. That would seem to be the sensible time.

I was intrigued by the speech made by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, and especially by the interplay between him and the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry). The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras said that he would defer to his hon. Friend, to allow him to provide us with much greater detail about where the boundaries of Bristol should lie. But answer came there none.

The hon. Member for Kingswood offered no illumination; we were deeply disappointed. It is clearly a case of one general handing over to another, but neither gave the command—

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. Robert Atkins): One corporal to another, surely?

Mr. Curry: I am being charitable. I am always willing to over-promote Opposition Members.

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras went on about how wicked all these boundary notions were. We are not changing Bristol's boundaries, because the commission did not recommend such a change, but we have said that the Boundary Commission will be invited to look at anomalies in the boundary.

I would, however, ask the House to imagine what the hon. Gentleman would have said if, contrary to the commission's recommendation, we had changed the local boundaries. Imagine the hon. Gentleman's Miltonic indignation—the peals of thunder that would have emanated from him—had we interfered with the commission's recommendations on boundaries. Yet all the hon. Gentleman's indignation today was because we did not interfere. I should be interested to learn from him in what circumstances we ought to interfere and when we should not interfere in the matter of boundaries.

The hon. Gentleman said directly that he believes that there should be a significant widening of Bristol's boundaries. I understood him to say that it should follow consultation with the people of Bristol. I should be interested to know whether he has any plans to consult people outside Bristol, and to find out where they think the boundaries should be. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. It is therefore perfectly reasonable to consult all involved. I have an inkling that the answers will not be unanimous.

Mr. Stern: Such consultation did take place. The result was an overwhelming negative in terms of Bristol. It is clear that that does not matter to the Labour party.

Mr. Curry: The Labour party's technique is clear. There are many Opposition Members who wish to see unitary authorities. They bring their delegations to us to ask for unitary authorities. Many local Labour leaders want to see unitary authorities. They come and ask for them. The Labour-led local authority associations also want to see unitary authorities. They say, "Please can we have more unitary authorities?"

There is a great deal of private canvassing for unitary authorities. The only thing that Labour will not do is to be seen to vote for unitary authorities. Labour wants them, pleads for them and leads delegations to ask for them, but it wants to have it both ways. That is arrant hypocrisy. If Opposition Members believe in something, they should put their money where their mouths are, along with their votes in the House. They do not do that. That is dishonourable, and I hope that their electorates note it. I commend the order to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 202.

Division No. 83] **[8.00 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Alton, David
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(South Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chidgey, David

Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Liam Fox and
Mr. Michael Bates.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela

Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'shawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Byers and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Avon (Structural Change) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 9th February, be approved.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have given notice to the office of the Leader of the House that I intend to raise a point of order. You will be aware that the business this evening is somewhat unusual in that we have three one-and-a-half-hour debates. It is therefore perfectly reasonable for Ministers, in exceptional circumstances or when something urgent needs to be said, to come to the House to make a statement without interrupting the flow of business. I therefore wonder whether you have had any response to the request made earlier by my hon. Friends that the Secretary of State for Health should make a statement to the House about the increase in prescription charges, which has been announced by way of a written answer.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not really a point of order for the Chair. As far as I am aware, the Chair has not been notified of any Government intentions whatever.

Student Finance

8.13 pm

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): I beg to move,

That the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 3044), dated 30th November 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 1st December, be revoked.

I understand that with this it will be convenient to discuss at the same time the following motion:

That the Education (Student Loans) Regulations 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 3045), dated 30th November 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 1st December, be revoked.

The debate takes place against a background of worsening student hardship and an increasingly defective system of student support. Those facts are undeniable, yet the Government are determined to press ahead and make further cuts in the grant next year, increase dependence on a flawed and failing student loans scheme and abolish the allowance paid to mature students for the extra financial needs that they have.

The Government have also clamped down on any increase in participation in higher education. They have frozen the number of places available. That is both economic madness and a social injustice. It represents a blunting of aspirations and a denial of opportunities for qualified students. Even the CBI has called for a 40 per cent. graduation rate for young people. The Government have set their face against that advice and, just as with the economy, they demonstrate that they can organise a short-term boom, but in higher education, of course, that is followed by bust.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): The hon. Gentleman and I have crossed swords on higher education for a great many years, from his previous time as a Member of Parliament. He does not acknowledge the greatest single expansion of opportunity that there has ever been in this country in higher education. The number of people going into higher education has increased from one in eight to one in three. The only time since the war that the numbers and the percentage fell was when he was a member of the previous Labour Government.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman is disregarding the record of the Conservative Government over 15 years. He should recognise that the Conservative party had been in power for almost a decade before it addressed the representations, which had been made right across the sector, of the necessity to increase opportunities for our young people. It then produced a short-term, five-year period of rapid expansion—I freely acknowledge that—not, I might add, bringing us up to the level of many of our competitors in advanced economies, but nevertheless creating a degree of expansion. Then we had the 1993 trauma of budgetary cuts, and instead of an education policy we saw an economic policy that caused a collapse of education provision.

The student loans scheme, in which we have been asked to place our confidence, is totally flawed and failing. It is universally derided. It fails on every criterion by which it should rightly be assessed. First, is the scheme fair or equitable? Loans are not available to part-time students, who must pay all their own fees and maintenance costs and make up 35 per cent. of the people in higher education.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): As the hon. Gentleman has now accurately referred to the participation of part-timers in higher education, will he please explain why earlier he said, inaccurately, that the participation rate was frozen, without respect and without reference to the part-timers whose participation is not frozen?

Mr. Davies: The Government should be careful when taking responsibility for the expansion in the number of part-time students. The Government give precious little in the way of support or opportunity to part-time students; in fact, they have continually set their face against such participation, and—I shall refer to it later—there is one clear instance of a group of students whom the Government appear to be setting out to deter. The student loans system is also flawed in that it does nothing for the vast majority of postgraduates. Loans are concentrated on a minority in post-compulsory education.

Secondly, the scheme requires graduates to repay loans at a time when their earnings are likely to be at their lowest—shortly after they have entered the employment market. Yesterday, at Question Time, the Minister said that the average figure for a monthly repayment at present is £14, but that is because he has included all the people who are paying now for courses that they completed when they could borrow only small amounts and therefore are repaying minimal amounts and bringing the average down. Already for many students the sum is far higher and is bound to increase in the future as Government plans to cut grant and increase the loans develop.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will my hon. Friend find time in his speech to refer to the fact that not only is the student loans scheme inadequate in giving security to students but even when mistakes are made—students in my constituency have waited as much as a term to have any money at all—there does not appear to be an adequate system to deal with the problems?

Mr. Davies: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for being one of the first to bring to the attention of the House the flawed system that the Student Loans Company was operating and for identifying the large number of students before Christmas who were victims of the scheme's failure.

The Minister is quite prepared to see the level of loan repayments increase. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals estimates that by the end of the century students will owe as much as £96 a month. Therefore, we are not talking about trivial amounts. Yesterday, the Minister sought to suggest that at present the figures were low, concealing the full position.

The inescapable fact is that once graduates go above the low repayment threshold they must pay back amounts that bear no relation to their earnings. That is why there is no equity in the system. The latest figures show that even on the present minimal borrowings, more than 20,000 borrowers were in default status and more than 2,000 were subject to legal action.

Only 47 per cent. of students took out loans last year, compared with a Government estimate of 80 per cent. when they designed the scheme. In the first year, the

take-up was only 28 per cent. The figure therefore has been creeping up only marginally. It is clear that a central plank of the Government's student support policy is just not delivering.

The third flaw in the scheme is that it does nothing to widen access to higher education for all social classes. Increased access depends primarily on increasing the number of places available—the very feature that the Government have frozen. It is clear that relative social class participation rates have not changed significantly for many years. The CBI confirmed that last year.

Finally, the loan scheme is grossly inefficient. It does not generate funds for higher education as the Government intended. Last year, only £19.8 million was repaid. That just about covers the running costs of the Student Loans Company. The administration of the scheme, referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), has been appalling. My hon. Friend knows that I will reinforce his argument this evening.

Last year, there was chaos in the processing of loans under a new fast-track application system. Some 35,000 students had still not received their loans by Christmas, of which the company admitted that at least 8,000 cases were its fault. The company was besieged by complaints. It received 11,000 calls each day from anxious students who had been left high and dry. The chairman of the CVCP was moved to write in the strongest terms to the Minister about the deprivation and suffering that that abject failure had caused.

The assessor, a somewhat reclusive figure who is supposed to act as an ombudsman for students, has been paid £34,000 in the past four years, yet he has dealt with only three cases, in two of which he found in favour of the company while the third is still awaiting consideration. One of those was a case brought to my attention of a student who had withdrawn temporarily from a course because he had to undergo two serious operations. Despite being fully informed of the position, the company stepped in and activated a direct debit to withdraw funds from the student's bank account. The assessor found that the company had done nothing wrong. What sort of ombudsman is that?

Meanwhile, the Department for Education has commissioned an investigation into allegations of malpractice and mismanagement at the Student Loans Company. The National Audit Office has also announced its intention to conduct a further investigation. This is a disgrace and it demands a full inquiry. Imagine the uproar if pensioners or the unemployed had been deprived of their livelihoods. Why should students be treated any differently?

The Government claim that student poverty does not exist and that the resources available to students have been maintained in real terms. That simply is not the evidence of the figures or what experience tells us. Students are turning increasingly to part-time work. Some universities are beginning to look for jobs that they can create for students so that students can keep body and soul together. Where students cannot obtain part-time work, they increasingly have to have recourse to the banks and to friends and relatives. Those who are lucky can just about survive. Those who are not so lucky drop out.

Hon. Members have many surveys and the experience of their surgeries to tell them a completely different story from the one given by the Government. The CVCP conducted a survey last autumn which showed a worrying increase in dropout rates of 30 per cent. between 1991-92 and 1992-93 for reasons other than failure on the course. The chief executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England was reported recently as saying:

"the system as a whole was under recruited last year, which indicates a fall in numbers in the late years of courses . . . My guess is that the reasons are financial, with people building up debts, looking around and saying 'I have to do something about this.'"

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Is my hon. Friend aware that in my constituency, with a high percentage of students in one part of it, one can see the enormous pressure on mature students in particular to continue their courses? Will my hon. Friend ask the Minister to comment on the difficulties faced by law students from families without substantial financial backing or professional wherewithal who find it impossible to finish their training because they have no financial assistance in the final year of the law degree to enable them to finish their practical work?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. We have only one and a half hours for the debate and many hon. Members wish to speak, so long interventions of that nature do not help.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for identifying a crucial area which should cause concern to which I hope the Minister will respond.

The problem is destined to get worse. I have a letter from the treasurer of Somerville college, Oxford, which says:

"Dear Parent or Guardian,

The College would like to draw to your attention the finances needed for an undergraduate in Oxford . . . Government assistance, whether in the form of a grant or a loan, no longer provides sufficient funds to support an undergraduate in Oxford."

I believe that Somerville was the college attended by the former Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher. I wonder how her father, Alderman Roberts, would have responded to such a letter.

The brutal facts are that the Government have progressively whittled away the value of the maintenance grant, excluded students from benefit entitlements and taken away the vacation hardship allowance. The total weekly resources available to most students are less than those given to someone on state benefits. To cap it all, students who seek to flee today's appalling increase in prescription charges by applying for free prescriptions on the grounds of low income will find that the student loan is treated as notional income, regardless of whether they have availed themselves of the loan. That effectively means that the vast majority of our students will receive no help at all with those costs. As one of my hon. Friends graphically expressed it earlier this evening, prescription costs are 2,500 per cent. above what they were when the Government first came to power.

Perhaps the most pernicious, short-sighted and indefensible measure that we are debating tonight is the withdrawal of the means-tested older students allowance. It penalises all those who want a second chance at higher education. In a modern economy, people must be given the opportunity and encouragement to undertake learning

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throughout their lives. Abolishing the older student allowance does precisely the reverse. It has no educational justification whatsoever; it is simply a Treasury-led cut.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. As he is presumably not going to speak for too much longer, will he now put some figures on student grants? Will he tell the House what he thinks the right level of student grant should be? As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) pointed out, one in three young people become students at our universities and colleges. What should their grants be, and how would a Labour Government pay for them?

Mr. Davies: As I pointed out this evening, the drop-out rates alone show that present resources are insufficient. Of course I am not prepared to give a figure now, but it is manifestly clear that the Government are serving students ill.

If the Government do not believe that the cut will deter mature students' participation in higher education, perhaps the Minister will tell me how he would respond to a letter that I received recently. It said:

"I have recently been offered a place at University which I was delighted to accept. This follows three years of studying at evening classes to obtain two A-Levels. As I work caring for adults with learning difficulties and have two small children it was not easy. You can imagine how devastated I feel to realise that I cannot, after all my efforts, accept this place due to the removal of the mature students allowance, which was to me worth £1,000 a year".

It continues:

"The ironic thing is that my local college contacted me today to tell me that I had been chosen as one of the nominees for student of the year."

How would the Minister respond to that letter? Would he tell its writer to apply for access funds?

The removal of the mature students allowance is a disgrace and the Minister should be ashamed of commending the order which contains it to the House tonight.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): My hon. Friend mentioned that, for mature students, it is their second chance for an education. Does he accept that it is often not their second chance, but their last chance, for an education, and their last chance of escaping poverty in communities such as ours, where a poll on job vacancies one day last May showed that the average hourly rate was just over £3 a hour?

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am sure that the Minister will have heard his comments and I hope that he responds to the issues this evening.

Student support is failing. Students are in poverty and some get no help at all. We need a comprehensive system of support for lifelong learning, not a shambolic mess of half measures that fails just about everyone who comes near it. The Government should think again. I urge the House to revoke the orders.

8.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Further and Higher Education (Mr. Tim Boswell): Even the best friends of the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) would not regard that performance as a magical speech. The hon. Gentleman missed his vocation as a magician. He sought to distract the House's attention with hair-raising and heart-rending stories of student poverty that had very little reference to the facts.

Sir Harold Walker (Doncaster, Central): I received an anguished telephone call today from one of my constituents who was induced to undertake a three-year course, the first year of which expires this September, when I understand that student will face a cut of £1,000 in grant and, having been encouraged to take the course, will no longer be able to continue it. That is horrendous and disgraceful. Although £1,000 may be marginal for the Minister, it represents disaster for a student.

Mr. Boswell: I am always interested in interventions from the right hon. Gentleman. I shall investigate the case, but the figures that he has given me suggest that it almost certainly involves a non-mandatory award and may suggest some withdrawal of support by local authorities.

The hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton sought to weave a tissue of concern about student poverty. He said that the system was failing, but he did not say a word about the proposals on which he based his principled opposition to the orders. That is perhaps understandable, because the failure rate of Opposition Front Bench spokesmen on higher education is considerable.

In the past, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) suggested that one possible option would be through

"funds from individuals using and directly benefiting from higher education."

He then passed from the scene, but the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton said just after Christmas that he would be prepared to consider a graduate tax. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) expressed interest by saying:

"I am interested in the tax related to income which is progressive and I shall explore that, but we are a long way from taking a decision."

We have heard very little about that tonight, for the simple reason that the Opposition do not wish to say too much about their alternative proposals.

Tonight we are faced with a proposition to overturn regulations that will bring considerable benefits to students and that are essential for their welfare. The regulations validate for forecast inflation the main rates of grant and loan for the coming year and the supplementary maintenance allowances for students with additional needs such as disabled students and students with dependants. They are essential if students are to receive these increases, and they follow yearly increases since 1990-91 that have been consistently above the outturn rate of inflation. We did not hear that from the hon. Gentleman, but it is true.

As a result, the support available to students through the total grant and loan package in the current year is more than 5 per cent. higher in real terms than it was in 1990-91.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The Opposition accept that there has been an increase in the number of young people going on to higher education. Our concern is that people from modest family backgrounds or with modest means have great difficulty in embarking on a university course. How will the Minister's proposals help those people? We already know

that students are having great difficulty. How will the Minister encourage people from poor backgrounds into higher education. Certainly someone from my background would not be able to enter higher education today.

In respect of mature students, I have a letter from the university of Birmingham, which is extremely concerned about the effect of these measures—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already pointed out to the House that long interventions deny those who are waiting the opportunity to speak in the debate. In a short debate of this nature, they are not helpful.

Mr. Boswell: Perhaps I can respond to the hon. Lady by saying that I entirely share her concern for the participation of less-favoured students or students from less-favoured backgrounds. It is a matter of record. The latest student income and expenditure survey, which is carried out independently, shows that the participation of those from relatively disadvantaged groups such as socio-economic class C1 or below is now rising above 50 per cent.

Before being interrupted—I do not propose to give way extensively, because I want to hear the Back-Bench speeches—I was going to refer to the older students' allowance. It is easy for the Opposition to take no notice of financial implications, but funding is always under pressure and we must always weigh our priorities. The withdrawal of the allowance will save £5 million in the coming year, then £20 million and £30 million progressively.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): It is disgraceful.

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman says that it is disgraceful. The allowance is means-tested—indeed, it is doubly means-tested. I suppose that this is a characteristic of Islington man, or whoever populates the Opposition Front Bench, which the hon. Gentleman may not have noticed. Unlike any other Government support, the older student's allowance is means-tested: students must have an income of £12,000 a year to qualify. It is not related to need; it is intended to cushion people experiencing a decline from a relatively more favourable salary.

As for the needs side, there is provision in the access funds, as well as the overall student support package. We do not feel, however, that giving an exceptional allowance to those on the highest incomes can any longer be justified.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Boswell: Almost for the last time.

Mr. Welsh: May I ask a brief question about the mature student's allowance? To qualify for the allowance next year, a student must be in receipt of it this year. What will happen to those who were receiving the allowance but left their studies for a year because of illness or other reasons? Will they still qualify?

Mr. Boswell: Yes, they will. We protect their position, as we protect the position of those currently on courses. I am talking about new students.

The regulations set out new loan arrangements for students studying in London who choose to live away from the parental home, but who—in the view of the local education authority—could conveniently live with their parents while studying. That special loan rate has been set above the parental home rate of loan, so students will still receive a cash increase compared with what they received this year.

I have already mentioned the uprating of student support over the past five years. That real-terms uprating followed a 25 per cent. cash increase in the main rates of student support when loans were introduced in 1990, which was more than adequate to compensate most students for the withdrawal of benefit in the same year. I should remind the House that particularly vulnerable students, such as single parents, have a continuing opportunity to receive benefit; but to restore students' benefits wholesale—housing benefit, for instance—would encourage the dependence on the welfare system that we have properly sought to eliminate.

Mr. Blunkett: Will the Minister answer a simple question? If I cut his salary by 30 per cent. and offered him a bank loan instead, would he consider himself to be better off?

Mr. Boswell: The hon. Gentleman may have overlooked the fact that the total cash package available to students includes the 1990 uplift of 25 per cent. He needs to draw a distinction, as I thought his party was seeking to in other contexts, between those who require social support because they are particularly vulnerable—I share the hon. Gentleman's concern for such groups—and those who are investing in their future through the medium of higher education, and whose future earnings are likely to be substantially greater than the earnings of those who are financing their time at university.

There are extra allowances for those who find it hard to stay at university, including disabled students, students with dependants and students who study for longer than the normal academic year. I take a particular personal interest in the fact that the access funds for higher education have been substantially increased for the third successive year, by a further £1 million to £22 million.

Dr. Hampson: I have always supported the loans scheme, but we must accept that the vice-chancellors in particular argue that there are problems with the current position. One of the central issues has been the invariable repayment system—the mortgage-type system. Is my hon. Friend investigating that? Even if we keep the present structure, could it be related to income?

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention, because it enables me to pick up a point that was made earlier. We continue to keep repayments in the existing structure under review; if the figures escalate from the £14 that I mentioned to the House yesterday, we shall be prepared to consider whether and when it would be appropriate to vary the repayment periods.

As for moving to a different structure, my hon. Friend will know that we are carrying out a review of higher education. All matters can be considered, but we have no immediate plans to act because we believe that the scheme is well conceived and is broadly meeting its objectives.

The hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton was not ready to concede that there are more students in higher education than ever before. Nearly one in three of our young people now enter higher education, compared with one in eight when the last Labour Government were in

[Mr. Boswell]

office. Student numbers will increase by some 22,000 in the year to come, and will continue at a record level in the planning period through to 1997-98.

Our policies have helped to ensure, and will continue to ensure, that higher education is no longer merely the privilege of the wealthy; I share the concern of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) about that. That expansion would not have occurred if we not been prepared to grasp the nettle, in the teeth of opposition from the Labour party, and find a means of widening opportunities.

Mr. Tracey: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Boswell: For the last time.

Mr. Tracey: Will my hon. Friend say a word or two about what he is doing to shake up the Student Loans Company? Although in my experience students are rather in favour of loans—they accept that they will have very good opportunities—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That point does not arise from the regulations.

Mr. Boswell: I may deal with my hon. Friend's point in a moment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the Minister will not do so; I have already ruled that the point does not arise from the regulations.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful for your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I need to make the point—because the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton did not—that total available public funding for English universities and colleges will increase by some 3 per cent. between the current year and next year, to a record £4.5 billion. That is the system that the hon. Gentleman considers to be failing, or to be on its last legs. Student support through grants and loans will amount to a further £1.7 billion, producing an overall public total of £6.2 billion. In a difficult public expenditure climate, that is a remarkably good show: it will ensure that the participation rate of young and older people is maintained within the target, which is already over 30 per cent.

Respecting the point that you made about the orders, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall now turn to the student loans to which one of them relates. I shall deal with both their quantity and the delivery of the system. The Student Loans Company certainly experienced difficulties last term; I acknowledge immediately that those difficulties caused real problems for students, and were not acceptable. They arose because of a new application process that was intended to speed up payments for repeat borrowers. The process did not work as well as it should have; nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that some 336,000 loans were paid by the company this year, compared with 246,000 last year. The system is not failing but extending itself, and it is increasingly accepted by students.

The company has set up an urgent examination of the administrative difficulties, and—together with, at my suggestion, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and the National Union of Students—is considering what action is necessary to avoid any recurrence. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have taken a close interest: we have asked for a full report from the board, and we are anxious for proper decisions to be taken to ensure that the problems do not occur again.

I think, however, that it is wrong for the Opposition to confuse their uneasiness and equivocation about the case for changes to the loan system with the controversy that they tend to drag in—the oldest possible red herring—about the administration or, in a sense, the propriety of conduct of the Student Loans Company. There have been problems this year, which I have acknowledged, but we continue to believe that the system is fundamentally well designed.

Indeed, the point made by the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton about the relatively low load on the assessor makes the point that the same demand, concern and failure did not exist in earlier years. The assessor will have to consider the points that have been made to him, although I hope again that the House will recognise that the first port of call for complaint is the company. That is as it should be.

We hear calls for some more radical changes. It is easy, for example, to call for an income contingent repayment scheme. The existing scheme is already income contingent. Graduates need pay nothing until they are earning nearly £14,600 per annum. Figures from the incomes data service were quoted in the *Financial Times* today. They showed that the average graduate starting salary was £13,800 per annum, which is below that other figure. It is therefore not surprising that, as of 1 February, 45 per cent. of borrowers have taken advantage of the concession. They have deferred repayment of their loans. That is exactly as intended.

The hon. Member for Brightside confused formal defaults with those of people who are not yet in that position. The figures are lower than he anticipated. The number of people who are not paying is clearly a small proportion of the total number of loans extended.

It is easy to call for cure-all loans through a tax on the national insurance system. They would be complicated to administer and would have to be paid for. The hon. Member for Brightside is beginning to trail the idea of slinging graduate taxes around the necks of students indefinitely. On graduation, many of them will take out mortgages for house purchase at substantially higher rates than the projected or likely rates of student loans.

Having said that, we are far from complacent about higher education. We care too much about it for that and it is too important to this country for that. Last autumn, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education announced a wide-ranging review in consultation with all the people who have an interest. We are considering the purpose of higher education and its future size and shape. In the light of views submitted to us on those fundamental issues, we shall move on to review funding and student support arrangements to ensure that they continue to be appropriate at the turn of the century and beyond.

The guiding principle behind student loans—that students should make some financial contribution to the cost of their attendance in higher education—is finding increasing favour with the people involved. They include the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, the Royal Society, the Borrie Commission on Social Justice,

the National Commission on Education, and even, fleetingly, the Labour party. The number of students applying for loans continues to rise. The hon. Member for Brightside seemed to regard the increase from 28 per cent. to 47 per cent. as a marginal increase. I call it not far short of a doubling. The signs for this coming year are that participation will reach close to 60 per cent. The loans are a major part of the scene and students generally accept the principle of loans and their part in investing in their future.

The system offers a fair deal for parents, for taxpayers and, because repayment terms are equitable, for students. I warmly commend the regulations to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In the 50 minutes available for the rest of the debate, no fewer than eight hon. Members hope to catch my eye. I hope that hon. Members who are fortunate to be called early will bear that in mind.

8.53 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): I regret that we are having this debate and that it is necessary. I accept your stricture, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the amount of time available. I shall address my remarks to the mandatory awards regulations.

As I represent a constituency that contains two universities and six colleges of further and higher education, I am only too well aware of the effects of student loans. I served on the Committee that considered student loans. Many of the things that my colleagues and I argued against in relation to those regulations have come to pass.

A constant stream of students complain to me about one aspect or another. They complain that they have great difficulty in pursuing their studies, which we never had to face. I suspect that the Minister, when he was a student at New college, Oxford, never had to contribute towards his education. I see no difference between then and now. We are of a different generation. The Government expect today's students to make a financial contribution when few of our generation faced that necessity. We were able to study at a time and within an environment that were much more favourable than today's. Hon. Members should remember that when they consider this matter.

The shameful decision to abolish the older students' allowance is perhaps the unkindest cut of all. It hits students who have missed out on higher education the first time around and who are hoping to get a second bite at the cherry. They may have missed out through no fault of their own. Many will now have the door slammed in their face again. The decision is particularly perverse because the number of mature students receiving the allowance has increased dramatically in the past five years.

Figures supplied to me by Ministers in the Scottish Office, Northern Ireland Office and the Department for Education show that dramatic increase. There are some 7,200 such students in Scotland, 500 in Northern Ireland, 32,500 in England and Wales. In Scotland, the figure has increased by 300 per cent.; in England and Wales, it has increased by 250 per cent. in the past five years. Clearly, that shows that demand exists for the allowance, contrary to what the Minister said. He says that students claim for it, but that it is not necessary. Of course it is necessary. It is a means of entering higher education for people who have never had the opportunity to do so.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Watson: I am sorry, but I cannot give way because of the restriction on time.

The total cost of the mature students' allowance, aside from the administrative costs, which Ministers have told me they cannot calculate, is £34 million to £35 million a year. That will be the saving when it is abolished. We should put that in the context of the total education budget. The sum barely ripples the water. Clearly, the reason for doing away with the older student's allowance is to save money.

All the evidence we can assemble shows that mature students in higher education have greater financial difficulty and suffer much heavier debt than their younger counterparts. We have recognised for some time that students over the age of 26, particularly those coming from employment, have difficulty in making the transition from a wage to a student income. In many cases, mature students are giving up a job in the hope of ultimately bettering themselves and their employment opportunities through achieving a degree.

Since 1989, the number of mature students has increased. They now form 17 per cent. of students in higher education. I can hazard only a guess as to what that figure will be five years from now. I suspect that it will dramatically decrease. The abolition of the older student's allowance is a regressive step that can be only a disincentive to people hoping to enter higher education.

An even greater injustice is being done to people hoping to enter education this year through the older students' allowance. They applied in good faith before December last year and in the belief that they would receive the allowance. The Government have turned around to them and said, "We gave you that guarantee, but we changed the rules of the game after the game was in progress." The applications are in and a number of potential students are caught in that trap. Whatever the merits, and I cannot see any, of the proposal, it is entirely unjust that people who applied in good faith will not receive the allowance.

Another aspect of concern involves home students aged over 50. Such students are not even eligible for a student loan. Anyone entering higher education at the age of 50 will be especially badly affected. I hope that, if he does reply, the Minister will give some consideration to the people caught in that trap.

I have tried to get some rationale for the cut—I got none from the Minister in his speech. The proposal is clearly an attempt to save money, albeit a relatively small amount. I managed to find two answers that he gave in December last year to questions on the savings that would arise. In one, he said that this was an additional allowance which was not targeted at any specific maintenance requirement that a student might have. As I have tried to demonstrate, that is not true. First, the older student's allowance is means-tested; and, secondly, older students tend to have extra commitments such as families and mortgages, which younger students do not have. The National Union of Students survey on value for money

[Mr. Watson]

found that the total average debt for students aged over 26 was £6,105. That compares with an average total debt of about £2,500 for those in the 17 to 21 age bracket.

I throw back at the Minister the fact that, when we started studying, our generation did not leave university with a debt around our necks and the burden of having to pay that off. The main problem for us was finding a job. Of course, that problem still exists, but hanging over the heads of graduates now is the fact that if they get a job that earns them more than £14,000 a year—not a massive salary these days—they have to start paying back the debt. We must appreciate that students over the age of 26 have additional burdens over and above the loans which, if they want to go into higher education, they will be forced to take.

The Minister also said in that parliamentary answer that, because of the continuing pressures on public spending, extra support could not be justified. He is saying that £35 million throughout the United Kingdom cannot be justified. The hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) may grin and think this is funny, but I wonder how many of his constituents will ask him how he voted when the mandatory regulations were discussed on 22 February. I hope that he will be able to say to them, "Yes, I voted to abolish them because I think that that is in your best interests."

The regulations cannot possibly be in his constituents' best interests. The implications are clearly more important for the public sector borrowing requirement than for the future of education, yet they involve minimal savings.

Dr. Spink *rose—*

Mr. Watson: I cannot give way because I do not have time. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister has already spoken in rather scathing terms about what he has described as hard luck stories about students who will be denied a place in higher education. He may not thank me for doing this, but I intend to refer to the case of one of my constituents, which made my blood boil when it came to my attention.

The constituent is called Jane Pepper and she lives in the Langside area of my constituency. She is 29 years old and has worked in the civil service—the Department of Social Security—since 1986. She decided that she wanted to broaden her job prospects and opportunities, so this year she enrolled at the Glasgow college of food technology to do an access course. That course has no other purpose than to help people gain access to university. It has no value on its own. It does not lead on to another degree.

While Jane Pepper is doing that course, she is receiving assistance through maintenance, course expenses and travelling expenses of about £3,000. When she applied for a university place—she has been offered places at three universities for the academic year starting October—under the old student's allowance she was entitled to about the same amount—just over £3,000. It was on that basis that she applied for a university place.

As I said, the rules have been changed after the game has started. I want to refer to something, although it may not be within the Minister's direct responsibility. The further and higher education charter for Scotland, which was issued in 1993, states that, before applying, a person would want to assess the costs of embarking on a course and how much financial support he or she might get.

The Government trumpet their citizens charters. They tell us that it is all part of open government and enabling people to question the way that the Government govern. Jane Pepper asked those questions, was given answers, applied for a course, was accepted and now has been told, "We are scrubbing what we said; forget it and go back to square one." She cannot go back to square one because she has given up her job. She is left in no-man's land, where she will be considerably worse off. She believes that, over a three or four-year course, she will be about £4,000 a year worse off. I challenge the Minister to tell me how she is supposed to make that up other than through a loan, which will be an albatross around her neck when she finishes her course.

I want to conclude my speech with a quote from Jane Pepper's response to the position in which she now finds herself. It is quite instructive and should be quoted in the House. She said:

"I am now faced with the prospect of a grant of £1975.00 per academic year which I simply cannot manage on financially. I am very angry and bitter, and feel betrayed by a government whom I have worked hard for"—

there is an irony there—

"for many years. If I had known this before I left my post in the civil service, obviously it would have had a bearing on my decision to leave my job. It seems likely that if these grant cuts are imposed I will be unable to pursue my degree . . . What the Government will then be faced with is yet another individual claiming social security"—

that is another irony—

"adding to the ever lengthening list of government unemployment statistics. Consequently, the government, by their actions, are forcing individuals in my situation to become unemployed which seems ironic."

That is the appalling position in which Jane Pepper and, I suspect, thousands of other people throughout the country find themselves, with the rules of the game being changed after they began to play it. It is unfair and unjust and the Government must reverse their decision.

I end with what is, perhaps, a sting in the tail for my own Front-Bench colleagues. The Labour party is putting up a spirited campaign on the regulations. I hope that my hon. Friends the Members for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) and for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) will give a commitment that a future Labour Government will reinstate the money that is being lost. Mature students are entitled to it. They missed the boat first time around and they must be given a second chance. If the allowance is not reinstated, they may be denied that opportunity. This Government are at fault; it must be for a Labour Government to put matters right.

9.5 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): It is ironic that, yet again, we are seeing the familiar shape of debate, where Labour Back Benchers are demanding more public expenditure and the Labour Front Bench is desperately ducking, diving and weaving to avoid giving any commitment. Labour Members talk about £35 million here and £35 million there as though that is the sort of money that we put in a charity box. The money we put in

a charity box adds up. Every single Labour Back Bencher is trying to persuade those on the Front Bench to commit themselves to further public expenditure.

As my hon. Friend the Minister said, the various options put forward by the Labour Front-Bench team are contradictory, to say the least. There was the suggestion of a graduate tax. What happens to the poor graduate? Is it every high earner who will pay graduate tax? For how long will a graduate pay tax? [HON. MEMBERS: "Life."] Yes, for life. Will it be on top of the normal tax that they will be paying? The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) said, "That is a good idea, let's investigate it". Talk about putting off decisions—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am waiting for the hon. Lady to refer to the regulations that we are supposed to be debating. So far, she has not done so.

Mrs. Lait: I shall come to the regulations immediately, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was so provoked that I felt that I had to point out that a great deal of money is involved in the orders.

Those of us who remember our student days and how we were supported have a somewhat rosy view. I was one who benefited from the Robbins expansion, when the new technological universities were established—one of which was in Glasgow. At that time, a number of hon. Members were living on student grants. Indeed, many of us were living on very little. It was almost part of the flavour of being a student. Today's students are pleading poverty when, in fact, they are much better supported than we were in the 1960s. I remember that I lived on £2 a week. If that were uprated in line with inflation, the equivalent now would be £25 a week. There is not a great deal to choose between what I lived on as a student and what students have to live on today. I managed it, I am here and so will they be.

Students are broadly better off with the student loans system than they were. I for one would regard it as a total income package, not as an option for a grant or a loan. One takes the whole package and lives within that package.

One need not pay back the loan until one has an income of more than £14,500, which is not what one would expect on leaving university, and the Student Loans Company's terms are that one pays interest at the rate of inflation. If I, or any other hon. Member, were offered interest rates at the rate of inflation, we would all jump at the offer. That system is especially generous.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): How big an overdraft did the hon. Lady have when she came out of university?

Mrs. Lait: I had no overdraft, but my husband owed an overdraft of £150 to the Royal Bank of Scotland, which he was paying back then at genuine rates of interest, which were considerable.

Mr. Steinberg: The hon. Lady had no overdraft.

Mrs. Lait: There are plenty who did, and they have managed very well on it. That is part of growing up, part of learning to manage money, and it does no one any harm.

Dr. Spink: If a student is not prepared to invest in his own future, why should the pensioner living in my constituency, who pays a few pounds a week tax on her pension, be prepared to invest in the student's future?

Mrs. Lait: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend, and I am grateful to him for mentioning that.

There is no evidence that students are being deterred by the loans system. There may be an element of becoming used to the loans system, but there is no evidence of deterrence. An increasing number of students from social groups C1, C2, D and E are entering the system, which can only benefit our country in the long run.

I should be grateful if the Minister would tackle an argument concerning discretionary grants. Those grants from local education authorities, especially for the performing arts, have decreased in the past five years. The higher education awards are now about 50 per cent. of those that were made in 1991. The director of the London Contemporary Dance school is a constituent of mine, and he brought that problem to my attention. I should be grateful if the Minister would consider some way whereby the discretionary element could be amended.

One of the great successes of the past 15 years has been the enormous expansion in cultural activity, which is profitable and valuable to our society. Job opportunities therefore exist for an increasing number of people involved in the performing arts. It would appear sensible for our grant and loans system to adapt to that demand in the marketplace and to allow people who wish to take up awards in places such as the London Contemporary Dance school to have access to grants on the same basis as, for example, those who go to conservatoires.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I wish to reinforce what my hon. Friend says. Under paragraph 10(1)(e)(ii) of the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1994, the Secretary of State has the power to designate courses. If my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) could include music when he was Prime Minister, should we not recognise both the dramatic arts and dance, as my hon. Friend says, and would it not be about time to give at least a limited number of such places, rather than giving so many places at universities, where people can do drama in their spare time rather than doing it properly?

Mrs. Lait: My hon. Friend reinforces my argument, and I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister would peruse the report that I understand my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received from the Arts Council for England, to reach some decision to help those schools which are providing high-class education in the performing arts, for which there is growing demand.

9.12 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): The Minister was obviously not impressed by the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies), but the Minister can at least claim credit for managing to produce a gasp of amazement from his audience during his speech. He certainly amazed many of us when he told us that we were here debating opposition—to paraphrase his words—to measures that will be of great benefit to students.

In reality, we are discussing two orders that continue the breaking of a clear promise given by Conservative Governments. All hon. Members present know and recall

[Mr. Don Foster]

that the White Paper that led to the setting up of the student loans system said clearly that the maximum grant would be maintained at the 1990-91 level. In 1990, that was reaffirmed by the Education Minister of the day, Baroness Blatch.

The orders that we are debating are obviously moving in the direction that the Government announced last year, whereby they are breaking that promise, because the level of grants and loans will be broadly balanced by 1996, which means a decrease in grant of 27 per cent. and an increase in loan of 120 per cent.

It is important that the impact of these measures is considered in the context of what is happening in higher education now. The Minister is right to talk about an increase in student numbers in higher education. The former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) used to boast that the increase in the number of students was the equivalent of 12 new universities. However, both the right hon. Gentleman and the Minister have failed to admit that they have not provided the resources that would have been necessary for the creation of 12 new universities.

I am sure that the Minister will not disagree with the figures that show that, in the past four years, public funding has decreased by 26 per cent. per student and, as the Minister said, student numbers have increased by 44 per cent. It is no wonder that there is a worsening of the staff-student ratio in higher education, that students are facing more and more problems when they try to find books in libraries, that there are overcrowded lecture theatres and that there is a growing backlog of repairs and maintenance for university and higher education buildings.

While universities have had to cope with that, they have also had to cope with the problems created by the equivalent of these orders last year. They will now have to face the problems that will be created this year. More and more students will face increasing hardship and difficulty as they are unable to find the means to support themselves adequately.

The Minister constantly fails to acknowledge that, even if we add together the maximum amount of grant and the maximum amount of loan possible under these orders, the combined amount still means that the vast majority of students will have an income that is less than they would have acquired had they been registered as unemployed. They are about £10 a week worse off.

Another way of putting it is that, under these orders, students who take out the maximum grant and get the maximum loan will have about £50 to £20 left as disposable income to pay for food, heating, travel, books and sometimes even the council tax. It is no wonder that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals—it is fairly independent in these matters—has estimated that the average annual shortfall of a student's income is well over £1,000.

The growing problem of student poverty is set to rise as a result of these orders, which fail to recognise some of the greater than inflationary increases that students will have to face. That includes significantly rising accommodation costs, the increased cost of domestic fuel because of—

Dr. Spink: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: I am happy to give way if the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) wants to make a serious point so that students can learn whether he supports measures that, in many cases, will leave them in poverty. The hon. Gentleman may care to say whether he believes that the orders should be altered to put increased money into the pockets of the vast majority of students who have learnt today that they face significantly increased costs for their prescriptions—well above the rate of inflation—because of the disgraceful way in which the Government have introduced prescription increases.

The orders and the figures contained within them continue to break the Government's promise. They will continue to ensure that many students will have considerable difficulties. All the surveys that have been undertaken now show that a growing percentage of students are contemplating having to give up their university course because of financial hardship. Last weekend, I spoke to students at St. Andrews, where a survey showed that 15 per cent. are contemplating giving up. A National Westminster bank survey showed that 21 per cent. of students are considering dropping out.

As has been said by many other hon. Members, the 5,400 full-time students over the age of 50 will be badly hit yet again. Last year, in a similar debate, I said that those people could not apply for loans and therefore suffered considerable reductions in their income. That is the case again. Last year, the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) intervened on my speech and berated me. She said that what I was saying was putting off older students because I had failed to mention the older students' allowance. I shall certainly have to fail to mention it this year because, of course, the Government have abolished it. I wonder what the hon. Member for Lancaster feels about that.

Hon. Members have touched on another problem that is important to mention again. More and more students, because of hardship, are having to take jobs during term-time as well as during vacations—I have no real objection to that. That is obviously undermining the quality of their work and affecting the quality of our higher education. Many surveys demonstrate that only too clearly.

I also agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies) that it is a great pity that the regulations do not extend provision to part-time students. I also agree with his noble Friend Lord Morris of Castle Morris in another place, who said in a debate on a similar issue last month:

"The present system of financial support for students is chaotic, inequitable and inefficient."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 30 January 1995; Vol. 560, c. 1313.]

Unfortunately, it was a great pity that an opportunity to provide assistance for students by supporting a Liberal Democrat initiative to introduce the possibility of students receiving benefits during the long vacation in that debate

was not supported by Labour peers. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that we see articles such as that in *The Times Educational Supplement.*

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster) *rose—*

Mr. Foster: As I referred to her, I am happy to give way to the hon. Lady.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Would the hon. Gentleman care to say how much the various things that he and his colleagues suggest would cost?

Mr. Foster *rose—*

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Hang on a minute. He may have forgotten that, when he had the great honour of going to the Royal Lancaster grammar school, he was described as being muddle-headed and unable clearly to formulate his ideas. It seems that he has not improved as his tutors thought he could.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for reminding me of that report. Indeed, I shared it with the hon. Lady at the time. Nevertheless, she is right to question how much such initiatives would cost. The Minister has said how much the reinstatement of the older students allowance would cost. That stands on the record and my party is committed to that reinstatement. My party has made an attempt to estimate the cost of the introduction of benefit support during the long vacation—about £250 million if there was a maximum take-up.

The hon. Member for Lancaster is, however, unaware that her Government are unable to provide such a figure. When the Government removed the entitlement of young people to income support and housing benefit and were then asked how much they had saved, they were unable to tell us. Nor, subsequently, have they been able to say how much reinstatement would cost. So I hope that the hon. Lady will not be critical of my party's attempts at least to come up with some figure.

Mrs. Lait: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Foster: No, because many hon. Members want to speak.

It is important that we place on record the acknowledgement of the Minister that there have been problems with the Student Loans Company. The way in which the company has been administering student loans has certainly not been right. Many students have got into considerable difficulty because of that failure.

Mr. Boswell: Just for clarification, does the hon. Gentleman accept that I said that I was not satisfied with the administration of the student loans scheme in respect of the autumn term? That remains my view and our position.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the Minister for making that clear. Of course he is well aware that, by December, 35,000 students had not received their grant cheques, which caused appalling difficulties. It is not surprising that the Minister acknowledges that that is that totally unacceptable.

It is crucial that we place firmly and clearly on the record that the amount of money available to students while studying is currently inadequate. It is hardly surprising that there is increasing hardship among our student population, that they are therefore taking on jobs in term-time, which does not help their degrees one iota and that an increasing number are dropping out or considering it. Those and other problems in higher education will not be solved by the sort of measures being introduced by the Government tonight. Therefore, I hope that hon. Members will vote against the orders.

9.24 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I benefited from a full grant while at university and I do not relish supporting the introduction of loans, but I can genuinely see no alternative.

There has been a dramatic increase in participation rates in higher education, which has been grudgingly acknowledged by the Labour party. The rates have risen to one in eight from one in three, and funding that increase is an enormous challenge for any Government. Maintaining the old grant system would have represented a massive call on the taxpayer and it was right that the Government should seek to strike a fair balance between the interests of taxpayers and the beneficiaries of the education.

If there were any evidence that students were being deterred from entering higher education, I would be worried. But the evidence is not there. In the two years before the introduction of the loans system, the number of students entering our institutions of higher education rose by 10 per cent. per annum. In the two years immediately after the introduction of the loans system, the rate of increase was 20 per cent. per annum—hardly evidence of the scheme being a disincentive.

If there were evidence that the orders had any disadvantageous effect on the lower socio-economic groups and their participation in higher education, I would be concerned. The House would do well to remember that in Germany, where the loan component of grants is higher than here, the proportion of students from lower socio-economic groups is three times higher than in the United Kingdom. What is more, contrary to what we heard from the Labour party's Front-Bench team, the position is improving. More students from less well-off families are entering higher education in this country.

Among first-year students in 1992-93, the proportion of students from A and B social grades fell from about 55 per cent. to 49 per cent., with a similar increase in the proportion of students from C1, C2, D and E backgrounds. That good news contradicts the bad news that we heard from the Labour Front Bench.

Our record internationally is good. The report of the Education Information Network of the European Community, known as Eurydice, published 18 months ago, said that there was a trend towards extending the system of loans in a number of member states. It said:

"the percentage of students assisted in Luxembourg, the 'new' German Länder (former East Germany) and the United Kingdom is high (between 76 and 90 per cent.). The proportions of students receiving support in Belgium . . . Spain, France, the 'old Länder' of the Federal Republic of Germany and Ireland are smaller (between 18 and 34 per cent.). The proportions of financially assisted students are smallest in Greece, Italy and Portugal (between 2.5 and 10-15 per cent.)."

I would have more sympathy with the Labour party if the loans imposed on students had punitive rates of interest or terms of repayment, but they are the most generous loans that I have heard of in the financial system.

[Mr. Peter Luff]

We cannot underestimate the rate of expansion of the higher education system. In 1993-94, there were 100,000 extra students—the equivalent of 12 new universities. It is only fair to ask students to join the taxpayer in funding that system as they will reap most benefit from it. The student will be the highest gainer.

I would have more respect for Labour Members' opposition to the order if they had a realistic alternative, but they do not. They notably ducked the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) about how much money they would dedicate to their grand, brave new vision of student support. They are muddled on the possibility of a graduate tax on students.

According to *The Times Higher Education Supplement* of 6 January, the office of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) recently confirmed that a tax to be imposed on students throughout their working lives was being considered. But the hon. Member for Oldham, Central and Royton (Mr. Davies)

"suggested this was a 'narrow and crude concept' which was unlikely to carry much support within the party."

The Times Higher Education Supplement stated that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker)

"described Mr. Blunkett's remarks on graduate tax as 'a careless use of language. It was pure ignorance. It was quite clear he said it without thinking the whole thing through'".

I say, amen to that.

The chairman of Conservative Students, Andrew Reid, said in a letter in the same edition of *The Times Higher Education Supplement*:

"What is typical, though, of the Labour party is that its first instinct is to tax the successful rather than to contemplate less punitive forms of financing our students at university."

That is what the measures represent.

We have heard a lot about vacation jobs and students taking jobs in term time. I wonder what Labour's plans for a minimum wage would do for the availability of work for students, during vacations or at any other time.

I would like to raise a question with the Minister concerning section 10(e)(ii) of the mandatory awards order which gives the Secretary of State the power to designate new courses for which students will be eligible for mandatory grants. It provides statutory footing to address the problem of discretionary grants for students of dance and drama which obviously concerns many hon. Members in the House.

Section 10 lists a bewildering array of subjects and courses which attract mandatory awards. Many of those subjects will benefit the country through the graduates who practice them. But dance and drama are excluded; they are left to the whim of local education authorities.

Students of music receive mandatory awards, but students of dance and drama do not. A sociologist will receive a grant, but a dancer will not; a medieval historian will receive a grant, but an actor will not. Why is that so? The arts, including dance and drama, provide jobs and tourism revenue—which is more than can be said for many of the academic disciplines which attract automatic mandatory grants.

Our dance and drama schools are among the finest—if they are not the finest—in the world, but student applications to them are drying up at an alarming rate because of the lack of eligibility for mandatory awards. The order gives the Secretary of State the power to correct that state of affairs. It would be economic and cultural folly to let those disciplines die. I am encouraged by the new priority that Ministers seem to be attaching to that area and I hope that they will use the power conferred by the order to correct the position in time for the start of the new academic year.

9.30 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): The Education (Student Loans) Regulations 1994 constitutes a further attack on students. The student grant has been reduced by 8 per cent. on top of the 10 per cent. reduction last year. As we have already heard, the mature student allowance will be phased out from 1995-96, which means that those students who are 29 years of age at the beginning of their courses will lose about £1,000 in grant. Those students tend to have families to support and other financial commitments. Tonight's order can have only one result: less people will enter higher education in the future.

Student loans are the most unfair way of funding students. The system is morally wrong. Those students who have no real need of a loan can get one at very low rates of interest, but those who need financial help desperately and who have already accumulated large debts often find themselves in even more debt. The Government have destroyed the grants system which, although not perfect, was much fairer than the present system. They deliberately reduced the level of grants and then introduced student loans.

The Government's record in the area of student financial support is absolutely deplorable. Since 1979 they have systematically eroded student support. The level of student support has never been generous, but at least before 1979 students could enter higher education without the threat of amassing huge debts and without constant financial worries. Students also had welfare benefits to fall back on, but the Government have destroyed that position and they continue to erode it further in the orders that are before us tonight.

Through a series of measures, the Government have reduced students in the main to living below the poverty level. Student grants were systematically reduced in value by more than 30 per cent. and income support, unemployment benefit and housing benefit were withdrawn. In 1990-91 loans were introduced to substitute the amount of money lost by students through the reduction in grants.

The scheme was so bad—I was serving on the Committee which examined student loans at the time—that the major banks refused to have anything to do with it; they turned it down. As student grants have been reduced, student loans have increased and that trend continues in these orders. The huge reduction in the grant of 10 per cent. in 1994 and more than 8 per cent. this year is an absolute outrage. The full grant is virtually the same as it was 10 years ago and, therefore, in real terms it is worth much less.

It is no wonder that students have acquired large overdrafts with their banks and are also in debt to the Student Loans Company. Before the general election in 1992, the Education Select Committee investigated student hardship. As far as I was concerned, it was quite clear from the evidence that we received that students

were finding it increasingly difficult to exist without getting into considerable debt. However, as that evidence was said to be anecdotal, it was ignored by Conservative Committee members. Consequently, the report fizzled out as the general election approached.

But it was clear to those who were prepared to listen to the representations from students, student bodies and university staff—from lecturers to vice-chancellors—that tremendous hardship prevailed among many students. It was also clear that the accumulation of considerable debt was escalating, and that huge numbers of students were unable to meet the costs of accommodation, food, books, travel and so on out of the financial support which they were receiving. They just did not have enough money to meet their basic needs.

We discovered that students were not only working in their holidays, if they could find work—I approve of that—but were having to work during term time to exist, and that is frankly scandalous. Under the orders, a student under 50 will receive a grant of £2,040 and a loan of £1,150, for a total of £3,190. That will provide a weekly income of £61.35. The weekly income of a person under 25 on benefit includes income support of £36.15 and housing benefit of £35, making a total of £71.15 per week. A young person under 25 is £9.80 better off on the dole than in higher education, while a student over 25 is £19.35 worse off than being on the dole.

Huge numbers of students are living below poverty levels. While there is no doubt that many students manage very well because of their parents' contributions, there are many students who have substantial debts and who experience real hardship, particularly older students who will be devastated by the orders. A system which places thousands of young people in severe debt and hardship is fundamentally wrong, and is a deterrent to poorer would-be students.

The Student Loans Company is dreadfully inefficient, and that also has a bearing on student hardship. Students get further into debt with their banks as they wait for their loans to be processed. The Minister recently told me in a letter that the present system of student loans eased the burden on the taxpayer. Perhaps he could explain how that works when, in 1993-94, the Government were owed £752 million in unpaid loans and had in fact received only £20 million in repayments. In Committee, I remember clearly that the then Minister told us that the scheme would not break even until after the year 2000. At this rate of non-payment, the scheme will never break even. So much for easing the burden on the taxpayer.

The Minister told me recently that the student loans system had reduced in real terms the contribution expected from parents. That may be all well and good in theory, but I assure him from personal experience that it works in the opposite direction. If more students are underfunded and accumulate more debt, more will depend on parental help.

The Minister claimed that students will have a good deal in 1995-96 because their total support will rise by 2.5 per cent. That is a joke. Their grant will go down, their loan will go up and their debts will increase. Is that good news for students? I do not think so. The whole system is morally wrong. It is unfair and, apparently, unworkable. Student support needs to be totally re-examined. Like everything else that the Government have done, privilege and wealth will determine opportunity, and not ability.

9.37 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I shall be brief because of the time constraints, and not because I do not have a great deal to say on a subject about which I feel extremely strongly.

As a product of the Scottish educational system, I benefited from—and strongly believe in—the democratic principles which encourage every child to develop as fully as his abilities will allow in an integrated system from primary to higher education, irrespective of income or social background. The Government seem intent on reversing a principle that has been entrenched in the Scottish democratic intellect and that has served my country well over the generations and centuries.

The ability and encouragement of all to benefit from the education system has been a gift to the Scottish people, and the results have been a gift to the wider world. I am afraid that the Government are forgetting those lessons. I fundamentally disagree with the Government's educational finance policy which will eventually and effectively cut vast swathes of the population off from higher education.

The November Budget not only made clear that the 30 per cent. cut was continuing, but proposed the abolition of the allowance paid to students over 26 years old from next year. I was a mature university student, and I am frankly disgusted that the present generation will not be allowed the benefits and the assistance which helped me to undertake a university degree course. Mature students clearly have greater financial burdens and commitments and they carry heavier debts than their younger counterparts. They now constitute 17 per cent. of students in higher education. So the abolition of the mature student's allowance is regressive, shortsighted and unfair to the many students who are committed to courses that began when it was available.

I have heard no rationale for this move, apart from some apparent cash savings. I have certainly heard no educational reasons for it. The Government have offered no rationale for the abolition of the mature student's allowance, so I hope to hear one from the Minister tonight.

For students more generally, the cost of the removal of benefit entitlement and the freezing of maintenance grants has been about £1,070 in lost benefits and about £810 from the freezing of the grant. That £1,880 loss compares with the maximum loan entitlement of £1,120, and it assumes that students do not find paid work during the summer.

Surveys at Aberdeen and Edinburgh universities have shown the practical effect of the Government's policy. Student grant no longer covers the average yearly rent; even with a loan, students have to look elsewhere for money. According to the surveys, students work an average 12 hours a week in term time. That can only put pressure on their academic work and their health. The Edinburgh results show many students paying rents over the summer to secure accommodation for term time.

Average rents have risen by 41 per cent. in four years—the Government have certainly not covered that increase—and 76 per cent. of all students work all or part of the summer, assuming that they can find work. Most students are therefore unable to cover their debts.

[Mr. Andrew Welsh]

Government policy is placing in doubt the whole principle of equal access to higher education for all, regardless of background. My party rejects the Government's position. We believe that education is a right, not a privilege, and that everyone should have proper access to higher education, regardless of financial status.

The SNP is making a commitment to abolishing loans and giving all students a decent grant, index-linked for inflation and independent of parental income. That fits well with Scottish educational tradition. Nothing less will ever be acceptable—a lesson that I wish the Government had learnt.

9.41 pm

Mr. Boswell: With the leave of the House, I should like to say that I have listened with interest to the debate. We take seriously the problems that students may encounter and we shall carefully consider all the points that have been made. But I have not heard from the Opposition parties, in support of their claims for higher expenditure, any realistic appreciation of how it is to be financed.

There has been a great deal of discussion of the older students allowance. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) referred to it at some length. We understand from the Student Awards Agency for Scotland that Jane Pepper, who is on an access course, may be eligible for the older student's allowance as a continuing student. We suggest that she pursue that with the agency.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central mentioned the sum of £35 million for the allowance. I should point out that it is not a small amount; indeed, it is greater than the sum of the access funds.

In conclusion, I refer to the helpful and positive contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) and for Worcester (Mr. Luff). I listened carefully to them, particularly to their suggestions for more funding for the arts. There are some practical problems with the route that they have suggested, not least the considerable expenditure involved in extending provision for the mandatory award. But we are concerned about the practical outcome—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Question necessary to dispose of it, pursuant to order [17 February].*

The House divided: Ayes 243, Noes 284.

Division No. 84] **[9.45 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N Wkshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill

O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Isl'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and Mr. Stephen Byers.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*

Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Dr. Liam Fox.

Question accordingly negatived.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &C

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

POLICE AND CRIMINAL EVIDENCE (CODES OF PRACTICE)

That the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (Codes of Practice) (No. 3) Order 1995, dated 27th January 1995, a copy of which was laid before this House on 30th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Question agreed to.

Rapid Transit Link (Fareham)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

9.56 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): My purpose this evening is to give parliamentary exposure to an innovative plan to develop a new transport system in south Hampshire, initially running from Fareham to Portsmouth by way of Gosport. In doing so, I hope to obtain a preliminary view of the Government's attitude at this stage, to canvass support for the scheme and generally to promote awareness of the issue.

There is no doubt that Gosport needs better road access. The constituency is a peninsula between Portsmouth and Southampton looking across to the Isle of Wight. It has an attractive seaside location, but shares with its Portsmouth neighbour a considerable density of population.

Unlike Portsmouth, which has motorway access direct to the centre of the city, Gosport has to rely on one A road, the notorious A32, and one B road for its access. Poor road access brings a range of problems. It deters industrial and commercial investment and it makes it less attractive for shoppers to visit the High street and Stoke road areas of Gosport which are traditionally the centre of the town. But my greatest sympathy is for those who are compelled to sit in traffic twice a day as they travel to and from work.

Much has been done to improve the road access. I formed the Gosport road group some years ago comprising county councillors, councillors of all parties and local business representatives, the object being to act as a ginger group to put pressure on all those involved, the county council, the Government and local authorities, to press for action on the road.

Action has been taken and much can be done by way of traffic smoothing, measures such as co-ordinated traffic lights, improved road junctions and so on. Traffic flow has improved, but any improvements are rapidly overtaken by increased car use. The fact remains that road access at off-peak periods is poor and at peak periods it is bad ranging through to appalling.

Since the area is a peninsula, it is difficult to plan a new and totally satisfactory road access, and the obvious route, across Fareham creek, is probably barred for environmental reasons. There is really no easy way to improve access by road, although much has been done.

Moreover, even a major new spinal road would not solve all of Gosport's travel problems because other internal roads, such as Brockhurst road and Bury road, have such a density of traffic that they are near to saturation level for several hours a day. There is a local joke in Gosport, which no one finds in any way amusing, that anyone who goes for the first time to Gosport for a meeting always arrives late, apologising that he had not realised how bad the traffic would be from Fareham to Gosport and his journey took him much longer than expected.

The Gosport road needs further improvement and the Gosport road group takes every opportunity to make that point to the relevant bodies. I now draw it to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister. I hope that he will take it on board and take back to his Department the fact that road access to Gosport is unsatisfactory.

Not only are Gosport roads under pressure, but Hampshire county council studies show that 5 per cent. of the county's strategic road network is currently over capacity and that by the year 2011, 46 per cent. of Hampshire's strategic road network will be over capacity, partly because Hampshire's car ownership is slightly above the national average at 0.41 of a car per household compared with the national average of 0.38 of a car per household.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

Mr. Viggers: Should there be anyone in the Public Gallery this evening, I am sure that the 10 o'clock motion will have completely baffled them, as it always does.

I was about to make the point that, interestingly, Gosport's car ownership is reflected in the fact that 29 per cent. of households do not have motor cars compared with 24 per cent. in the rest of Hampshire. That poses the intriguing possibility that a means of transport that does not rely on cars might be attractive to local residents.

Against that background, Hampshire county council has been making its plans and is currently at the consultative stage of its review of the Hampshire county structure plan which takes the present planning period from the year 2001 through to the year 2011.

The consultative document quotes my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment as saying:

"We need to put urban structures into place today which face up to the environmental challenges of tomorrow. One challenge will be persuading people to make the right transport choice. We shall seek to influence those choices through various initiatives."

The document continues:

"These initiatives will include reducing the length and number of motorised journeys which people need to make; encouraging alternative means of transport".

That is exactly where this evening's Adjournment debate comes in, with the proposal of an alternative system.

Within the guidelines that I have just recited, Hampshire county council has formulated the south-east Hampshire transportation strategy to comply with the Government who wish to see bids for funding in a package deal. Hampshire has done that.

One proposal that has been put forward is for a regional metro, which is a much more ambitious rapid transit link than the one I am talking about. It would included transit links between Portsmouth and Southampton as well, but I should stress that, although the Gosport plan for a rapid transport system would be an integral part of that regional metro, the Gosport proposal stands alone. It does not stand or fall by being part of the regional metro system.

The Gosport scheme would run from Fareham station with a loop in Fareham. It would go through Gosport and to Portsmouth town station. I have, of course, discussed the issue with my colleagues. My right hon. Friend the member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) and my hon. Friends the Members for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) and for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) are all extremely interested in the project and wish it well. I am delighted that they have supported the scheme by their presence here in the House. I appreciate that very much.

The present scheme would start from Fareham station. It would run for 5 km along a partially disused rail freight line that is used rarely by the Ministry of Defence and a further 4 km along a disused railway line running alongside a cycle way and a pedestrian footpath. It would then go to Gosport town centre, the High street area and under Portsmouth harbour in a new immersed tube tunnel, to emerge near Portsmouth harbour railway station before moving on to Portsmouth town.

That is a densely populated corridor, with 23,000 households within 600 m of the route of the proposed system. There is no doubt that the system, if implemented, would be of massive benefit locally. First, it would help all those who travel to work between the Fareham and Portsmouth axis, with many places of work being on the route or close to it. Secondly, it would help shoppers, providing access to shops in Fareham and Portsmouth—and, even more important from my constituency point of view, to shops in Gosport, which currently suffer from the lack of good road communications. Thirdly, it would be helpful to schools: the proposed route would be near to a number of large schools.

Finally, the system would be very beneficial to tourism. We in the Portsmouth-Gosport area are keen to promote tourism, and we have some major attractions—HMS Victory and the Mary Rose, to name but two. There are many other attractions, including in my constituency the submarine museum, Priddy's Hard museum and Fort Brockhurst. We do not want people to visit south Hampshire for one day, perhaps visiting HMS Victory before going home; we are keen to promote the idea of visiting the area for a long weekend, and taking full advantage of all the attractions. The presence of tourists for several days at a time would build up hotel and restaurant capacity, making the Portsmouth harbour area a natural holiday resort. Such a development would be considerably aided by a light rapid transit system.

The present scheme proposes 12 vehicles making some 15 stops on the 14 km of the route. It would take some 28 minutes to make the total journey, and maximum capacity would be about 3,600 passengers an hour. That would mean between 30,000 and 40,000 passengers a day—about 9 million a year, according to the current projection.

Schemes of this nature have been studied since the 1970s, but it was not until the 1980s that real progress was made. In 1989, a pre-feasibility study looked into demand, costings and engineering aspects; in 1990, a private sector consortium examined the project. In 1991, Hampshire county council sponsored a study of whether a light rapid transit system based on trams, a guided bus system or a partially guided bus system was preferable, and concluded that the present system of trams was best. That was followed by public consultation, and in 1993 merchant bankers and transport planning consultants were employed.

A total of £100,000 has been spent on trial borings under Portsmouth harbour to test the acceptability of the soil for the proposed tunnel. Hydrological studies have been conducted to ensure that Portsmouth harbour will not be unduly affected by the tunnel. An operational audit has been carried out by a French team, which is responsible for running comparable systems in Grenoble and Nantes. Gosport now has a team of six people, headed by Mr. Fraser Smith, who has relevant experience with the Hong Kong mass transit railway and with Ove Arup and Partners. A serious proposal is now seriously being studied.

[Mr. Viggers]

The mission strategy is:

"To have received approval by the Secretary of State for Transport of an order through the Transport and Works Act 1992 procedure before 31st March 1997."

The project team will also seek the best funding method. The latest cost estimate for the whole scheme is about £104 million, of which private capital might provide about 50 per cent. The team will of course consider the best manner of integrating private capital into such a scheme before asking for the Minister's assistance, and much detailed study and negotiation will be needed. The vehicles themselves, or even the tunnel, may well be franchised or leased. There is much work to be done.

Public sector support would be by way of a section 56 grant under the Transport Act 1968. An earlier study in 1992 led the Department of Transport to write on 16 June 1992:

"We consider that, although the analysis will require further refinement, at this stage of the appraisal the economics of the scheme look relatively robust."

That was encouraging, and I hope that the Minister will be able to tell me that nothing has happened to make the Department feel less confident than it did in 1992.

My final point concerns perceptions—how public transport is seen. Public transport had suffered for many years from under-investment and restrictive union practices. Much public transport has been dirty, cold and unreliable, and accordingly has a bad reputation; but the Government have invested a great deal to improve the position—and rightly so, because the capacity of roads to absorb further cars is not absolute. The light rail transport system would be a dramatic force for good in south Hampshire, and I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to extend his good wishes to the project.

10.10 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on securing this debate on the proposed light rapid transit line, which would link Portsmouth, Gosport and Fareham. I acknowledge in their places my hon. Friends the Members for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) and for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd), who I know have an interest in the project.

I shall try to deal with the questions of my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport in the time that is available. In March 1988, my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell), wrote to my hon. Friend in reply to a proposal for a light rail scheme linking Fareham and Gosport. He gave my hon. Friend the same answer that I can give the new proposals today: it is for local commercial interests or local authorities to pursue local public transport projects. In that letter, my hon. Friend added;

"it cannot be denied that implementing light rail proposals takes time and is more complicated than may at first be realised."

He was, as ever, a master of understatement.

In 1989, Hampshire county council commissioned its pre-feasibility study. One of the corridors that it examined was the subject of today's debate—the Portsmouth-Gosport-Fareham corridor. Discussions between the Department of Transport and Hampshire county council officials continued and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport said, in November 1991 the council commissioned transportation planning consultants to investigate the scope for obtaining section 56 grant. The preliminary report showed that an outline economic case existed for a rapid transit system along the Portsmouth-Gosport-Fareham corridor.

Hampshire county council has continued to progress the scheme, including putting it out to public consultation. Its dialogue with my officials continues. It plans to confirm its 1992 case for grant in the next few months, to apply for powers under the Transport and Works Act 1992 in mid-1996, and to examine the scope for private sector involvement.

I understand that Hampshire county council is awaiting results from the south-east Hampshire transportation study, which is under way and scheduled to finish at the end of March this year. That will be an important study because its results will enable us to test the patronage forecasts on which the light rapid transit option is based, and the figures in the 1991-92 study. That could, ultimately, be an important part of the section 56 appraisal. The study should also allow us find out whether light rail is the best option in terms of an overall transport package for south Hampshire.

Let me discuss the process of introducing a light rail scheme. There are three elements: the appraisal of the scheme to see if it qualifies for Government grant, the need to obtain statutory powers under the Transport and Works Act and the application for funding if the scheme passes the appraisal test. In all this, the most important element is to establish in general terms whether a scheme is worth funding before spending large sums of public money in getting powers and in getting into the detailed appraisal of the case for grant.

If Hampshire county council wants to make progress, it needs first to establish that the scheme is "in principle" worth funding. It also needs to get on with involving the private sector, not only in the development of the scheme but in establishing the case for attracting developer contributions and for locating other sources of local finance.

I was interested in the figures that my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport quoted about the informal estimates for private sector involvement. Clearly, the lower the overall cost of the scheme to my Department, the more likely it is that we will, ultimately, be able to afford it. That is not just a truism; it points to the considerable need to ensure that every opportunity for involving the private sector is taken in terms both of operations and of commercial development. My hon. Friend referred to such opportunities.

I would like this to happen: before Hampshire embarks on obtaining powers under the Transport and Works Act and commissioning further work on a full economic case, it should collaborate with the private sector in developing the outline case for the scheme and exploring funding approaches which will reduce the call on the public purse.

Private finance brings many advantages to light rail innovation, improved management, the transfer of a considerable degree of risk and, not least, a reduction in the level of public sector support required. There is no set

percentage of private finance over which the Government will support a scheme; each scheme will be different and each will need to be examined in detail on its merits.

We are expecting the private sector to play its part. Light rail can make a healthy operating profit; the current systems in operation in Britain amply demonstrate that. Where a transport scheme brings benefits which are primarily local in character, it is not unreasonable to suggest that central Government should not be expected to foot the whole bill.

I should like to make some general points on the policy context in which light rail schemes are set. There is no doubt about our commitment to the general principle of supporting light rail schemes. We know that they can play a role in relieving urban congestion in some of our major cities. Government funding has already supported schemes such as the docklands light railway, the Greater Manchester metrolink and the south Yorkshire supertram. On 13 December 1994, in the last settlement, we set aside funds for two new schemes—the Croydon tramlink and the midland metro line 1.

Other towns and cities are developing proposals for light rail projects, but one of the most important things to remember is that these schemes are expensive and are not the only answer to urban transport problems. Even in Manchester, where metrolink has been a great success, its overall contribution to reducing congestion is to remove just three cars in a thousand from Greater Manchester's roads. Manchester metrolink is an excellent system and is very effective at serving passengers on the Bury to Altrincham line, but it illustrates the fact that no single light rail line can be the whole solution to a city's congestion problem.

That said, this Government see light rail as well worth support where it can play a significant part—and every car removed is significant. The presence of such a scheme allows the local authority to think of sensible vehicle restraint measures allied with the light rail scheme, which can have a substantial effect on the levels of congestion to which my hon. Friend referred on the spine road from Fareham to Alverstoke.

If light rail is to receive Government support, it must contribute to the Government's overall policy aims for local transport. Those are, broadly, a policy for urban areas to make cities better places in which to live and to improve the quality of urban life. To underpin that, we need to reduce car use wherever that is possible. We are trying to do that not only by reducing traffic congestion but by encouraging the use of alternatives to the private car, while, at the same time, preserving access to traditional urban centres.

There is no doubt that to bring about a reduction in car use there needs to be a modal shift—a transfer from cars to public transport. If that does not happen, we are merely suppressing economic demand and social activity in a way that the community will not accept. There must be a balance. We also need to improve facilities for walking and cycling. In the longer term, we are looking to policies that put the places where people live, work, shop and enjoy their leisure time closer together, so obviating the need for travel.

In 1994-95, the then Secretary of State introduced what was called the package approach to local transport funding.

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor and Maidenhead) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Norris: That is something on which my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor and Maidenhead (Mr. Trend) is an acknowledged expert and master, and I am glad to see my hon. Friend in his place and taking such an interest in tonight's debate.

The package approach is an important development in the way in which the Government support spending on transport by local authorities. It says to local authorities that they should not bid simply on the basis of individual schemes that are specific to one local authority. Instead, recognising the fact that most of those transport issues are wider strategic issues, it tells local authorities to bid, as part of a package of authorities, for a package of schemes that allow us to develop strategic alternatives.

The approach has been very much welcomed by local authorities of all political persuasions, and it has produced some very effective and imaginative conclusions this year. It is essentially about the strategic approach that considers transport in the round and demonstrably gives us better results than those that continue to consider measures in isolation.

It is for local authorities to decide the detail of those transport strategies. They need to consider all forms of transport and they need to tailor their plans to the circumstances of the district. Sometimes, that will mean light rail, but often—I say that in the general context of considering such schemes—other policies and schemes will be more effective, and considerably cheaper, than light rail.

It is important therefore that one should consider the light rail scheme as growing out of a local authority's coherent overall transport strategy, not simply as a nice piece of froth superimposed on top of it. A problem must have been identified for which light rail is the best solution. It is not enough that local authorities think that it would be a nice idea to have some shiny new trams.

That being the context in which one regards those light rail schemes, I have to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport that, as we have previously said, there is, at this stage at least, an outline case to be made for the Fareham-Gosport-Portsmouth line to which he refers. No event that has transpired since he received that earlier assurance would cause the Department to change its mind in that regard.

Let me say a word about the processes that it will be necessary to pursue from here on in. Since the passage of the Transport and Works Act 1992, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport referred, the promoters have needed to seek an order under section 1 of that Act to obtain the necessary powers—that Act essentially replacing the private Bill process with which we were all previously familiar.

I understand that Hampshire officials have held discussions with my Department's processing unit about the Transport and Works Act procedures, and I can confirm that we shall be happy to provide any further help that Hampshire requires in that respect.

[Mr. Norris]

Briefly, those procedures require the application to be made to the Secretary of State. It must be accompanied by several supporting documents, including full plans, and an environmental statement, which is obviously important in any scheme of that type these days, and the notices must be published in the *London Gazette* and in one or more local newspapers.

Objectors have their rights. They have six weeks in which to lodge objections and, if there is a sufficient number of objections, a local public inquiry would be held by an independent inspector. The Secretary of State would then have to decide whether the scheme should be approved, having taken into account the conclusions and recommendations of the inspector.

It is difficult, in all honesty, to predict how long in practice that process takes, unless one has any idea of what type of objections may be circulating. My hon. Friend will appreciate that, in the case of a scheme such as the one that we are discussing, which generally is likely to be extremely well received locally, objections can, in effect, still be petitions from those with property interests in the area or with other commercial interests that they feel will be affected by the scheme.

Until one is aware of the totality of the objections, it is difficult to give a more concrete guidance on how long the procedure will take. Given that the inquiry might last about a month, it should be possible for a decision to be announced in about 18 months from the date of the application.

In view of the quasi-judicial nature of the Secretary of State's role in the process, I hope that my hon. Friend will understand why I cannot comment specifically on the detailed merits of the council's scheme at this stage. That is why I have taken the time available to outline the process and show our general interest in allowing that process to continue.

The promoters have to establish whether the LRT scheme is worth building. An outline financial and economic case leading to a bid for Government support needs to be prepared. Because light rail systems are so expensive, detailed assessments of individual schemes must be completed before a decision is made on whether assistance from public funds is appropriate. Given the prohibitive level of capital costs, it is highly unlikely that anyone would be able to build and operate an LRT scheme profitably without grant.

My hon. Friend was right to refer to section 56 of the Transport Act 1968 which permits the Secretary of State to give a grant for certain large new public transport infrastructure projects where there are exceptional reasons for using specific grants to spread the cost beyond users and local charge payers. The grant is used to fund these light rail schemes and the other schemes to which I referred.

It is for the promoters to establish whether the light rail system is the best possible option. They have to look at patronage, potential local benefits and at the reduction in congestion. Underpinning all that is the question whether the benefit to the economy will be greater than the cost. Light rail schemes are appraised on the basis of commercial viability and are supported by a full cost-benefit analysis covering benefits to users as well as to non-users. The non-user benefits are particularly important.

I have already said that light rail is expensive. It has high costs compared with roads, new railway stations, public transport interchanges, bus-based park and ride, and so on. However, expensive though that may be, Manchester has shown that, in many cases, it can be worth it.

As I have said, the funds which we have will depend on competition from all other local transport projects. It stands to reason that, if we can increase the level of private and local finance for the schemes, we should be able to support more light rail schemes over a shorter time scale.

When a local authority is promoting a scheme, the Government will expect it to examine the scope for private sector involvement in construction and in the operation of the scheme. The Department will also expect local authorities sponsoring projects to use the competitive tendering process wherever possible. In some cases, it might be appropriate to have a single contract for the design, build, operation and maintenance—the DBOM concept—and for the whole of that single contract to be put out to tender.

In those cases, the amount of grant will be based on the amount required by the successful tenderer. Normally, that tenderer will be the bidder requiring the least public sector subsidy. In other cases, it may be appropriate for different elements of the scheme—design and build and operation and maintenance—to be treated as separate projects. There is sufficient flexibility in the section 56 arrangements for that to be taken into account.

The advice that my hon. Friend was given in 1988 was and still is correct. It is because light rail systems are so expensive that that sort of long and detailed assessment of individual schemes has to be performed before a decision is made on whether assistance from public funds is applicable.

My hon. Friend has put his case with great clarity. He has made it clear that he does not expect me to produce a signed cheque from my pocket this evening—I am grateful for that, because I fear that I do not have it with me. I hope that he will have gathered that we recognise that the concept of light rail has real value in solving some of the more deep-seated problems of urban congestion and that we recognise that the Hampshire study has revealed a case that can realistically be taken forward. I hope that that is the assurance that my hon. Friend sought.

I am sure that Hampshire will want to examine the record of tonight's proceedings and I must say that it is important to try to do as much of the work as possible to establish the—

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 23 February 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 2 March.

QUEEN MARY AND WESTFIELD COLLEGE BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 2 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Veal (Marketing and Exporting)

1. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the marketing and exporting of humanely produced veal.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. William Waldegrave): I hope that marketing of humanely produced veal can increase, which is why my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary is opening a Ministry seminar on that subject tomorrow.

Mr. Home Robertson: As we have been exporting 500,000 calves a year into veal crates and the like on mainland Europe, and as we import the equivalent of 8,000 of them back again as anaemic veal each year, while only 4,000 calves are reared in humane loose-house veal units in Britain, does the Minister accept that our urgent and massive task is to develop the market for welfare-labelled veal not only in Britain but throughout the single European market? That will not simply happen; it will take more than seminars. What resources and what action are the Minister and the Meat and Livestock Commission devoting to promoting that market?

Mr. Waldegrave: As a distinguished producer of high-quality Scottish beef—that is a good product, too—the hon. Gentleman speaks with knowledge. The figures that he gives are correct: about 80 per cent. of our present very small market, which is mostly within the catering trade, is imported. That amount could be replaced, which would be a start. But the hon. Gentleman should not undervalue the importance of getting the retailers, including the supermarkets, and the producers all on side and working together. That is why the seminar tomorrow will be important in terms of promoting a national movement working together. We shall back that with our marketing grants, if good candidates are put forward to help develop the market.

Mr. Knapman: My right hon. Friend has made clear the Government's opposition to a unilateral ban on the export of veal calves, but who now supports the Protection of Calves (Export) Bill, other than its promoter, the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew)?

Mr. Waldegrave: As I read it, the Labour party's policy as set out in its policy statement is to do what the Government are doing—to seek a ban through the Commission and the Council of Ministers. That must be the right thing to do. Even if a unilateral ban were legal, which I fear it is not, it is extremely difficult to see how it would work. As soon as the animals were across the channel they would be out of our jurisdiction, and whatever happened to them we could not do much about it.

Dr. Strang: But surely the Minister accepts that the majority of the British people regard it as utterly unacceptable for us to export calves into a system of production so cruel that we have banned it in this country. As he has undertaken to resolve the problem by eliminating veal crates in Europe, can he give the House any idea of a date by which he could reasonably expect to secure that aim?

Mr. Waldegrave: I could give the House good news yesterday, in that on either Monday or Tuesday—I forget at exactly which point during the Council of Ministers' meeting—Commissioner Franz Fischler told us that he had been able to respond more quickly than he originally expected to our request to bring forward the review, and that the report that will have to precede any action across Europe will now be available well before the end of the year. As the scientific committee doing the work is chaired by a distinguished Cambridge veterinarian of great reputation, I believe that its work and its recommendations will carry much weight.

Abattoirs

2. **Mr. John Townend:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the recent announcement by EU Agriculture Ministers concerning abattoirs.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mrs. Angela Browning): The December Council of Agriculture Ministers agreed in principle to a package of amendments to the Fresh Meat Directive 64/433/EEC, but adoption has been delayed because of a procedural difficulty with the European Parliament. The House may wish to know that the derogation increasing the low throughput limit has now been extended to 30 June.

Mr. Townend: I welcome those small concessions, but does my hon. Friend agree that if they had come earlier they might have prevented some of the country abattoirs, such as the excellent one at Kilham, in my constituency, from being closed? Where does she put the blame for the

fact that so many of our excellent country abattoirs have been closed? Was it the fault of European regulations, or was it British bureaucrats showing excessive zeal?

Mrs. Browning: Neither, because—as my hon. Friend will know—the number of abattoirs in this country has been on a consistently downward trend during the past 15 years. In 1980 there were 1,231 abattoirs in Great Britain, while in 1992 there were 647. The regulations to which my hon. Friend referred were not applied until 1993.

Mr. Hardy: Since this country complies with European requirements in regard to the export of animals, could we not have a greater insistence from the Government that other member states comply with the supposed requirements from Brussels which deal with the welfare and humane slaughter of animals and the conditions of abattoirs?

Mrs. Browning: Absolutely. I have great sympathy and agree with the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. He will be aware that when the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals recently produced documentary evidence of the most disgusting and appalling conditions in Greek abattoirs, my right hon. Friend immediately informed the Commission and asked that it be investigated, and that is currently being done.

Mr. Alexander: Is my hon. Friend assuring the House that the directive is being uniformly introduced over the whole of Europe, and that it is being uniformly introduced in this country? Bearing in mind the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend), can my hon. Friend give some assurance as to the way in which Members of Parliament will be advised in the future on problems with abattoirs in their constituencies?

Mrs. Browning: We shall be vigilant where we have evidence that the rules are not being kept uniformly throughout the EC. That is important not just from the point of view of the welfare of animals but because of the commercial inequalities which could be created. I am happy to be able to tell the House that, as of September last year, I have implemented a policy whereby when I am asked to sign a closure order for an abattoir, the Member of Parliament concerned is immediately notified in writing and—providing that the abattoir owner gives written permission—the Member of Parliament is invited to come to my Department to examine fully the evidence which is being given to me.

Veal Calves

3. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received concerning the export of veal calves to other EU member states.

Mrs. Browning: We continue to receive many representations both from organisations and individuals.

Ms Jackson: Does the Minister agree that public opinion is increasing, not only in this country but across Europe, against the particularly abhorrent form of food production that is veal crates? Does she attribute the Minister's failure to convince our European partners to adopt the British ban on this form of food production to his own powers of argument or to the anti-European campaign which is being unceasingly waged by his senior colleagues in the Cabinet?

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Lady seems to be remarkably ill-informed on this subject. My right hon. Friend the Minister, in conjunction with Franz Fischler, was instrumental in making sure that there was an early response from the Council of Ministers to the directive which currently makes veal crates legal in the rest of Europe. In negotiations with all of our EC partners, we have not had one voice raised from any country—regardless of either commercial interests or the fact that a country perhaps does not consider the measure to be something it wishes to adopt—in support of the raising of veal calves in crates.

We believe that the report will come forward quickly, and even Italy, which has a vast commercial interest in the matter, has assured me that if the report has not been brought forward by the time it holds the presidency, it will put the matter at the top of the agenda. I hope that the report will be out before then. That shows the spirit and influence of my right hon. Friend.

Sir Terence Higgins: The Minister has said that we are unable to impose a unilateral ban on the export of live animals for slaughter, as it would be contrary to European law. In a debate yesterday, my right hon. Friend said that the legal arguments were scarcely worth looking at, but the replies that he has given to questions have not answered in detail the case put forward by Compassion in World Farming. Has the matter been referred to the Law Officers, and will my right hon. Friend publish the legal opinion which he has received in dealing with the particular cases quoted in the representations to which I have referred?

Mrs. Browning: My right hon. Friend made it very clear in a three-hour debate yesterday that we have taken legal advice from more than one source, and it would be highly irregular and unusual for any Minister to disclose whether the Law Officers have been consulted. My right hon. Friend has been very open about the advice that we have received. It is quite conclusive—this country would be open to charge in the courts if we applied a unilateral ban to the blanket export of live animals or to certain species destined for certain types of rearing.

Mr. Barnes: Yesterday morning, during the debate, we received a great deal of information from the Minister about what discussions had occurred within the European Union at an earlier stage and about developments and possibilities for changes, as the aim was generally to change European Union regulations. Is it not a pity that there has to be a great deal of trouble over an issue before that type of information is supplied to the House?

I have never heard of an attempt to provide information about any other item that affects the European Union on such a basis. If we are sending Ministers to act on our behalf in such matters, we need them to report back on what has occurred, so that we know that what we want is being pursued. That is not occurring generally—

Madam Speaker: Order. I need a question, not a speech.

Mrs. Browning: My right hon. Friend arrived back in this country from a two-day Council meeting at 3 am.

By 10.30 am yesterday, he was sharing with the House information about that Council and its procedures. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman feels that he should have been telegrammed at 4 am, 5 am or 6 am, but if he writes to us on that basis we will look into it.

Horticultural Industry

4. **Mr. Legg:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking following the publication of the results of his study into the problems of the horticultural industry.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Michael Jack): I identified six key areas for further work, which we are taking forward with the industry.

Mr. Legg: Can my hon. Friend confirm that exporting is one of the six key areas that he is considering? What does he hope will be the benefit to British produce of that review?

Mr. Jack: I can confirm that exporting, especially selling into the single market, is one of the key areas that we are considering as part of the horticulture project. I am considering ways in which we can provide practical assistance to our industry. There are already some hopeful signs that breakthroughs are being made. One company from Cambridgeshire has increased exports of salads and vegetables to Spain, Italy and Sweden by 74 per cent. in recent years and 15 per cent. of all United Kingdom daffodil bulbs are exported. Narcissus bulbs go to Holland and English apples are a leading item in the Marks and Spencer store in Paris.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why did not the Minister support a full Horticultural Development Council ballot, instead of the compromise consultation of a very shadowy nature?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman usually considers the background of such questions meticulously. Had he done so, he would know that, under the Act that governs the operation of development councils, we are statutorily obliged to consult with representative bodies. We consulted 41, which are democratically elected and are said to represent the interests of their members. Not one requested a statutory ballot, and that is why we did not have one.

Lady Olga Maitland: What steps is my hon. Friend taking to encourage producers to improve their promotional skills and, therefore, to sell more of their produce?

Mr. Jack: We have the very successful marketing development scheme in operation, with a budget of £10 million over three years. We have already made available about £1 million to the 30 successful horticultural projects that applied for assistance. For example, we gave £150,000 towards the restructuring of the English National Fruit Company, ENFRU, which enabled the apple industry to rationalise its marketing and deal more successfully with supermarkets.

Supermarkets

5. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with farmers about the problems they face in dealing with supermarkets.

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend and I frequently talk to farmers about the importance of producing for the customer, including supermarkets, and our marketing grants provide practical help towards that end.

Mr. Griffiths: Does the Minister share the concerns of the National Farmers Union about the future funding of regional speciality food groups, which help redress the balance between producers and supermarkets, and does he share our concerns about the uncertainty of their future funding?

Mr. Jack: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned the assistance given by groups such as Food From Britain to small, regional groups that produce speciality food. He will no doubt know about organisations such as Taste of the West and Taste of the North West. I have no indication whatever that future financial assistance to help those groups will not be forthcoming.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend accept that farmers raise animals to be eaten, not slaughtered at birth? In his talks with farmers and dealings with supermarkets, will he stress the importance of producing rose veal? Will he ask the Parliamentary Secretary to stress at her seminar tomorrow the importance of supermarkets buying only rose veal, preferably home-produced?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend will be well supported by one British supermarket, which has already said that its future marketing plans for veal will be precisely as she described. Supermarkets are sometimes unjustly criticised with regard to promoting welfare systems for animals. A number of them make it a feature of the meat that they produce, and they market accordingly. They are doing a great deal to encourage and support the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to promote high standards of welfare in livestock production.

Mr. Martyn Jones: Is the Minister aware that farmers of products such as lettuces and early-season tomatoes often gear up their business to meet the demands of supermarkets, only to have the rug pulled from under them by imports? Has the Minister any specific ideas to remedy that problem?

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman should do his research properly, certainly with regard to early-season tomatoes and some newer varieties of lettuce because the partnership between supermarkets and growers has enabled those new varieties to be grown. The resurgence of the Little Gem lettuce is but one example of how supermarkets have helped. As for pulling the rug, I had a seminar with some of the leading buyers of supermarket produce and, on the subject of apples, they agreed that if they got the right product, they would not buy from outside the United Kingdom. Last season they bought no Dutch Cox, in spite of a price advantage, and they thereby supported producers of high-quality Cox apples.

Farmland

6. **Mr. Michael Spicer:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the effect of the proposals in the Agricultural Tenancies Bill on the supply of farmland available for rent.

Mr. Waldegrave: A survey carried out last year by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors suggested that the proposed reforms could increase the area of let land by up to 10 per cent. over five years. This was before my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced his intention to extend inheritance tax relief to let land from 1 September 1995. If anything, the survey results underestimate the position.

Mr. Spicer: May I pass on the undiluted and undying gratitude of 400 of my tenanted market gardeners to the Secretary of State and Minister of State for having, this week, amended the Agricultural Tenancies Bill to preserve 100-year old rights under the Evesham custom? It will do everything to inspire the proper marketing of tenanted land in my constituency.

Mr. Waldegrave: I pay tribute my hon. Friend for raising that important point. Unique to his part of the country is the fact that, over the years, the market and individual good sense have found a way round the perhaps over-restrictive laws that need to be changed elsewhere. Because his area found a satisfactory way of doing that under the old tenancy law, we thought it right to preserve it. I am sure that it was the right thing to do. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his thanks.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: The Minister will know of the concern that the proportion of tenanted land has dropped from some 90 per cent. at the turn of the century to some 50 per cent. now. Is that a bad thing? Why are hon. Members from all parties pleased to see a rise in owner-occupation in housing, but concerned about the increase in owner-occupation in farming?

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the increase in owner-occupied family farms in that period is a good thing. But all sides of the industry agree that more tenanted land would help people to enter the industry. There will always be large estates, for example the Co-operative Wholesale Society's large estates, which were mentioned in the debate on that subject, and easier access to them for young farmers on a tenanted basis must be good for the future of the industry. That is the intention of our Bill, which is supported by all sides: landowners; tenants' organisations; and young farmers.

Organic Production

7. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what voluntary schemes now exist to encourage organic production methods.

Mr. Waldegrave: My Department launched the organic aid scheme for England on 1 July; it aims to encourage a three-fold increase in organic produce over the next few years.

Mr. Arnold: Bearing in mind that organic farming has the same effect in terms of volumes produced as set-aside, but in the process produces high-quality food—that is particularly noticeable at Luddesdown court in my constituency—and bearing in mind that most of the organic food for sale in Britain comes from abroad, what is the Government doing about research and development to improve that industry?

Mr. Waldegrave: I thoroughly support the implication of my hon. Friend's question. This Friday, I shall be visiting one of our best-known organic farmers to have a look at the industry. He is quite right about the importations. My guess is that about two thirds of the organic food we eat in Britain is imported, and we should be producing it here. That is why my Department is putting over £1 million this year into research to support the organic movement, as it is vital to get the underpinning of the industry right at the beginning.

British Jam

8. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he is taking to promote the sale of British jam.

Mr. Jack: We promote our high-quality British jams and preserves through Food From Britain's programme of action on speciality foods at home and abroad.

Mr. Whittingdale: My hon. Friend will be aware of the excellent jams and marmalades produced by Wilkins of Tiptree in my constituency. Can he confirm that, despite that splendid British product, we still have a balance of payments deficit in jam? What is he doing to correct that imbalance?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend is right to draw the attention of the jam makers of Britain to the commercial opportunity that exists to bridge the gap in the jam trade. I am glad that he mentioned Wilkins and company, the manufacturers of Tiptree jam in his constituency. That company has perhaps shown the way forward. It grows its own raw material on 1,100 acres, and one of its recent successes that has helped to turn back the tide of imports has been the brand Little Scarlet, made from strawberries grown in Essex. It has been a tremendous success that I hope will be replicated throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Mr. Skinner: Why can't we have jam today?

Mr. Jack: Because the hon. Gentleman represents the "jam tomorrow" party.

Mr. Lord: May I remind my right hon. Friend that it will seriously damage British jam sales if we do not have enough British sugar to go in the jam? I urge him not to forget that all the British sugar beet growers are expecting him to fight very hard for our sugar beet quota.

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend would have been in European Standing Committee A when we had a lengthy debate on that subject and he will know the Government's line. We do not believe that the United Kingdom should suffer any form of quota cut. Our production is already in balance with our consumption of sugar, if one takes cane and beet production in total. Other member states have a total imbalance, and, in the light of the general agreement on tariffs and trade, they, not we, should bear the brunt of any adjustments.

Livestock (Cruelty)

9. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to prevent those with convictions for cruelty to livestock from continuing to export livestock.

Mrs. Browning: The law provides for severe penalties of up to £1,000 per animal on conviction for mistreating animals in transport. We are also pressing for the introduction of a Community-wide licensing system which would provide for the disqualification of persistent or serious offenders.

Mr. Flynn: Should not the Morris report on animal transport be implemented and should we not ensure that hauliers of livestock are licensed to prevent men such as Richard Otley, who was convicted of calculated cruelty to animals and Mr. Roger Mills, who was convicted of assaulting a disabled woman who protested because he was mistreating cows, from continuing to inflict prolonged suffering on defenceless calves and lambs?

Mrs. Browning: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that all major recommendations in the Morris report have been implemented to ensure that high standards of export certification are maintained.

I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are working very hard on the licensing question. There is unanimity in the European Community, among both veterinarians and Ministers, that there should be a Community-wide licensing system. We must ensure that if the cowboys—those people who do not respect animals—cross the channel and commit offences in other countries, we can bring them before the courts in the country where they committed that offence.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Does my hon. Friend agree that penalties for cruelty to animals are stiffer in this country than they are in many other European countries? Will she continue her work to help other European countries to bring their animal welfare standards up to our level?

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend is quite correct: we have high standards in this country, and we enforce them. We want to see animal welfare standards raised throughout the European Community. As was explained in yesterday's debate—I think it is an important point—it is not just a question of the welfare of animals within the United Kingdom. If we are really serious about animal welfare, we should be concerned about animals in the UK, Spain, Greece or wherever. We shall achieve the greatest prize on a Europewide basis, as my right hon. Friend the Minister told the House yesterday.

Mr. Morley: While I welcome the Minister's comments about the need for a Europe-wide licence scheme, does she accept that we could take national action on that, as we are not restrained by European legislation? We could introduce a licensing scheme in the UK which would crack down on the cowboys and those people who are bringing the entire industry into disrepute.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman and I are at one on the need to toughen the law and, as he knows, on 23 January we introduced further measures to do just that. However, we are aware that it is not a seamless robe, and if the hon. Gentleman and his party have any practical suggestions about enforcing the rules, we should be happy to examine them.

Set-aside Land

10. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what environmental gains can be made from set-aside land.

Mr. Waldegrave: Sympathetic management of set-aside land helps wildlife to flourish. Recent Royal Society for the Protection of Birds research has shown this in relation to specific species such as skylark and linnet. In winter, there are on average 15 times as many birds feeding on set-aside fields as on neighbouring conventional cereal fields.

Mr. Nicholson: Given the valid point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), does my right hon. Friend agree that, while set-aside is perhaps not the ideal way to cut agricultural production, we should nevertheless make the most of the opportunities that it presents? Will my right hon. Friend inform the House what progress he has made in the European Commission to allow land that is set aside for forestry and other schemes to count against set-aside requirements?

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree with my hon. Friend: we did not support the introduction of set-aside and we would prefer the burden to be taken by cuts in prices. However, while we have it we must use it properly. I prompted the Commission to bring forward the long-promised report to the Council on exactly the points that my hon. Friend has made. The report is now before the Special Committee for Agriculture, which will then bring it back to the Council. I hope for agreement at the next Council meeting, or the one after that.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Minister agree that the English hedgerow is a very important and much-appreciated feature of the countryside? What incentive does the farmer who sets aside his land have to tend and nurture the hedgerow in order to maintain it as a feature, rather than to neglect it and allow it to become a straggling line of disconnected trees?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman will know that proposals about particularly important hedgerows are currently before the House in the Environment Bill. I do not think that many farmers neglect hedgerows nowadays in the way that the hon. Gentleman has described and we welcome the new planting and the replanting of hedgerows that is going on.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

11. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many environmentally sensitive area scheme agreements have now been signed.

Mr. Jack: There are now 5,644 environmentally sensitive area agreements signed, with a further 604 under consideration.

Mr. Rowe: My hon. Friend will know that, among those, is the north Kent marshes environmentally sensitive

area. Will he say whether the farmers involved are satisfied with the way that it is developing? Does he feel that the area meets the criteria?

Mr. Jack: The terms under which ESAs are run are always subject to review. As to the north Kent marshes ESA, we have increased the rate of payment for reversion of arable land from £240 per hectare to £260 per hectare. We set ourselves a target that 15 per cent. of the ESA should become arable reversion. Some 83 per cent. of that target has been met. Some 700 hectares of land have now returned to pasture use.

Live Animal Transport

12. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the Government's objectives for European Union policy changes during 1995 on the subject of the transport of live animals within the EU.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our objectives are to win agreement to a system that contains satisfactory journey limits and journey times based on the best veterinary advice. We have also succeeded in securing an early review of Community legislation on the welfare of calves.

Mr. Hughes: The Minister did a good job in Brussels the other day. I wish him well in achieving a successful outcome to the negotiations and a successful Europewide agreement. Does he accept that the lesson to be learned, in what has been a fast-moving situation in the past few weeks, is that, if we can possibly achieve national cross-party agreement on these issues, on the basis of Government proposals put to the House, which are debated and agreed here first, his hand will be strengthened and European animal welfare will be considerably improved?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am genuinely grateful for the hon. Gentleman's words. I think that he has a real point. The strength that any Minister has in negotiating for improvements which are broadly supported by the House, if the House can for a moment forget its party divisions and put the united interests of the country first, is always considerable.

Mr. Marland: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is somewhat unusual that this is yet another significant statement from the Liberal party, but not from the shadow Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? Is my right hon. Friend as curious as I am as to exactly where he is?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am informed that they seek him here, they seek him there, they seek him everywhere.

EU Agriculture Policy

13. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will next be meeting his opposite numbers in the European Union to discuss the European Union agricultural policy.

Mr. Waldegrave: I met the other European Agriculture Ministers at the Agriculture Council earlier this week. The next Agriculture Council is scheduled for 27 and 28 March.

Mr. Mackinlay: How is it that, since the previous Labour Government went out of office, the cost of the common agricultural policy has increased by 58 per cent., putting an additional £20 burden on British families? When will the Minister join my hon. Friend the shadow Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in calling for a root and branch reform of the CAP? When will he cut out all this Mr. Nice Guy and go to Brussels and tell them that we are not going to have it any more; enough is enough, and this kind of profligate public expenditure is unacceptable to ordinary British taxpayers?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am pleased to hear a member of the Labour party saying that profligate public expenditure is out of order. His neighbours on the Front Bench below the Gangway looked a little nervous at that point. The previous Labour Government supported a CAP that was generating huge surpluses, which have now been largely disposed of. They short-changed the British farmer with the monetary compensation amounts to a really acute degree. For example, our milk quota is less than it should be because they short-changed our dairy farmers in the late 1970s and our production fell. That is why we were not able to negotiate a better quota.

Mr. John Greenway: Is my right hon. Friend aware that his proposals for the CAP review group, which is now established, have been warmly welcomed by farmers in north Yorkshire? They recognise that there needs to be further reform of the CAP, but will my right hon. Friend take note that they will not support any further changes in CAP reform that discriminate against British farmers and that there are in any event enough sectors—such as sugar beet quota, which is due for reform—where they are already disadvantaged with regard to other European farmers?

Mr. Waldegrave: As my hon. Friend the Minister of State has said, we will fight for fair treatment of sugar producers. We are not producing the surpluses that cause the problem, and we should therefore not be penalised when the matter is dealt with.

Following the farrago of nonsense from the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), I forgot to point out that it is absurd not to recognise that, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the British Government have taken the lead in working for reform of the common agricultural policy. We shall continue to do that.

Dr. Strang: May I point out to the Minister that it was a Conservative Government who introduced milk quotas? Labour had long since lost office.

Will the Minister now admit that we were right to warn his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), that the 1992 MacSharry reforms were hopelessly inadequate? Surely the Minister appreciates that the current proposals for reform of the sugar and wine regimes—both in huge structural surplus—fall far short of what is required. Moreover, is it not clear from the latest European Commission price proposals that the Commission is simply not prepared to redress the huge cost of the beef and dairy sectors? When will the Government take a decisive stand on the common agricultural policy?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is a bit ironic to be teased by the hon. Gentleman on that subject. I know very well that the milk quotas started during a period of Conservative Government; they were imposed on us then. My point, however—a real point—was that the short-changing of the dairy industry under the last Labour Government had

damaged production in this country, which meant that our base-year figure was much lower than it would otherwise have been.

If the hon. Gentleman had read the newspapers recently, he would know that I have made the point about this year's price review in almost the same terms as him, although on the basis—I hope—of slightly more knowledge. The review does not go far enough, although there is a useful cut in the intervention price for butter. We need further steady cuts in underlying price support; otherwise, in due course, we shall face very serious problems with the common agricultural policy, which will have to be dealt with on an emergency basis. That would be a much less good way of handling the matter.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The Government were congratulated from all sides when they secured agricultural spending limits at the Edinburgh summit. Will the Minister tell us what we are to do now that the EC has published a budget for 1995 that exceeds the legal spending limits by £1,000 million?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that agricultural spending is running well below the guideline. That shows that the MacSharry reforms—although I have many criticisms of them—have probably been more successful in limiting over-production than people predicted at the time, and surpluses have diminished as a result. This year we shall be well within the FEOGA guideline.

Food From Britain

14. **Mr. Simpson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for an increase in the funding for Food From Britain in the next six months.

15. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to provide additional funding for the organisation Food From Britain in the next six months.

Mrs. Browning: In line with the policy announced in 1993, we are maintaining Government funding for Food From Britain. In the current financial year, this represents 54 per cent. of the organisation's financial resources.

Mr. Simpson: Would the Minister care to think again about the adequacy of that answer, given the current almost unsustainable and unbelievable levels of food imports into the United Kingdom? I should be grateful if she would explain why we import apples over a distance of 6,000 miles from South Africa, green beans over a distance of 4,000 miles from Kenya and parsnips over a distance of 11,000 miles from Australia. That cannot be other than damaging to the global environment and our domestic economy. Given that set-aside is now the second largest crop in the United Kingdom, when will the Minister come up with a policy that will reverse the problem of empty land—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. This is Question Time. Questions must be much brisker than that.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman raised a range of issues; let me pick the key ones.

Food From Britain targets its resources on exports and speciality foods. Many of the horticultural products that the hon. Gentleman mentioned are produced in this country, ensuring that we can not only export them but produce them for the home market, thus promoting import substitution.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned parsnips. I learned only last night that it is difficult to obtain them in France. I have spoken to Food From Britain, which is already exploring the market opportunities.

Mr. Cook: Does Minister realise that more than half the food retail market is in the hands of only 2 per cent. of retail stores, and that that results in a high percentage—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The Prime Minister's entry is appropriate because I was about to say that that results in a high percentage of rejects—about 20 to 50 per cent., depending on the commodity. In the case of the latest commodity to enter, it will be 100 per cent. shortly. That underlines the need for perfect produce. What percentage of the Food From Britain programme is dedicated to helping the producer, who must bear the cost of that, and produce a better standard for the market?

Mrs. Browning: I reject the implication in the hon. Gentleman's question. Food from Britain is the best in the world.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Watson: Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced detailed plans for a legislative assembly in Northern Ireland. Does he understand that, by doing so, he has conceded that power can and should be devolved to each of the constituent countries of the United Kingdom, precisely because each of those countries is distinct and different? When can we expect framework documents that meet the clearly expressed demands for a Welsh Assembly and a Scottish Parliament from the people of those countries?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's parallel. There are a range of distinct differences between the position faced in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the UK.

Mr. Watson: What are they?

The Prime Minister: With your permission, Madam Speaker, I shall tell the hon. Gentleman what those differences are. In Northern Ireland, the Assembly will not be tax raising. The Assembly proposed for Scotland would be. In Northern Ireland, there has been a sectarian divide of remarkable proportions for years. That does not exist elsewhere. In Northern Ireland, neither of the parties can form part of the UK Government and lead that Government. That does not apply in any other part of the UK. In Northern Ireland, because of its history, there has been an Assembly in the past. That does not apply elsewhere. In Northern Ireland, a part of the population may wish to form part of a

foreign country. That does not apply anywhere else. Those are some of the differences. I can stretch that list to the corner of the Chamber and back again.

Q2. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hawkins: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, where councils can be described as mean-minded cocktails of political correctness, inefficiency, bureaucracy and waste, that is a matter for condemnation? Does he further agree that councils like Labour Blackpool and socialist Lancashire have been accurately so described by Mr. Leo McKinstry, a recent close adviser to Labour Front-Bench spokesmen?

The Prime Minister: I am not always apt to accept the words of Labour spokesmen, either past or present, but, on this occasion, I am prepared to make an exception and to agree with Mr. McKinstry.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister agree with the director of the Gas Consumers Council that, although the City may view the £1 billion profit of British Gas as reasonable, consumers will take a different view?

The Prime Minister: I think that consumers wish to see the lowest possible gas price. Consumers will also be pleased with the fact that the gas price has fallen by something over 20 per cent. since privatisation. They will welcome the fact that the Gas Consumers Council represents gas consumers' interests and deals with complaints. I much prefer profits to losses, provided that there is a good service for customers, and that the price, which the regulator seeks to determine, is right. Profits yield taxes for meeting our public services. In the past, these same public utilities have drained public resources through subsidy.

Mr. Blair: Just on prices, gas prices fell in the three years before privatisation. They have risen in real terms since 1979. They rose last year in real terms, and they will rise again next year. *[Interruption.]* They rose last year in real terms, and they will rise again. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Both sides of the House must cool down. I want to hear what the right hon. Gentleman has to say.

Mr. Blair: Is that not the contrast between pay excesses at the top and pay cuts and redundancies for the rest, between vast monopoly profits and a tide of consumer complaints? Let me tell the Prime Minister and the Conservative party—*[Interruption.]* Yes, pay excess at the top and salary cuts for the rest. I tell them, until— *[Interruption.]* I see the yobbos are out in force today. We will continue to speak for the British people on this issue. Until those companies are properly regulated in the public interest, they will continue to be seen, rightly, as the unacceptable face of privatisation.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman rather dashed around the dates in order to make the case that he put before the House. As he knows, at the time of privatisation we put in a regulator to ensure that customers get the best deal possible. Since privatisation, prices have fallen by over 20 per cent. for domestic consumers, even after allowing for inflation. That is the reality. It is also the reality that, for many years while they were in the public sector, the nationalised industries cost the British taxpayer £50 million a week in subsidies. Now they are yielding money for the Exchequer to deal with public services and other matters. The right hon. Gentleman knows that that is the case. He knows that a more efficient service is being provided, and he has offered no alternative whatsoever.

Mr. Mark Robinson: Will my right hon. Friend take time out of his busy schedule to find the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and to tell him that there is still time for Liberal Democrat-controlled councils, including Somerset, to set aside some of their pet projects and to put children's education first?

The Prime Minister: I have no objection to raise at the absence of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and I am sure that my hon. Friend's message for the right hon. Gentleman was taken on board by his right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and will be faithfully relayed to him.

Mr. Beith: May I have instead a message for all those people whose incomes are just above the level at which they would qualify for free prescriptions and whose chronic illnesses are not on the list which would qualify them for free prescriptions? Those people now have to pay 26 times more for prescriptions than they did in 1979. Is that a fair rate of inflation for such a vulnerable group of people?

The Prime Minister: I can give the right hon. Gentleman a message in addition, rather than instead. As he knows, over 80 per cent. of prescriptions are dispensed free. Pensioners, pregnant women, children and those on low incomes all have their prescriptions free. A total of 333 million free prescriptions are dispensed every year. I believe that it is fair that those who can afford to pay should do so.

Even after the increase that has been made, the prescription charge will be well below the average cost of medicines to the national health service. The resources raised from that charge, paid for by people such as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, myself and many others, are enough to pay for 75,000 hip replacements, 33,000 heart valve replacements or 235,000 cataract operations. That is the reality. The money does not go to the Exchequer: it is made available to help increase the resources for the health service to meet the needs of people.

Mr. Barry Porter: In the document published yesterday, the Prime Minister said that he cherished the Union, and he went on to say in his statement that he was a Unionist. Will he take every opportunity to reinforce, underline and emphasise that commitment?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the efforts that the Government have been making to try to ensure that the strife and difficulties that have taken place in part of the United Kingdom for so long are brought to an end is a clear and compelling reason for my hon. Friend to accept what I said yesterday.

Q3. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hain: Did the Prime Minister sanction the Minister for Health telling the BBC's "PM" programme last night that the prescription charge increase would help to finance the nurses' pay award? Does he accept that there is public disgust at the way that the news of the increase—a savage tax on the sick—was sneaked out while the House was uniting on Ireland? Does it not prove that the Tories are the party of high tax and low cunning?

The Prime Minister: When the hon. Gentleman stretches his arguments to such a length, I am tempted to remind him that it was a Labour Government who first introduced prescription charges and a Labour Government who reintroduced prescription charges after they had been abolished and that only one half of the people who get free prescriptions today enjoyed them under a Labour Government. Perhaps the next time that the hon. Gentleman talks about prescription charges, he will make those points clear as well.

European Central Bank

Q4. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the level of contributions by member states to the administrative costs of the proposed European central bank.

The Prime Minister: Although the administrative costs of the proposed European central bank will be of concern to the Government if the bank is established, the relevant provisions of the Maastricht treaty are not yet in force and are unlikely to be so for some years to come.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the European Monetary Institute, which is the embryo central bank, on 6 February levied a capital charge on national banks of £500 million, including £75 million paid by the Bank of England, is the Prime Minister aware that some consider, rightly or wrongly, that the process of monetary union from which we are only partially exempt will forge ahead?

As many people consider that we are now near the irreversible end on Europe, would the Prime Minister, whose integrity I genuinely greatly respect, consider whether it might be appropriate to ask the people of Britain if this is the way that they want to proceed? Would not such a referendum now help to resolve the damaging splits on both sides of the House and give the Prime Minister real authority at the 1996 intergovernmental conference?

The Prime Minister: On my hon. Friend's first point, let me assure him that, if the House wishes, we have a full, not partial, exemption from monetary union. The opt-out which I secured at Maastricht, approved by this House, provides that we will not enter a single currency at any time unless we take a specific decision to do so. That is not a partial but a complete exemption.

As to the money made available to the EMI, to which my hon. Friend referred, that which has been provided by the Bank of England will be returned when the EMI is, in due course, liquidated. It is not a non-returnable payment.

On my hon. Friend's third point, a single currency of course raises serious political, economic and other issues. I have never ruled out a referendum and, again on this occasion, I do not rule out a referendum, but I believe that whether or not it is appropriate is something that we would need to consider at the time.

Engagements

Q5. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Campbell: Is the Prime Minister aware that Richard Budge, who now owns the vast majority of the British coal industry, last week told miners that they would have to take a three-year pay freeze at the same time as awarding himself £50,000? How does that go with the Prime Minister's classless society?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of what Mr. Budge said to the miners, but I will make myself aware. I hope that what the hon. Gentleman has just said will prove to be more accurate than what he said across the Floor of the House about Trafalgar House and Northern Electric a few days ago.

Mr. Trimble: In his statement yesterday, the Prime Minister placed great emphasis on the right of the people of Northern Ireland to decide their own future. In the context of his proposals, will he give an undertaking that, if at some future date the people of Northern Ireland express a wish to become a part of the United Kingdom on the same basis and with the same benefits and the same burdens as everyone else, he will give effect to that wish?

The Prime Minister: As I have said to the hon. Gentleman, we are asking the parties in Northern Ireland and the people in Northern Ireland to see whether they can reach a consensus on what they believe their future should be and how they would wish to deal with that future. That is the whole purpose of the framework document. If the hon. Gentleman and the political parties across Northern Ireland would come forward with that proposition, we would consider it in precisely the same way.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for information about future business?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): The business for next week will be follows:

MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion on section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act.

TUESDAY 28 FEBRUARY—Until 7 o'clock, motions on the Statutory Sick Pay Percentage Threshold Order, the Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order, the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Fund Payments) Order, the Social Security Benefits Up-Rating Order, the Social Security (Contributions) Amendment Regulations and motion relating to the Income-related Benefits Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 3) Regulations.

Followed by motions on the North Yorkshire (District of York) (Structural and Boundary Changes) Order and the Humberside (Structural Change) Order.

WEDNESDAY 1 MARCH—Until 2.30 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Opposition Day (8th allotted day). There will be a debate entitled "Government policy towards the European Union" on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 2 MARCH—Debate on Welsh affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 3 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet as follows:

Tuesday 28 February at 10.30 am: European Community Document No. 7988/94 relating to the conclusion of a partnership and co-operation agreement with Russia, and the unnumbered explanatory memorandum submitted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 27 January 1995 relating to relations with Russia.

Wednesday 1 March at 10.30 am: European Community Document No. 7484/93 relating to posting of workers in the Community.

[Tuesday 28 February:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community documents: 7988/94 and unnumbered, Relations with Russia. Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 48-xxii (1993-94) and HC 70-vi (1994-95).

Wednesday 1 March:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community document: 7484/93, Protection of Workers. Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 79-xxxvii (1992-93) and HC 70-i (1994-95).]

With regard to the following week, I shall give the House some, but not complete, information. On Monday 6 March, I expect to propose the Second Reading of the Criminal Appeals Bill and on Thursday 9 March, until 7 o'clock, I expect to propose the Second Reading of the South Africa Bill. That might be followed by a motion concerning a report from the Select Committee on Broadcasting. Of course, on Friday 10 March, we shall have the first of the non-sitting Fridays.

Since I see that he is in his place, I take this opportunity to say that the whole House would wish to congratulate the Father of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), on the 45th anniversary of his becoming a Member.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank the Leader of the House for that information and associate myself with his remarks about the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath).

With regard to the business for the week after next, will the Leader of the House use his best endeavours to ensure that there will be an Opposition Supply day on Wednesday 8 March, which is, of course, International Women's day, so that the House may debate women's rights and women's status?

With regard to next week's business, will the Leader of the House ensure that, in the interests of open government, important statements are not sneaked out by the Government while the attention of the House is quite rightly focused elsewhere? Is the Leader of the House aware of the very real anger that there was in the House yesterday? The Secretary of State for Health had spoken in debates on Monday and on Tuesday, and had failed completely to mention the pending increase in prescription charges. Indeed, the Secretary of State chose to speak in the debate on Tuesday evening knowing that the planted question had already been tabled on Monday and that the answer had been delayed from Tuesday until Wednesday so that it would clash with other events. Would it not be a good idea to have a debate on open government so that the Government's lip service to that ideal could be exposed?

Will the Leader of the House also bear in mind the need for a debate on the efficiency of Government Departments? Is he aware that, despite representations over many years from individual Members of the European Parliament, from the European parliamentary Labour party and, more recently, from me, Government Departments seem incapable of writing to Members of the European Parliament at any address other than the House of Commons, which causes great hardship all round, including for people in the Post Office here?

Is he further aware that Government Departments even send Members of the European Parliament letters saying that that will never happen again, addressed to the House of Commons? Should we debate the incompetence of Government Departments in that regard, or is it just symptomatic of the fact that the Government cannot get their act together on Europe?

Given the public concern about events related to privatised utility companies, from the 7 per cent. increase recently announced by Yorkshire Water to the £1.25 billion profits announced today by British Gas, is it not about time that we had a debate in Government time, on the regulation surrounding those industries, so that we can have a proper discussion on the need to give further protection to consumers?

Mr. Newton: I shall take note of the hon. Lady's request about what the business should be on Wednesday 8 March when we discuss it through the usual channels.

The suggestion that the prescription charge announcement was sneaked out in some way is pretty far-fetched. First, as the hon. Lady acknowledged, the question was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon) on Monday. As the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said several times yesterday in raising points of order that she thought that the question had been tabled on Tuesday, the inescapable deduction is that the Opposition simply failed to notice that the question had been tabled on Monday and was on the Order Paper.

Secondly, it is simply not the case that the answer was delayed by a day for any particular purpose. Thirdly, it is well known that announcements on those matters are made at this time of year. Fourthly, it is at least six or seven years since the announcement was made in any way other than by a written answer.

The hon. Lady made a point about the efficiency of Government Departments and about where mail was sent for Members of the European Parliament. I was not aware of that problem and I shall certainly see what I can do about it, especially if it helps to improve the evident lack of communication, to judge from the different statements that come from them, between Labour Members of the European Parliament and Labour Members of this Parliament.

There have been a number of opportunities to raise issues concerning privatised industries. I do not anticipate providing time for such a debate in the near future, but I am sure that the hon. Lady will find ways in which to raise those matters if she wishes.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House provide time for an urgent early debate on the success of former nationalised industries so that the House may demonstrate the fact that those industries now make a major contribution to the Exchequer, whereas, when they were nationalised, they were a drain on the Exchequer? Will my right hon. Friend please tell me who will speak for the Government in Wednesday's debate?

Mr. Newton: The first part of my hon. Friend's question appears to be a request for the same kind of debate suggested by the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), but from a rather different and more encouraging perspective. Of course I will bear it in mind. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) has felt able to refrain for once from asking a question about Kent and I congratulate him on the fact that he has an Adjournment debate on that subject next Wednesday.

With regard to another part of next Wednesday's business, I anticipate that the Government's speakers in the debate entitled "Government policy towards the European Union" will be my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Given that the announcement on prescription charges, even though it is made by written answer, is always controversial, in future would it not be a good idea for the occasion of the announcement to be an opportunity for a debate on the funding of the health service, in Government time, and as a regular debate every year?

Will the Government look back at debates on the youth service, funding of the youth service and youth policy? We do not seem to have had such a debate for many years. Will the Government make time for such a debate before the end of this parliamentary Session?

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly take account of the request for such a debate, which might usefully form a debate on the Adjournment at a convenient time. That is not a promise of a debate, but it is certainly a promise to consider the suggestion. With regard to the first half of the hon. Gentleman's question, I really cannot give an undertaking of that kind.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Hastings and Rye): My right hon. Friend will be aware of our plans to commemorate the end of the second world war on 5 May in Westminster Hall. Will he confirm that, for those of us who lost parents and relatives in the far east, those who died there will be included in that commemoration? Will he confirm that the veterans' organisations representing those people will also be invited?

Mr. Newton: As you know, Madam Speaker, and as I explained to the House in questions last week, there is no question whatever of ignoring those who fought in the far east until August 1945. Although the Government are sponsoring separate celebrations in respect of VE day in May and VJ day in August, your view, Madam Speaker, which I share, was that the most appropriate course for Parliament, given the particular timings, was that we here should remember both those events in a single ceremony.

I said last week that representatives of what my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mrs. Lait) described as veterans' organisations—many veterans' organisations—would be asked. I assure her that they will include representatives of organisations concerned with the far east. That will certainly include FEPOW—Far East Prisoners of War.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): On the point raised by several hon. Members about prescription charges, why can we not have a statement next week from the Secretary of State for Health to explain this latest increase, which means that, since the Tories came to power, the prescription charge has increased by 2,525 per cent., which is more than 10 times the rate of inflation? Bearing in mind the fact that most prescriptions now cost less than the prescription charge, what possible justification is there for such a vicious tax being imposed on sick people?

Mr. Newton: I assume that the hon. Gentleman was here during Prime Minister's questions a few moments ago, during which he would have heard the points that were made very clearly by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, including his equation in relation to the money raised by the charges, from which a very large proportion of prescriptions are exempt for various reasons, and the huge amount of additional health care that that provides.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Will my right hon. Friend consider finding an early opportunity for a debate on medical research facilities in the south-east of England? Is he aware that, in my constituency of Beckenham, the Wellcome laboratories are a centre of excellence and expertise of world class? Is he also aware that the proposed

[Mr. Piers Merchant]

Glaxo bid for Wellcome has caused a great deal of concern about the future of those laboratories, and concern about a manufacturing site in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), who, I am sure, would align himself with my concern?

Mr. Newton: As I think my hon. Friend will understand, the Government's position is that commercial decisions are best left to the boards and shareholders of companies, so I would not wish to be drawn too far in commenting on the background to his question. However, he and I share our support for the success of the strong British pharmaceuticals industry, and our hope that the sites in his constituency and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford will find a proper place in future use.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Leader of the House aware that the new Register of Members' Interests is out today? Does he think that there should be a statement and a debate about it, as it shows that more than 200 Members of Parliament, mainly Tories, have interests stretching from directorships to adviserships and consultancies—there are more than 500 in total—yet not one of the entries gives any idea of how much money is obtained? Does he not think it a scandal that at this time, when pensioners have to pay all the increased charges, Members of Parliament cannot be satisfied on 32,000 quid a year?

Mr. Newton: I cannot recall whether the hon. Gentleman has given evidence to the Nolan committee, but I do not think that he has. Perhaps we could consider his question as evidence for that committee. For my part, I think that such matters are best considered in a more measured way than the hon. Gentleman invites us to adopt.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Can my right hon. Friend find an early opportunity for a debate on the constituency of Harborough? If he did, the House would hear of the success of Government policies such as those on employment, education, health and many other aspects, not least agriculture. I am sure that the House would benefit from such a debate.

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly bear that request in mind. Perhaps you, Madam Speaker, would care to bear it in mind for one of the Wednesday morning debates, should my hon. Friend put in an application. I assure him that those who sit on the Government Front Bench are well aware of what he says about his constituency; I was told while he was asking his question that the deputy Chief Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight), has been in Harborough during the past week.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): The Leader of the House will know of the great anxiety of the 800 organisations that have submitted applications under section 11 of the Race Relations Act 1976 and are waiting for the Government's response, which has been promised for no later than the end of this month. If he cannot arrange for the Home Secretary to make a statement before next Tuesday, and he is casting around for the opportunity for a written reply, I have arranged for a question to be tabled on Tuesday that could provide a vehicle by which the Government could give their answer.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is characteristically helpful.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May I ask for a debate or a statement next week on the continuing chaotic traffic conditions in front of Buckingham palace and the great inconvenience that that causes to Londoners and to people visiting London? The works are all to do with the wedding cake, and they cause serious disruption to traffic. Sometimes people cannot get through the area for as long as 20 minutes at a time, and that is damaging.

Mr. Newton: I have observed on one or two occasions that there seems to be some difficulty. I had probably better not comment further without being clearer about precisely who is responsible for the work. I shall try to find out, and shall communicate with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I read this morning—it was in *The Daily Telegraph*, so it must be true—that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was against a referendum, that he said that monetary union would have no political consequences, and that he and the Prime Minister were at one on that issue, so the Prime Minister was certainly not a Euro-sceptic. In view of what the Prime Minister said today during Prime Minister's questions, who is right and who is wrong?

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Gentleman says, that matter was rehearsed again with my right hon. Friend at Prime Minister's questions just now. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer stand four square together.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will my right hon. Friend tell us what arrangements he intends to make for the debates on Tuesday evening on the North Yorkshire and the Humberside structural orders? Will there be one three-hour debate, or can we debate those two matters separately? We had a separate debate on the Cleveland order, and one on Avon only last night. The issues surrounding the Humberside order and the North Yorkshire order are markedly different, so we should have separate debates on them.

Mr. Newton: I shall bear my hon. Friend's point in mind.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): Will the Leader of the House ask the Home Secretary to come to the House next week to make a statement on the progress of the prison privatisation programme, particularly in view of the report that it will cost £150 million to tighten prison security? Will the Home Secretary finance both programmes, or will he finance prison privatisation while cutting the number of policemen on the beat?

Mr. Newton: That point was raised with me in a somewhat different form a week or two ago, and I cannot add to what I said then.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): Will my right hon. Friend consider a debate on the United Nations and, in particular, the importance of upholding resolutions and sanctions, bearing in mind the visit to Baghdad by a

group of British business men who appear to have been seeking to break those UN sanctions? The visit comes at a time when Iraq is failing to comply with UN resolutions seeking to release 625 Kuwaiti prisoners who are still held there.

Mr. Newton: I shall of course bring my hon. Friend's comments to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. She can certainly have no doubt about the British Government's firmness in seeking to uphold UN resolutions concerning Iraq.

Ms Judith Church (Dagenham): Now that early-day motion 531 has the signatures of more than 100 Members, will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on pay relativities and executive pay in view of the high profits that the privatised utilities are declaring?

[*That this House notes with disdain Sir Iain Vallance's comments to the Employment Committee on 31st January suggesting that a National Health Service junior doctor's job might be more relaxing than his current position as Chairman of BT; notes particularly the results of a recent survey which showed over 50 per cent. of junior doctors worked beyond the recommended 72 hours on pay as low as £12,500 a year; believes this compares dismally with Sir Iain's current £663,000 BT salary including a bonus of £185,000 and other benefits of £13,000; further notes that Sir Iain's non-executive directorship on the board of the Royal Bank of Scotland brings in a further £50,000 for one-and-a-half days a month, a weekly rate of £1,371; considers this vastly over inflated salary is neither fair or just reward but a breeding ground for resentment-particularly within his own company-especially if one compares the weekly pay of various grades in BT, notably a domestic cleaner on £162.99, an operator on £193.48, and a clerical assistant on £190.91; and reminds him that it is thanks to the efforts of the workforce, especially CWU members, that last year he pocketed a performance bonus of £185,000, an increase of 105 per cent., whilst the workforce settled for 2.9 per cent. and that since privatisation in 1984 CWU members wages have risen by 80 per cent. whilst his have rocketed by 687 per cent.*]

Mr. Newton: I am of course aware of the early-day motion and the number of signatures on it. I do not anticipate making time available for a debate, but I hope that the hon. Lady would also think it right to refer to the considerable improvements in the competitiveness and efficiency of British Telecom since privatisation.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Bearing in mind the Labour party's policy to foist a national assembly on the people of Scotland, which would cost them up to 29p in the pound extra in income tax, could we have a debate next week on regional government in England, because that is a price which we would have to pay for the Labour party's folly? During such a debate, we in Kent could point out how bitterly we would resent a vast and expensive bureaucracy in Reading interfering in our county.

Mr. Newton: Having breathed a sigh of relief that my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) managed to find something other than Kent to ask me about, I should have realised that I was likely to get it from another quarter. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that matter again.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Is the Leader of the House aware that the scandalous rise in prescription charges was not the only health matter to be sneaked through this week? The new guidelines on continuing care beds in the NHS have been brought out today, which state that responsibility will be placed mainly upon local authorities now. As the Government are closing hospitals for long-term care, such as the Northowram hospital in my constituency, patients will not have a choice and will simply be left to a means-tested system in the community. May we have a debate on people who need long-term care in the NHS and who should not have to pay for it?

Mr. Newton: I take note of what I take to be a request from the hon. Lady for a debate on community care, which is certainly an important subject. But as to the rest of her question, the use of the phrase "sneaking out" in this respect is just ludicrous. A full statement has been made in response to widespread requests from social services and health interests, which sets out clear guidelines on the way in which services will be provided. That is an entirely sensible and helpful thing for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to have done.

Mrs. Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): In view of the huge £1.2 billion profit announced by British Gas today, does not the Leader of the House find it incredible that the most that that company can offer to help cover the running costs of the Energy Saving Trust, which promotes energy efficiency, is a miserable £100,000? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Minister for Energy and Industry found that totally acceptable when he came to the Environment Select Committee on Tuesday? Will he not therefore find time for a debate about the privatised utilities, so that we can examine whether they are in any way operating in the public interest?

Mr. Newton: It is clearly in the public interest for the gas industry to show a record of having reduced real prices to consumers, in the way that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister described, and for it to have delivered the results that it has—the benefits to the consumer and the taxpayer, because of the taxes that it pays on its profits. As for the rest, my main awareness of the activities of British Gas in the sort of area to which the hon. Lady refers is through my extensive contacts with an organisation called Neighbourhood Energy Action, which is well known on both sides of the House. It has a close relationship with British Gas and appears to speak very highly of the help that the company gives it in exactly the area about which the hon. Lady is concerned.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): Can the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the future of the national blood transfusion service, given that today Sir Colin Walker, its chairman, offered a briefing to Members of Parliament from all parties who have expressed concern about its future, yet the *Liverpool Echo* can confidently carry a story that all five blood transfusion centres earmarked for closure are indeed to be closed? That is flying in the face of opinion in the House and ignoring the views of consultants throughout Britain who

[Mrs. Jane Kennedy]

have expressed concerns about the proposals, and it is an example of the shambolic way in which the review has been conducted.

Mr. Newton: I presume that the hon. Lady intends to attend the briefing and to make those points, as it would be legitimate for her to do. It would be appropriate for her to acknowledge that much has been said about privatising the national blood transfusion service, and that it is simply inaccurate. While there is plenty of scope for disagreement about the details—as there is with any review—the purpose is to ensure the continuation of an efficient and effective national blood transfusion service.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Is the Leader of the House aware of early-day motions 343 and 375, which bear signatures from Members on both sides of the House?

[*That this House calls upon Her Majesty's Government in concert with the United Kingdom's partners in the EU to apply economic, political and diplomatic pressure upon the military regime' in Nigeria, to obtain the release of Ken Saro Wiwa, writer, human-rights activist and founder of MOSOP, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, held under the regimes' repressive detention without trial law since May 1994 and facing a possible death sentence if brought to trial before a military court, despite no charges having been brought against him, to release all other opponents of the military regime held under the same law, and to restore, without delay, democratic government and human rights to Nigeria and its people.*]

The early-day motions highlight the case of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a Nigerian writer, human rights activist and leader of MOSOP, who has been held in detention without trial and without any charges being brought since May 1994. As the Nigerian high commissioner has failed—despite assurances to the contrary—to furnish a deputation of Members with the date, place and type of trial that Mr. Saro-Wiwa may have to undergo, can the House have a debate on the gross abuse of human rights, not only in Nigeria, but in other countries?

Mr. Newton: Again, I suggest to the hon. Lady that that is the type of subject on which she might consider seeking a Wednesday morning Adjournment debate, but that would be a matter for Madam Speaker, should such an application be made. On that particular case, she will know that, together with our European Union partners, we have deplored the recent repressive actions of the Nigerian Government and called for the release of detainees, including the man to whom she referred. We shall continue to urge the Nigerian Government to make early progress towards democratic civilian rule.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Will the Leader of the House find time in the near future for a debate on the way in which asylum seekers are dealt with? He will be aware that, a few days ago, the Home Secretary announced changes in procedure, which it seems will lead to more detentions and to people being detained and deported much more quickly, and also to the curtailment of leave for people who have permission to stay in this country, in ways that were not envisaged when the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 was debated. Since those powers are to be used in a way that did not seem to be envisaged when that Act was debated, we ought to have an opportunity to debate the issue now.

Mr. Newton: I will, of course, bring those comments to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that the background—I think that there would be some feeling on this on both sides of the House—is that asylum is also sometimes used in ways that were never intended when the present rules were put in place.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May we have a debate on the policy of sentencing neo-Nazis, particularly as a result of the extraordinary decision yesterday, when, in Teesside Crown court, Mr. Justice Holland decided to give 180 days' community service to an odious and unrepentant neo-Nazi who was found guilty of a series of offences of possessing foul racist material? Apparently, the probation officer suggested that he should be sent to work among the large Pakistani communities in the town so that he might learn the error of his ways. I do not know what the Pakistanis would do to him, but if he were sent among the Jewish community I doubt whether he would be well received.

Mr. Newton: I am not familiar with the details of that case, the background to the advice reported to have been given by the probation officer, or the decision that the judge made. Therefore, as a distinguished lawyer, the hon. and learned Gentleman will understand that I think it sensible that I should refrain from comment.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When considering the request of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) about the planned visit to Baghdad of the British-Iraq interest group, will the right hon. Gentleman consider the group's previous visit to Oman, which had the same ends—to trade with Iraq? A member of that group, which threatened UN sanctions, was the hon. Member for Norfolk, South. I have corresponded with the hon. Gentleman on that subject and given him notice that I would raise the matter this afternoon. The hon. Member for Norfolk, South is an influential member of that group because he is parliamentary private secretary to the Secretary of State for Defence. Is it not unwise of hon. Members to support, even in a private capacity, organisations that seek to bust sanctions, undermine Government and United Nations policy, and give comfort to the regime of Saddam Hussein?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will understand why I shall not attempt a full reply. I happen to know that the hon. Member for Norfolk, South is my right hon. Friend the former Leader of the House, a former Secretary of State for Transport and for Education and Science, who has held a number of other posts. It therefore seems clear that the hon. Gentleman is in a state of confusion.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): The Leader of the House is no doubt aware that South Thames training and enterprise council was put into official receivership in December, leaving many of its creditors in financial crisis, including training providers such as Greenwich Training Company Ltd., which has a good record of both finding employment and providing high-quality training. The right hon. Gentleman will have noticed from the Order Paper that a plethora of questions have been tabled

by hon. Members representing constituencies in south-east London, answers to which have not been satisfactory. Will he find time next week for a debate in which the Minister concerned will come to the House, so that all hon. Members with an interest in the area covered by South Thames TEC can question him directly?

Mr. Newton: I cannot provide an early opportunity for a debate, but I am aware of the concerns to which the hon. Gentleman refers, and I shall bring his further expression of those concerns to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Given the considerable and wide-ranging support in the House and the country for the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, should the Government seek to block its development, as they have said they will in a number of statements, including by the Leader of the House? Should not the Bill be given an opportunity to make progress in Committee so that we can see where we are, and could not the Government set up another Committee for private Members' Bills?

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Gentleman says, the position has been made clear and straightforward on a number of occasions, mostly by my hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People. The Government do not envisage making different arrangements for that Bill from those made for any other private Member's Bill.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will the Leader of the House arrange an early debate on how hospitals deal with the incineration and disposal of their clinical waste? The concern that the matter has raised in my constituency echoes the widespread concern around the country, particularly in the light of written advice from the Government that hospitals offload their responsibility to the private sector to avoid public insurance liabilities for the damage that might be done in the disposal process.

Mr. Newton: I shall bring that point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): I am sure that the Leader of the House is at one with me in being concerned about and condemning the increase in racism and Nazi activity among football supporters. Will the Government make an early statement on the matter, as there is now clear evidence that in Dublin last week and at football grounds up and down the country, Nazi groups such as Combat 18, the British National party and the National Front have sought to spread their filth and orchestrate youth discontent and to drive it in a racist and Nazi direction?

In his inquiry, will the Secretary of State address what Government action can be taken in concert with the police, youth authorities and local government, together with the football authorities, to see whether the problem can be tackled head on?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is well aware, as he implied in his question, that inquiries are being made in the wake of what happened in Ireland recently. It would be wrong for me to anticipate anything that might be thought appropriate in the wake of that. There are not too many things on which the hon. Gentleman and I would find ourselves at one—at least not too many have emerged over the years—but certainly we are at one in seeking to do anything we can to resist this phenomenon.

Mr. Bryan Davies (Oldham, Central and Royton): The Leader of the House will have noticed calls for a debate on the privatised industries. Would that not be an opportunity for us to discuss privatised industries as welfare relief for ex-Ministers and note that the former Foreign Secretary said that it was unwise for Ministers to take up positions in those companies? What is the Government's view, and what will happen to ex-Ministers when they lose their positions after the next election?

Mr. Newton: The Government's view, as I said in reply to a somewhat similar question from the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), is that it is well known that the Nolan committee is examining those matters. The Government will, of course, consider with care any recommendations that it may make.

Mr. Flynn: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I state briefly that the hon. Member to whom I referred in my business question was the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham)?

Madam Speaker: Before hon. Members make any allegations or raise the names of other Members, they should check carefully the personality concerned and the constituency that that Member represents. It saves many problems across the Floor of the House.

Army

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

4.7 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): As someone who had the privilege of serving for a number of happy years in the 11th Hussars, now regrettably a quarter of a century ago, it is with a feeling of great personal pride that I have the honour to open this afternoon's debate on the Army, one of the institutions in our country of which we can be most proud.

Since we last debated the Army nine months ago, its activities have continued to receive widespread coverage. More than 20,000 members of the Army are currently deployed on operations—some 17,000 of them in Northern Ireland, including the home service force element of the Royal Irish regiment, and more than 3,000 in the former republic of Yugoslavia.

As we sit here in the comfort of the Palace of Westminster, British troops are serving along the green line in Cyprus, as observers on the Iraq-Kuwait border, in Georgia and are training in the inhospitable jungles of Brunei. They are also manning garrisons in both hemispheres and on three continents. In more than 30 countries around the world from Brunei to Bermuda, Hong Kong to Ghana, Malaysia to Mauritius and Belize to Nepal, members of the British Army are providing training assistance for the forces of many of our close and good friends around the globe.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): As someone who served with the military police some years ago, I should like to ask the ex-cavalry officer of a Minister a question concerning the deep concern felt by many people in Scotland over the press speculation in relation to the further merging of Scottish regiments. In view of his service experience, the Minister will readily acknowledge that infantrymen need to place absolute trust in their officers, and particularly their non-commissioned officers, when on peacekeeping duties, patrols and so on. That is achieved much more easily within the framework of an infantry regiment. Will the Minister assure the House that the press speculation is utterly groundless?

Mr. Soames: I am very happy to give the hon. Gentleman, in his capacity not only as a Member of Parliament but as a former military policeman, my absolute assurance that no such moves are planned.

I also add—I should have said it at the beginning of the debate—that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is away today and he sends his apologies. Opposition Members have been good enough to understand that he is attending to essential and long-standing business.

Of particular note is the 33-man team which is currently deployed in South Africa to assist in the integration and training of the new national defence force. The fact that we should have been invited to perform that task, I believe, speaks volumes for the very high esteem in which the British armed forces are held worldwide.

As I speak, the United Kingdom Allied Command in Europe mobile force is currently exercising in Norway and the First Royal Anglian Regiment and elements of the Royal Artillery and the Army Air Corps have just finished a major exercise in the United States of America. The Army is extremely busy.

It has been an important period for the Army in terms of developing plans for its organisation and capabilities for the future. It has participated fully in defence costs studies and, as a result of "Front Line First", we were able to announce some significant enhancements to the Regular Army last summer. In addition, last December we announced our plans for restructuring the Territorial Army. I shall refer to those issues later in my speech.

Since we last debated the Army, there have been the most dramatic developments in Northern Ireland. Because of a bold and thoroughly courageous initiative by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, we have arrived at a situation of considerable promise in Northern Ireland. However, the House should remember that, for more than 25 years, the Army's largest and most important commitment has been within the United Kingdom in Ulster.

The Army has carried out its role in support of the Royal Ulster Constabulary with huge distinction, outstanding skill, determination and almost unbelievable fortitude. For 25 years our young soldiers have had to face, day after day, the possibility of horrific and cowardly terrorist attacks. During that time, 650 soldiers have lost their lives and more than 5,500 have been wounded or injured—some of them grievously—while on active service.

Those young men have carried the greatest part of the heat and the burden. For the past 25 years they have had to face, day after day, the awesome responsibility of making split-second decisions on which their lives, and the lives of many other people, have depended. It is an enormous credit to the quality of their leadership, training, discipline and character that they have carried out their duties to the highest standards. We should all be deeply grateful to and very proud of them.

I do not believe that the service men of any other country could have shouldered the burden in quite the way that ours have. I know that, but for the dedication and unequalled professional skills of the Regular Army and the Royal Irish Home Service battalions, many more lives would have been lost and much more property destroyed.

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and I join him in paying tribute to the professionalism of our soldiers in Northern Ireland. What is my hon. Friend's view about the future of Private Lee Clegg? Does he agree that, when Private Clegg is finally released on licence, he deserves to be allowed to return to normal active duties with the armed forces, bearing in mind the fact that, when he was charged, he was doing his duty trying to defend the people of Northern Ireland from terrorism?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As she knows, we are all aware of the situation of Private Clegg, and the disposal of his case will be a matter, eventually, for the Army Board, which, I have no doubt, will have heard what my hon. Friend has said.

As the House will realise, operating in the face of terrorism places a very great burden on all ranks, and when difficulties for our soldiers arise, we therefore have a high responsibility to resolve them effectively. That, of course, is why we have provided all possible legal and

welfare support to Private Clegg and to Guardsmen Fisher and Wright, and why we shall co-operate fully with the review of the law recently announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

In the meantime, our first priority plainly is to support the peace process. The Army has been able to assist in this by adjusting the profile of the armed forces to reflect the welcome absence of terrorist attack. Soldiers no longer undertake routine daytime patrols in most towns and cities, and it is very encouraging that the Royal Ulster Constabulary has been able progressively to extend the areas in which it operates without routine military support.

Tangible signs of a return to normality are all the more remarkable when the House recalls that, during the first half of 1994, both republican and loyalist terrorist attacks showed absolutely no sign of abating. In the first four months before the ceasefire, there were 261 terrorist attacks, which resulted in 37 deaths, whereas in the past six months, in addition to the incident in Newry, two bombs have been planted, neither of which caused any injury. We recognise only too well that, while terrorist organisations retain their weapons and explosives, the peace process could be frustrated. Thus, we remain hopeful but at a very high state of vigilance and readiness.

British troops are now in the third year of operations as part of the United Nations protection force in the former Yugoslavia, where they continue to make a truly vital contribution. The British contingent, which operates in central Bosnia and the eastern enclave of Gorazde, is based around two infantry battalion groups equipped with Warrior and Saxon armoured vehicles together with elements of an armoured reconnaissance regiment equipped with Scimitar and a regiment of Royal Engineers.

Those troops are admirably supported by soldiers from the Royal Logistics Corps, the Royal Signals and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. They serve a six-month tour and the roulement of units in theatre continues on a regular basis. The 1st Battalion Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment, after an extremely distinguished and successful tour, has just started handing over to the 1st Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers, while the 1st Battalion Royal Highland Fusiliers is to be replaced by Devon and Dorsets in May.

British troops continue to support the humanitarian effort by helping to distribute aid, and have assisted some 4,200 convoys carrying more than 230,000 tonnes of aid through central Bosnia since the operation began—a task that has proved particularly important over the winter months. It is worth noting that, in the two months since Christmas, there has been almost a 20 per cent. increase in the amount of aid delivered compared with the previous two months. The House should be in no doubt about the importance of this mission and the number of lives that will have been saved by our people.

The logistics operation in Bosnia has been a brilliant success, and the Royal Logistics Corps deserves the greatest praise and credit.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I am sure that we all agree with the Minister about the importance of aid in order that lives be saved. Can he explain why it is still not possible to take medical aid into the safe haven of Gorazde, which would be vital to save many lives? Why cannot we deliver medical aid into that safe area?

Mr. Soames: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the precise reason. I suspect that it will have been because of the great difficulties of getting any convoys and equipment in or out, because of the difficulties of which the hon. Gentleman is well aware. I will look into that and let him have a more detailed reply.

In addition, we have also played a crucial role in implementing the Muslim-Croat ceasefire in central Bosnia, which has allowed tens of thousands of ordinary people to start rebuilding their homes and lives. Anyone who has seen the damage in that part of the world will understand and comprehend truly the importance of that task. It has involved confidence-building patrols on the former confrontation lines between the parties, manning observation posts, brokering local agreements between the factions and helping to rebuild the local community. The experience, training, hard-won skills and cool heads of our soldiers, of all ranks and arms, have enabled them to handle all this with the greatest skill, imagination and flair.

British forces have helped to underpin those efforts by providing the key support for a large number of civilian infrastructure projects which are creating the foundations for peace to be sustained. That is clearly a fragile process, and one that is often overlooked. We should not underestimate the importance of the work.

More than 116 infrastructure and public utilities projects have been completed with British help. They include the construction of nearly 100 km of roads and the maintenance of another 970 km of important aid routes, the lifting of more than 1,500 mines and the construction of a new bridge and bypass at Bijela, near Mostar, which has carried more than 200,000 vehicles since its completion. Other projects have included the reconnection of electricity, water and gas supplies, vehicle maintenance, refuse collection and the opening of schools. The role of the Royal Engineers in particular has been outstanding, and is a source of the greatest pride and satisfaction to the Army.

The safety of our forces remains of paramount importance, and I assure the House that their position is kept under the most careful and constant review. They are thoroughly trained, well equipped and well led; but, tragically, 12 British service men—11 soldiers and one Royal Marine—have been killed since operations began in Bosnia. I know that the House will wish to extend its profound sympathy to their families in recognition of the ultimate sacrifice that they have made in the pursuit of peace.

The new year ushered in a different phase in the conflict, with the four-month cessation of hostilities agreement that came into effect on 1 January. That agreement is an important step towards a negotiated settlement, and Britfor is already playing a crucial part in helping to implement the agreement on the ground. We have also responded positively to the United Nations' request for additional resources to support implementation—an action that further serves to illustrate our firm and continuing commitment to securing a lasting and peaceful solution to the conflict. Four Lynx helicopters from the Army Air Corps have already deployed; another two Lynx and six Gazelle helicopters

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from the AAC, together with six Royal Air Force Chinook helicopters and 19 UN military observers, remain on standby.

Let me take this opportunity to pay the warmest tribute to the achievements of Lieutenant-General Sir Michael Rose, who recently completed a distinguished 12-month tour in Bosnia. He displayed throughout a remarkable resolve and determination in steadfastly continuing UNPROFOR's mission in support of the international community's efforts to secure a peaceful solution to the war. He deserves our whole-hearted congratulations and thanks for the vital part that he played in helping to transform the situation on the ground—and transform it he did. I also send the House's best wishes to his successor, General Rupert Smith, and wish him well in dealing with the many great challenges that he will have to face.

The House will realise that the Army is truly fortunate to have such exceptional officers, and I wish to salute their efforts.

Mr. Macdonald: The Minister mentioned General Rose. Will he say something about the apparent breakdown of relations between NATO and the general towards the end of his tour? NATO threatened to withhold details of flight plans from him, fearing that he would disclose them to the Serbians and thereby put the NATO aircrew at risk. Will the Minister explain the background to those events?

Mr. Soames: I will not explain the background to any such events, because they did not happen. General Rose is rightly regarded as a highly operational and robust officer, and I have no doubt that he and NATO have had robust exchanges of views from time to time; but by and large, as General Rose has regularly said since, his relationship with NATO worked extremely well and contributed to a very successful tour.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I do not know whether my hon. Friend had the opportunity—probably not, because he is too busy—to watch a recent television programme by John Simpson, in which he put a good question to the Prime Minister of Bosnia, who had said that 70,000 people had been killed in Bihac. Mr. Simpson said that surely that town contained only about 1,000 people, most of whom were soldiers, but the Prime Minister of Bosnia refused to answer that point. It was an extremely good television programme and I commend it to my hon. Friend. Are not some people taken in rather easily by propaganda, from whatever side?

Mr. Soames: I agree with my hon. Friend. I saw that "Panorama" programme and I agree that it was fascinating. I was horrified by that interview. His point about black propaganda is well taken, and should be accepted by all people who try to understand the matter.

The United Nations protection force still has an important mission to perform. British forces should continue their substantial and valued contribution to the international effort in former Yugoslavia. We can all be proud of their courage and skill in carrying out their mission, in what I know from my visits to Bosnia are difficult, demanding and sometimes extremely dangerous circumstances.

The United Kingdom made a major contribution to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda—UNAMIR. Some 600 service men and women played a key role in that operation. The British contingent included technicians from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, who did sterling work in repairing vehicles and who literally got UNAMIR back on the road. Fifty four-tonne trucks were also made available to the UN.

The contingent of 150 men and women from 23 Para Field Ambulance, which formed another part of the British contingent, treated more than 125,000 people, and the field squadron from the Royal Engineers helped in the reconstruction of Rwanda's infrastructure by rebuilding bridges and repairing roads. They were backed by logistics specialists whose skills were at the disposal of the whole UN force.

The British members of UNAMIR filled a critical gap. Their work, lending invaluable assistance to the Rwandan population, non-governmental organisations and the new Rwandan Government alike, was highly praised by all. Their task was completed by the end of November, when they returned home. It was a highly successful deployment, and all the people who took part deserve great credit.

Finally, and closer to home, I should not neglect to mention the important part that the Army has played in assisting the civil authorities to cope with the atrocious conditions that have affected so much of our country in recent months. In December, soldiers from the Territorial Army assisted Strathclyde police in evacuating houses and in delivering emergency supplies during the floods in Paisley, and more recently various units of the Regular Army were deployed in flood relief activities in the north of England.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Minister for mentioning the fine work carried out not far from my constituency in Renfrewshire. When he and I served in a cavalry regiment and in the military police respectively, few officers came up through the ranks. Is he satisfied that the opportunities for promotion are much more widespread and developed for talented non-commissioned officers than they were a few years ago?

Mr. Soames: The opportunities were substantial in my regiment. I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman the assurances that he seeks. Opportunities for promotion throughout the service are available on merit. He knows that no one is keener than the Army to promote young men and women who are likely to make good officers.

The Army has, of course, been actively involved in the implementation of the defence costs study, the results of which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced last July. The study impacted widely on all elements of service activity outside the field Army itself.

"Front Line First" was a great success in identifying areas where savings can be made without impairing the fighting capability of the Army. We have managed to cut costs, not defence, which is allowing us to maintain the Army's capability and to participate in the activities that I have already outlined.

An example for the Army are the proposed changes to the UK command structure. Land command will be established on 1 April 1995. The responsibilities of the new command, which will be the premier operational

headquarters of the British Army, will include not only the land forces in the UK, but those in Germany, Brunei and Nepal, as well as training support organisations in Belize, Canada and Kenya. In consequence, the current UK district structure will be rationalised, and improved operational efficiencies will result. That will result in significant savings and give the Army a command structure that is relevant to the changed strategic environment, and one that we hope will serve it well into the 21st century.

As a result of savings from the defence costs study, we have also been able to make a number of enhancements to the Army's front-line capability. In particular, we announced last July that we would be increasing the planned number of front-line major units by re-roling the Royal Armoured Corps training regiment as an armoured reconnaissance regiment, increasing the number of such regiments from two to three.

The Third Armoured Reconnaissance regiment will form on 1 April 1997. The 9th-12th Lancers, which is currently the Royal Armoured Corps training regiment, will take on the recce regiment role and will be based at Bovington.

This addition to the front line demonstrates our commitment to preserving and indeed increasing the fighting strength of the field Army, even though savings in the support area will result in some reduction in overall military manpower numbers.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Does my hon. Friend agree that, shortly, he and the Minister of State for Defence Procurement will be considering an attack helicopter for the Army? Does he also agree that a machine that has 90 per cent. of the ultimate capability at two thirds of the cost and which has a high proportion of highly advanced British avionics would be an attractive proposition for the Army?

Mr. Soames: It is not for me to be tempted down that road. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be dealing with that matter later. I am sure that he will be able to give my hon. Friend an extremely comprehensive reply, which I am unable to do.

We also announced in "Front Line First" the development of the joint rapid deployment force. The Army is closely involved in the work to define the role missions and concept of operations of the JRDF, and the consequences for such things as command and control, the capabilities that are needed within our force structure, and logistic support implications including strategic lift. In this work we plan to build, where possible, on the capabilities of our existing rapidly deployable forces, to allow us to project military forces quickly at a distance in support of our defence and security policy objectives.

We have already announced a number of communications enhancements and developments of existing command and control arrangements to that end. We will make further announcements as the work that I have described matures.

Initial planning has focused on lighter forces, including the 5th Airborne Brigade in the Army, but in principle we might wish to draw on any of our national contingency forces for a rapid operation. The important point is that the force we send must be adequately matched to the needs of the operation, the tasks that it is asked to take on and, above all else, the risks that it is likely to face.

The Army's principal war-fighting formations are assigned to NATO's Allied Command Europe rapid reaction corps—the ARRC—commanded by a British officer, Lieutenant General Walker. The ARRC headquarters is now firmly established in its permanent peacetime location in Rheindahlen, near Monchengladbach, where the United Kingdom is well placed to fulfil its role as framework nation. Thirteen nations are represented in the headquarters in Rheindahlen, which is due to be declared fully operational in the spring.

Last autumn, the United Kingdom provided the headquarters infrastructure for two major exercises, one in the local area and the other immediately afterwards in Denmark. Those exercises demonstrated the viability of the headquarters and underlined the major contribution that the United Kingdom is making to the ACE rapid reaction corps.

The headquarters of both I(UK) Armoured Division and 3(UK) Division were involved in those exercises, as well as NATO's multinational division central, to which the United Kingdom contributes a quarter of the headquarters' staff and to which we assign 24 Airmobile Brigade.

I know that the Territorial Army is a matter of great concern to the House. The Government remain wholly committed to a wider use of the Territorials. That was exemplified by the deployment of a TA platoon, drawn principally from the 4th-5th Royal Irish Rangers, as part of the Falkland Islands garrison from July to November last year.

That deployment was a success, and a composite TA company will therefore undertake a four-month garrison tour in the Falklands from next month. In addition, during the past year, a number of individual TA officers have served on special regular engagements in Bosnia. When the Royal Welch Fusiliers deploy to Bosnia in May, we expect to include in their number some 30 TA personnel on special engagements.

As we announced last year, the Territorial Army is to be restructured at a size of 59,000 with a new role as that of general reserve to the Army. There will be some alteration in the balance of arms and services within the TA reflecting that new role, in particular a shift from infantry towards armour and the logistic services. Within the Royal Armoured Corps, the Royal Yeomanry will re-role to form the Army's nuclear, biological and chemical defence regiment, thus demonstrating the Government's confidence in the TA providing this unique capability for the Army.

Within the infantry, the support weapons platoons of the eight battalions currently so equipped will be concentrated in four specialist fire support battalions. Some reservations have been expressed about this element of our plans, but it is our firm view and that of the chiefs that that arrangement, by permitting heavy weapons to be made available to support any TA infantry battalion in training or on operations, will greatly enhance the flexibility and operational effectiveness of the TA infantry.

Our plans build on the one-Army concept. That concept is based on the TA and the Regular Army sharing a common military ethos, the same command structure, common doctrine and tactics, the same regimental system and similar equipments and training. The future TA will

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be highly relevant to our operational needs, cost-effective and usable in an even wider range of circumstances than hitherto.

There has, of course, been understandable disappointment in some units that are to convert or amalgamate, and I understand the concerns of those affected. I assure the House, however, that we have kept the changes to the minimum consistent with our operational needs taking priority. In such cases, it is our intention to take forward into the new unit those traditions, honours and unique distinctions which are so important to each and every part of the Army.

The Government's commitment to strong reserve forces is undiminished, and I believe that the restructuring will enable the Territorial Army to continue to be a key component of the Army and, as such, to provide challenges and rewards for the men and women who voluntarily give up so much of their spare time in the service of their country.

I do not like to introduce a note of bipartisanship into our agreeable debate, but I am afraid that I shall have to. Events have come to a pretty pass when, last week, in the debate on the Royal Navy, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) had to pray in aid the Conservative research department in telling us what Labour's defence expenditure plans would be.

The hon. Gentleman is a new boy and a welcome addition to Labour's defence team. Indeed, as I said, he made an excellent speech. He claims not to have read all the documents that come out of Walworth road. If he had not read any since 1987, he still would not have missed any on Labour's defence policy. Members of Labour's Front Bench do not have a policy on defence expenditure, because, if they did, it would be unacceptable to the party or unacceptable to the country.

However, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has blown away the twisted construction that passes for the Front Bench team's camouflage of Labour's defence policy. He has spent the past few weeks stating time after time after time that the Labour party's policy towards the single currency is absolutely clear—it was the one passed at the 1993 party conference. If the 1993 labour party conference is good enough to establish the Labour party's policy on a single currency, surely the 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994 Labour party conferences are sufficient to establish what its defence policy is.

Opposition Members had better understand what the country and, for that matter, the Conservative research department, will assume from here on: in the lifetime of a Parliament, a Labour Government would reduce defence expenditure to the average level of other western European countries. That is a cut of more than £6 billion from current levels, which already include the 25 per cent. reduction from the end of the cold war. What is Labour's policy—to get rid of the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force or—the subject of today's debate—the Army?

The country can assume that the Labour party will scuttle all the Navy, ground the Royal Air Force or disband the Army until it is prepared to present a cogent defence policy to the House that it can carry at its party conference.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): It is a pity that the Minister, having given us a fair and accurate assessment of the Army, should resort to such platitudes and attacks. He cannot keep a straight face himself, but may I ask him a particular point? He mentions in great detail the Territorial Army and, as the Minister knows, we support him in his efforts to try to modernise the reserves and find a place for them in the modern Army.

Lady Olga Maitland: Rubbish.

Dr. Clark: I am sorry that the hon. Lady has shouted, "Rubbish." The Minister also knows that, to find that place, we need legislation. We in the Labour party recognise that and have told the Minister that, if we were involved in some minor consultation, we would be prepared to give a fair wind to such legislation because we believe it necessary for the future of the Army. May I ask the Minister seriously when may we expect that legislation?

Mr. Soames: I am happy to consult, but may I say that that was an unsatisfactory response to the fly that I lobbed on the water about Labour party policy on defence. It proves what I said in the debate last week on the Royal Navy: that, to be frank—I regret to say this to the hon. Gentleman, who is a nice man—

"there is no field of politics in which the Labour party is less convincing than defence."—[*Official Report*, 16 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 1225.]

I am, however, grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support of the Territorial Army, which he has made plain in the past. We hope to bring forward the paper for consultation as soon as possible and as soon as we have a firm date, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will wish to involve the hon. Gentleman.

For the Army, the past year has been one of high operational activity and of change and planning for change. The nation can be proud of the way in which our soldiers have carried out their duties, often in the most difficult circumstances, in this country and abroad. Nevertheless, we are, regrettably, having to reduce the size of our armed forces and to make redundant men and women who have served their country very well.

Perhaps we should pause to consider why almost 80 per cent. of those who leave the services are in employment or another chosen activity within three months of leaving and why 93 per cent. of them are in that position after 15 months. It is not only because of the remarkable work done by the resettlement organisations—they do a fantastic job. There are other important reasons which I believe to be quite clear.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): While my hon. Friend is talking about percentages, and knowing that he is a very fair-minded man, would he care to comment on the 50 per cent. cut in the defence budget and the services proposed by the Liberal Democrats, which is especially relevant in the south-west, and the fact that, in my constituency, a quarter of all jobs are in defence?

Mr. Soames: That is perfectly true, and my hon. Friend makes a fair point. To be frank, it is neck and neck in which are least convincing, Labour Members or the Liberals. Plainly, under the kind of policies proposed by the Liberal Democrats or by the leader of the Labour party, job cuts in my hon. Friend's constituency would be very serious.

I return to why there is such an extraordinarily high take-up of service men and women on leaving the services—quite apart, as I said, from the excellent work of

the resettlement organisations. It is due to their reliability, adaptability, self-discipline, self-organisation, self-reliance, resourcefulness, loyalty, teamwork, leadership, goal-orientation, integrity, decisiveness, self-motivation, commitment and responsibility, which mark out the men and women who serve in Her Majesty's armed forces. They are truly of a quality not found in any other organisation in the land.

A journalist recently remarked that, as nearly every British institution seems to be undergoing an almost total systems failure, only the armed forces seem to have maintained a high degree of credibility and a unity of language and performance. He went on to say that he believed that their words of "can-do" seduced and impressed a country that so often and so sadly feels that it cannot.

That is what makes the Army and the other two services the best trained, the best led and the best motivated work force in the country. That is what makes me extremely proud to be the Minister responsible for the armed forces, and to rejoice that this wonderful country should possess such a priceless and golden asset for the defence of the realm and the vigorous promotion of our national interests all over the world.

4.44 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): May I first join the tribute paid to our armed forces, especially to our Army since we are debating it, by the Minister? It is customary that we pay such a tribute, but because it is habitual, it does not mean that it is any less sincere. I know that the House will understand, in this week of all weeks, if I pay tribute in particular, as did the Minister, to those members of our armed forces who over the past 25 years and more have been left with the awesome and awful task of combating terrorism in Northern Ireland. I am sure that, as we reflect on yesterday's first step forward, all hon. Members present will have thoughts for the families of those who have lost loved ones in serving all the people of this country over that quarter of a century.

In that context, I should also say that, while we normally refer to the dedication and commitment of our armed forces, if the events in Northern Ireland have shown one thing, it is that the professionalism of the British Army is without doubt the highest of any army in the world. I can think of no other army which could have conducted itself under such circumstances, with so many young men and women, and have committed so few mistakes. Mistakes have been made, but in comparison to the potential number, they have faded into insignificance. That is not in anyway meant to diminish any loss of life because of those mistakes, but it puts into context the cases of Private Lee Clegg and others.

Labour Members, as well as—I am sure—the Government, have never believed that the containment and defeat of terrorism in Northern Ireland or elsewhere was a sufficient condition for a solution to the problems of that unhappy Province, but it was a necessary condition. As is often the case, it was a task imposed on our armed forces, not by the success of politicians, but by our failures. So the first chinks of light which are beginning to pierce the decades of darkness are a tribute not only to those who are engaged in dialogue in the Province and outside, but to those who for a quarter of a century have been engaged in the maintenance of law and order. We can only express the hope that, as politicians increasingly put away their prejudices, members of the British armed forces will be allowed to operate in a context in which they may increasingly put away their guns.

We were disappointed with the Minister's speech. We thought that a record was going to be set tonight. For the first 34 minutes of his speech, I sat in astonishment because I found that I could not disagree with any of the words that he uttered. Indeed, towards the end, there was an almost half-hearted attack on the Labour party; a token and symbolic act that had been handed to him by central office. I suspect that, in the great office of Minister of State for the Armed Forces, we have a secret thinker. I do not know how someone who thinks on such a level could have sneaked into the Ministry of Defence. Obviously, the Minister would not have got the post had there been an election for it among his colleagues.

Labour Members could agree with the vast majority of what the Minister said, as far as it went today. Therefore, it has been no surprise that the question of promotion, asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), has been answered. There must be ample scope for promotion when a relatively insignificant unknown cavalryman, without family connections or social advantage, can rise to the great office of state as Her Majesty's Minister of State for the Armed Forces. We can all take heart from that living embodiment of meritocracy in Britain.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way as he referred to me. I do not believe for a moment that the 11th Hussars of 25 years ago had a healthy mixture of officers who went in through the traditional methods and officers who came up through the ranks—no way.

Dr. Reid: I am not sure of the entry system in the 11th Hussars. However, the Minister is a man of enormous stature. As Rab C. Nesbitt would have said, it must have been some size of a horse.

On a more serious note, we are concerned about promotion. There was rapid promotion through the ranks until 1945 as a direct result of the conditions of war and the death of the officer class. After that, there was a dramatic reduction in the number of officers who rose through the ranks. The trend is now moving in the other direction. I know from my experience of spending four days with some new recruits at Westbury during the officer selection that there is a stringent selection test. I understand that more than 50 per cent. of the new recruits at Westbury now come from non-public schools. However, a high proportion of recruits still come from public schools, which account for only about 8 per cent. of the population. The trend is moving in the right direction, although not necessarily at the correct rate.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): It is interesting that this place has a high proportion of people from public schools. I understand that the leaders of two out of the three major national parties went to public schools. Is that correct?

Dr. Reid: I did not know that there were three major national parties; I thought that there were only two. As I understand it, foremost among the schools that have sent people here as Members of Parliament—I am pleased to say that they are members of the party that is about to be

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the party of government—is St. Patrick's in Coatbridge. With three Members of Parliament here, it is comparable even with the public schools. As one of the three hon. Members, I take some pride in that.

Lady Olga Maitland: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Reid: Yes. I shall eventually get on with my speech.

Lady Olga Maitland: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way in his characteristically charming manner.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the balance between the number of public schoolboys and the number of state schoolboys who became soldiers. Does he agree that state schools should put more leadership into their teaching of children?

Dr. Reid: The Government should put more resources into state schools. I do not think that everything in our state schools is good and that everything in our public schools is bad. The curriculum and ethos of public schools lend themselves to the leadership qualities that are demanded at Westbury. Nevertheless, I believe that the major difference between the two types of school is resources. I do not, however, want to go into an education debate with the hon. Lady.

The Minister's attack on Labour seemed, at best, half-hearted. The Minister accused my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) of praying in aid Tory central office. The fact that the Minister had to pray in aid the shadow Foreign Secretary, quoting a Labour party conference decision on the European single currency as a reference to how much we would spend on defence, seemed far more convoluted than anything that my hon. Friend said. However, let us return to our bipartisan approach. We were in agreement with much of the Minister's speech, as far as it went.

I shall mention today some procurement matters and one or two specific matters. However, I shall major on peacekeeping and, the Minister will be glad to hear, on Labour's demand for a full defence review, which he has questioned. I shall try again to explain to the Minister in simple terms what we mean by that.

We welcome the widening use of the Territorial Army and the move towards integrating the experience of the Territorial Army with that of the regular Army. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) said, we are disappointed that there has not yet been any positive or concrete movement on a Bill for the reserve forces. We would be willing to give our backing to such a Bill. We do not give an open cheque, but we want such a Bill to be enacted as soon as possible.

General procurement matters, including the management and system of procurement, were dealt with fully by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central in last week's Navy debate, so I do not want to dwell at length on them. However, I want to raise one or two matters of particular interest to the Army. Standardisation and inter-operability are arguably even more vital on the land than in the air or at sea. The Minister will be aware that, for many years, standardisation and inter-operability have tended to mean buying American. Given the new and emerging European dimension and the European defence architecture and identity, is the Minister convinced that this is still a useful assumption? What consideration is being given to this question?

A number of projects could have a significant impact on the ability of the British Army both to act in concert with its European allies and to benefit from a Europe-wide logistical organisation. I mention the attack helicopter, the medium-range and long-range anti-tank systems—TRIGAT—the future reconnaissance vehicle, light-armoured vehicles and future gun and missile systems. Can the Minister tell us tonight how many attack helicopters he intends to order? Can he be more specific about the date when he expects to make a decision on the purchase of the attack helicopters?

Does the written answer from the Minister of State for Defence Procurement dated 31 January, in which he said that the decision would be taken "later in the year" suggest that there has been slippage since his previous statement on 4 May last year? Has there been slippage in the intended in-service date? In last year's defence statement, it was noted that the in-service date intended for the attack helicopter was the "end of the decade".

In another written answer dated 31 January, the Minister referred to the in-service date as

"the early part of the next century."

Hon. Members may think that I am being churlish in distinguishing between the phrase, "end of the decade" and the phrase

"the early part of the next century".—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. *560*.]

However, we have become used to such apparently minor nuances marking some slippage in projects. Can the Minister clear up the matter tonight?

I shall deal now with Bosnia, the first of the two general matters, and more specifically with United Nations peacekeeping. In the nine months that have elapsed since the previous Army debate, our service men and women have continued to perform their difficult and demanding duties in Bosnia with great skill and determination, as the Minister noted. There has been some criticism of the United Nations protection force over the past two years. Although some of the criticism has been justified, much of it has been highly irresponsible.

People should not doubt, whatever view they take of the conflict in Bosnia and whatever side their prejudices tend to lead them towards, that the British troops and the UNPROFOR troops are making an invaluable contribution in that theatre. The number of innocent lives blighted by the conflict would have been far greater without UNPROFOR's efforts, as the Minister said earlier.

No one should be in any doubt about the regard, affection and admiration that we have for General Sir Michael Rose. We have found him to be as professional as we would have expected, more impressive than we thought that he could be and endlessly civil when we have made inquiries, even under the most trying of circumstances.

General Rose is not the first to have been accused by one or more of the factions in Bosnia of leaning towards this or the other side of the argument. We are convinced that he has carried out his duties as we would expect him to, without bias and within the objectives that have been given to him. He has applied the rules of engagement and he has maintained neutrality. The United Nations is not in Bosnia as a party to the internal civil war. It is there for

specific, limited purposes. We have no doubt that General Rose has carried out his duties not only to the best of his ability, but to the best ability of any soldier who could have been given the post. We wish his successor, Rupert Smith, well.

On more general matters connected with UNPROFOR, in the last Army debate I identified several serious flaws in the UN operation in Bosnia. Sadly, it is clear from what has happened since then that those flaws have not been rectified. In particular, the position in Bihac, just like the attack on Gorazde which preceded last year's debate, has highlighted the continued mismatch between the objectives established in UN Security Council resolutions and the means provided by the UN to realise them.

Resolution 836 authorises the use of "all necessary means" to defend safe areas. However, in the 20 months that have elapsed since the passage of that resolution, none of the ground forces required to fulfil their mandate have actually been put in place. As we have seen, attempts to control the situation on the ground through the sporadic use of air power above the ground have failed.

The next reason why the safe areas policy has been thrown into crisis is the failure of the United Nations to insist on their full demilitarisation. Territory that is used as a centre for the military operations of one of the combatants will naturally and always become the target of the military operations of the other. Unless and until the safe areas are cleared of all combatants, it will not be possible to make them truly safe for the civilians who inhabit them.

Experience has taught us that the way in which the UN makes and implements policy needs to be thoroughly reviewed in order to ensure that the mistakes made in Bosnia, as in Somalia, are not repeated in future. In particular, there is a need to ensure that, when it is formulating mandates and drafting resolutions, the Security Council takes account of what is militarily achievable as well as what is politically desirable.

I have said before from the Dispatch Box that there are some problems to which there are no military solutions. We are aware of the tendency of politicians when they are under pressure to pass the buck to the armed forces. What I have said implies an enhanced role for military advisers in the initial planning stages of UN operations and in the drafting of UN resolutions.

If the prospects for a peaceful long-term settlement of the conflict in former Yugoslavia seem remote, we can at least take comfort from the fact that the temporary ceasefire has led to a significant reduction in the level of violence. In the near future, however, we should flag up the fact that there is a serious risk that the military situation may again escalate out of control, perhaps even to the point where containing the conflict may no longer be possible.

The threat comes from two sources. The first is the ultimatum issued by President Tudjman that the Croatian Government will not renew UNPROFOR's mandate when it expires on 31 March and that all personnel attached to UNPROFOR will be required to leave the country within three months. Quite apart from the facts that UNPROFOR will lose the use of Zagreb as the location of its headquarters and that access to Bosnia from the Adriatic, which has been so crucial to the humanitarian aid operation, will become impossible, the withdrawal of UNPROFOR's presence in Croatia threatens to destabilise the region as a whole.

The second general threat to UNPROFOR's operation, and also to UN peacekeeping efforts more generally, comes from a distant quarter, in the form of the United States National Security Revitalisation Act passed by the House of Representatives last week. I can understand that the Minister may find it difficult to respond to this point. However, we believe that that Act, which requires the US Government to deduct from their contributions to the UN peacekeeping budget any costs incurred unilaterally in the course of conducting peacekeeping efforts, including UNPROFOR, is not a move forward.

It is our sincere hope that, on reflection, Congress will decide to reject the Act and, if it does not, that President Clinton will be able to veto it. United Nations peacekeeping should be regarded as a vital element in any strategy to promote international peace and security.

It is in that context that we consider the question of Angola. The Minister did not refer to that subject earlier, and perhaps some reference to it by the Minister of State for Defence Procurement when he replies to the debate would enlighten us about the present position.

The UN Security Council has agreed to send a peacekeeping force of 7,000 to Angola. As far as we understand it, the Government are considering whether, and in what way, they can make a contribution to that force. I understand that consideration has been given to sending support and logistical troops.

We are sympathetically disposed to the general aim, particularly as the lack of transport and logistical support appears to have been a significant obstacle to the progress of the peacekeeping process in the past. However, we would want to know, and to satisfy ourselves, that the Government are satisfied that we have the resources to do that; that the UN planning has been adequate; and that both the objectives and rules of engagement are clear and concise.

Are the Government happy with the contingency planning if things were to go wrong in Angola as they have done in other areas? The Opposition are only too well aware of the dangers in Angola from the widespread distribution of anti-personnel mines—a point that has been raised on several occasions by Opposition Front-Bench Members—and we are aware of the fact that two previous UN missions—although they were not peacekeeping missions—to Angola have failed. We would like to be satisfied on all those points before we could record our full support for a Government decision on that matter.

I want now to consider a matter which rivets Ministers as it is at the core of our considerations: British defence policy and our argument for a defence review. The Minister, who I know follows this argument word by word, line by line, will forgive me for going over it in some detail today. He expressed some reservations about this, as did others, during the debate on the Navy.

What is the context? Since the last Army debate, the Government have announced the conclusion of the defence costs study, which is the third round of defence cuts in three years. Like the two previous rounds, it failed to square the circle of dwindling resources and escalating commitments.

It is our contention that Ministers have arrived at wrong answers because they have asked the wrong questions. Instead of asking how to produce the best defence for Britain, they have been asking how to produce the biggest

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cuts to meet the demands from the Treasury. The budgetary imperative of the defence costs study was even more blatant this time than it was through the "Options for Change" exercise. I am sure that hon. Members noticed that a Treasury "enforcer" sat on each of the study teams set up by the Ministry of Defence.

Over the past few years, we have made it plain that we believe that the Government's approach to the restructuring of our armed forces has been incoherent and lacking in strategy. We have made it equally plain that any changes should have been predicated upon a full and comprehensive defence review. Only then could we have ensured that any reduction in defence expenditure was coherent, managed and based on strategic rationale.

The need for a defence review, far from diminishing, has never been greater than it is today. In the past, the Government have obstinately refused to recognise the advice given to them. That advice was proffered by the Labour party and by a formidable range of opinion inside and outside Parliament.

Because the Government refused that advice, it is no surprise that, when the man from the Treasury called, as he did in his annual visit over the past three or four years, the MOD door was lying open. When the man from the Treasury left, not only was the cupboard a little barer, but the Office of State was left in a shambles.

The MOD has been the victim of its own negligence. It has stumbled and staggered through half a decade of decimation. It is now saying, with no sense of irony, that it should warn against a full defence review because that would mean a period of instability for our forces. Ironic though that might be, that suggestion—preposterous as it is bearing in mind whence it came—demands a response.

The first point to be made to those who say that a full defence review would cause change and instability is that changes are continuing, and will continue, irrespective of the assurances of Ministers. We need only read the papers: last week the generals were depleted; the week before it was Rosyth and yesterday morning it was the Marines. The mayhem resulting from the cuts already planned is continuing, and will continue for some considerable time.

More than that, even as the Prime Minister issued bland assurances that the upheaval was over, further cuts and upheavals were being planned and discussed. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow asked whether any discussion was taking place within the Ministry of Defence about the eventual abolition, elimination or diminution of the regiments. He appeared to receive a blanket denial that any such discussions or considerations were taking place. I advise my hon. Friend to read the Minister's words extremely carefully, because the Minister will not deny that consideration is to be given to various projects, one of which, British Army 2000, postulates a new corps involving at the very least a diminution of the traditional role of the regimental system. Last weekend's press revealed that, but it has been known for some time.

The regimental system has made our Army the pride and envy of the world.

Mr. Soames: I apologise for interrupting the hon. Gentleman, but may I put his mind at rest about the article that appeared in the *Sunday Express*? There is indeed important work being conducted on the future of the Army, as the hon. Gentleman would expect—the Army will not stand still between now and the next century—but the suggestion that the regimental system is under threat in any way is absolute nonsense. It is quite untrue, and I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman that assurance from the Dispatch Box.

Dr. Reid: I thank the Minister for saying that—and especially for saying that the Army will not stand still between now and the next century. That is precisely the point that we are trying to make. The Minister said as much last week, and I think that he was quoting the First Sea Lord when he used a telling phrase. I cannot remember his exact words, but it was something like, "Let the word be known among the multitudes that the storm has passed." Then he felt compelled to add, "But the swell will be felt for some time." No wonder he felt compelled to add those words, because major change is under consideration. The Army and the other armed forces will not stand still.

The swell continues not only because of the most recent changes but because other changes just as great in extent and effect are under consideration. I see that the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), the Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, is nodding, although the Minister is not. Sometimes I do not know whether the Minister is in control—

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I know that the hon. Gentleman was wearing his spectacles when he said that I was nodding, but actually I was shaking my head, not nodding it.

Dr. Reid: Let the nod be struck from the record, although I felt that the hon. Gentleman was shaking his head in a positive manner.

The Minister was talking about waves last weekend. Those who know about such things tell me that the wonders of technology now allow the owners of aquatic leisure establishments to use a new device for the entertainment of customers—a wave-making machine. I have a funny feeling that someone in the Ministry of Defence has got his hand on one of those machines, because for the past four years, every time a Minister denies at the Dispatch Box that any further upheavals or waves of cuts are being contemplated, within six months he or a fellow Minister is back in the House announcing yet another wave.

To those who declare that instability will be avoided and change will not occur so long as we do not have a defence review, I reply that I am merely stating the obvious: change will occur, and it is being considered.

Dr. Godman: The Minister's assurance about the retention of our military regiments is not only good for us to hear but most important for soldiers serving with the infantry regiments, and even more so for their families.

Dr. Reid: Yes. I have no doubt that this Minister at this time and in this position will argue strongly against any idea of abolishing the infantry regiments or other regiments. However, we are all aware that some people believe that the Army could be made leaner, fitter and all the other euphemisms designed to introduce cuts and radical change, if the regimental system were abolished. That idea is still under consideration.

Mr. Soames: There are huge and important issues to be settled in the defence world, and I know that the hon.

Gentleman is aware of those. He has good views on many of them, which he and I have discussed from time to time. But please may I try to drag him off that pointless argument about abolishing the regimental system?

The British Army 2000 project is important, and plainly tactics and strategy, like everything else, change. I know that the hon. Gentleman gets around quite a lot, but if he met the coming generation of future leaders in all three services they would tell him that they expect and know that change will come. The Army is always an evolving animal. Please could we lay that argument to one side? I ask the hon. Gentleman to accept that there is no such plan afoot, and to move on to more serious and substantial matters on which there can be real and important debates and arguments.

Dr. Reid *rose—*

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): Tell us about Labour party policy.

Dr. Reid: I am trying to outline Labour policy in some detail—more coherently than anything that we have heard from the Government over the past five years.

What I said about the regiments was a response to points raised by my hon. Friends. The significant factor—I am glad to agree with the Minister here—is that change will occur. Let no one suggest that not having a defence review means that there will be no change. Thus, I have established the first premise of our argument.

The question is not whether change will take place—it will—but whether the process of change will be managed, systematic, rational and strategically coherent. That is what we mean when we talk about a full defence review. A review represents the sensible precaution of reading the route map before setting out on the journey. Of course, especially in military and foreign affairs, there will be necessary diversions, unforeseen obstacles, climatic conditions and atmospheric changes, but if we had a full defence review at least we should have some rational idea of our ultimate destination, and of the area that we mean to traverse to get there.

In contrast, over the past five years we have seen two Secretaries of State for Defence standing in the bows of the good ship Ministry of Defence and sailing into waters that they have never considered, without charts and with few navigational aids and few friends. Compared with that, a defence review would be a godsend for our forces.

Having established the fact that change will happen and must be managed, let me deal with the calumny that a defence review would mean the big bang catastrophe—that somehow within six months the Labour party would try to restructure everything all over again. Far from introducing further instability, a full defence review would promise the potential for a bedrock of stability. It would be nothing more than an analysis leading to the reasoned establishment of a framework of strategic criteria for consistent application to any future proposals for change. I know that some of those words—such as analysis, reason, criteria, strategic and consistent—are alien to the Government's traditions, but they represent what we are talking about when we ask for a full defence review.

The Minister and other Conservative Members have asked to hear some of our views—and we can tell them about those, because even now some of the parameters of the framework are obvious to anyone who has observed the shambles of the past few years.

First, it is recognised that defence is not only the primary duty and responsibility of the Government, but largely the daughter of foreign policy. We can see that that immediately creates problems for the Government. If they do not know what their foreign policy is, how can they work out a coherent defence and security policy if it is a consequence of their foreign policy? For a Government who do not know from week to week what their relationship is even with our European allies, far less than with countries further abroad, the most simple primary criterion of a defence review becomes a major problem.

Mr. Soames: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that our principal and main defence relationship—one to which we are irrevocably wedded—is with NATO, and that therefore the prospects which he is raising simply do not exist in terms of foreign policy?

Dr. Reid: I have no difficulty in agreeing with the Minister's proposition, but I do not know what he thinks may be the implications of what he has said. No one can discuss our participation in NATO without discussing our relationship with the rest of the European defence architecture, including the Western European Union and the intergovernmental conference. A Government who are split down the middle about our relationship with Europe and about the intergovernmental conference cannot have a fixed relationship with NATO. Difficulties are created for the Government even on the first premise of a full defence review.

The second criterion is obviously the matching of commitments and resources. There must be a balance between resources and commitments, and between different capabilities. Those factors, and the balance between front-line units and support services, have been primarily determined during the past years on factors which have nothing to do with Britain's real security needs.

In the late 20th century, our defence structures are a product of a complex network of interrelationships between a diverse range of elements which comprise military power. Defence policies shaped in a piecemeal fashion with successive waves of cuts in different sectors will never be adequate for that task. We cannot entirely blame the present Ministers, who have only come along on the crest of the fourth or fifth wave and have inherited the present situation.

Nevertheless, the consequences of successive waves of cuts, and the piecemeal fashion in which they have been carried out, are obvious. The process of a defence review by stealth that the Government are engaged in—one year looking at combat arms, the next year considering the role of the reserves and the year after that restructuring support services—has produced nothing but chaos and confusion. That is why the Government have failed, and why we insist that a proper defence review is necessary.

The third criterion—I am only choosing those criteria which must be obvious to most hon. Members—would be the relationship of our defence security needs with the strategic industrial base of our defence industries. Once again, the Government have particular problems in facing

[Dr. Reid]

up to that, because—whatever they may say—they are in practice apparently wedded to the theory of non-intervention in the free market.

I admit that we took some heart from the speech of the Minister of State for Defence Procurement during the debate on the Navy. I would hesitate to ruin the future career of the right hon. Gentleman, but it did seem that perhaps the first chinks of light on this subject were beginning to fall, even in the darkest recesses of the MOD.

We can use those three criteria to start the evolution of a defence review and, subject to them, we can identify some of the secondary criteria that would flow from them in relation to the structure of the Army and our armed forces. There are three key words here—flexibility, deployability and sustainability.

Our armed forces must be flexible, and able to respond to a wide variety of challenges. The Opposition oppose the purchase of a stand-off nuclear missile, because, among other reasons, it failed to meet the criteria, and did not represent value for money. Our forces must be deployable, and have the tactical and strategic mobility required to move rapidly in the event of a crisis.

There have been fewer interventions since we started discussing the real meat of a coherent strategy. Conservative Back-Bench Members are sitting listening to every word.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for some 40 minutes, and I thought that I would give him a chance to finish.

Dr. Reid: Our armed forces have gone through five years of chaos, incoherence and hell, and they are entitled to 40 minutes of common sense from the Opposition.

Mr. Soames: Cheeky bugger.

Dr. Reid: I may be cheeky—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. I am not totally sure that I heard the word used by the Minister. If it was the word that I thought it was, the Minister would perhaps like to withdraw it.

Mr. Soames: Of course I withdraw the word. It was meant with affection.

Dr. Reid: Not too close an affection, I hope. Even bipartisanship has its limitations on this side of the House.

The Minister will agree with much of what I have said, but I am putting it in a coherent format. Our ability to deploy the British Army out of area is as important as ever, but it is being called into question by the Government's policy—specifically by sealift.

Our armed forces must be sustainable and be provided with the full range of stocks, spares, maintenance facilities and logistic support required for them to function effectively in combat. Never again must we find ourselves in the situation we did before the Gulf war, when 77 per cent. of our tanks could not be used. As I said on that occasion, the Lada had a better record of reliability than some of the British tanks. The Minister well knows that it eventually took two divisions to produce one.

A full defence review would not be a catastrophic big bang. It would be an attempt to create the criteria by which judgments can be made in a coherent fashion. There are other reasons why a defence review is needed, including the appalling levels of waste and financial incompetence which still characterise the Government's management of Britain's defences. Many examples of that have been given, and I do not intend to publicise them any further today.

Another reason why a review is needed is that the Government's defence plans are unsustainable in financial terms. It has been revealed by Professor Ron Smith of Birkbeck college and David Greenwood of Aberdeen university that there is a massive funding gap at the heart of the present defence budget. Projections produced by Professor Smith show that reductions in defence expenditure to 2.9 per cent. of GDP by year the 2000—the Government's own target for 1997-98 is 2.8 per cent.—will require force levels to be cut by a further 32,900, or 14 per cent.

Incidentally, the Government have cut defence spending in the past 10 years by a bigger percentage and by more in absolute terms than any Government since the war, have increased the differentials between the lower and higher ranks by more than any Government since the war, and have spent the smallest percentage of GDP on defence of any Government since the war. For members of that Government to criticise not the practice but the theoretical conference decision of an Opposition party seems to me to be the height of cheek.

The message from all that is clear. It is not a full defence review that the armed forces have to fear—it is this Government. Only this week, the Under-Secretary said that the Government had

"no target or ceiling for the future strength of the Royal Marines".

If the Government cannot refuse to rule out reductions in the numbers of the Royal Marines, we can presume that they are unable to rule out any further reductions in the size of the Army. If so, the Secretary of State's much-vaunted promise is worthless.

In conclusion, we do not need to ask what is the policy of the Conservative Government, or what will be the experience of the armed forces under their continued—albeit temporary—Administration. We do not need to look in the crystal ball, because we can read the book. It is on the record—cuts, chaos, mismatch and muddling through. Almost 200 years ago, Clausewitz urged:

"Be audacious and cunning in your plans, firm and persevering in their execution, determined to find a glorious end."

Rarely have a group of politicians so confounded his advice as this bunch of Defence Ministers. Timid and unimaginative in their planning, equivocating and irresolute in their execution, they stagger slowly onwards to their finale. It cannot come soon enough for the benefit of the armed forces and the salvation of the whole country.

5.30 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): Before dealing with the general subject of today's debate, I ask the House to bear with me while I pay a brief tribute to Sir Nicholas Fairbairn. As everyone present knows, he was a member of the Select Committee on Defence, and it was an enormous privilege to work closely with him in the past two and a half years. Nicky had a very flamboyant style and I am sure that he would not mind me telling the House that his dress and wit occasionally took aback some of the people whom the Select Committee visited.

Underneath that flamboyance, however, were two people whom the public did not often see—one, a serious politician with deeply held convictions, and the other, a personality of great warmth and generosity of spirit, who was a close and dear friend to all of us who worked closely with him. The greatest benefits that Nicky gave the Defence Select Committee were not merely his penetrating mind and extremely good sense of humour, but his great legal knowledge.

I shall now deal with Private Clegg and the situation in Northern Ireland, about which Nicky Fairbairn felt strongly and on which he wrote to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and to Defence Ministers.

The Defence Select Committee had been unhappy for some time about our young men in Northern Ireland and elsewhere operating under the terms of the yellow card, which we do not find acceptable. The yellow card has no force in law and, therefore, while we can advise young men and order them to obey what it says, we cannot guarantee that even when they do so they will be immune from prosecution if it results in the death of someone whom they considered to have been threatening their lives at the time.

About a month ago, the Select Committee visited our Northern Ireland pre-training area. We were a rather large bunch of middle-aged gentlemen pretending to be a platoon of young soldiers, which was perhaps not entirely realistic. We went round as though we were a platoon and went through the same experiences as young men who go to Northern Ireland are put through before being sent there. It was an impressive course. There is a mock-up village, which looks like a Northern Irish village, and the troops spend a substantial amount of time there immersed in what appears to be real Northern Ireland life. The pub and the fish and chip shop work, and the system works as though they were on the streets of Ireland.

We were fired at—had it been for real, some members of our platoon would undoubtedly have been injured, if not killed. Two young men in balaclava helmets, armed with rifles, ran across in front of us, at a range of about 30 yards. A little further down the street, someone came out from another door and hurled a tin can at us—mercifully, from a considerable range, as it exploded.

I give those examples because in neither of those circumstances would the soldiers concerned have been allowed to fire—in the first example, because their lives would not have been considered to be in danger at that stage, as the men were not looking at us and, in the second, because the law states that, once an object has left the hand of the person throwing it, one is no longer in danger—or so the argument goes—from that person and so one is not allowed to shoot him, although one does not know at that stage whether it is an empty bottle or some sort of explosive device.

I find that wholly unacceptable. It is doubly unacceptable because, should one fire and kill the person, the penalty would inevitably be life imprisonment. Senior ranking officers advised the Government that they did not want a change in the law for a variety of reasons, all of which I understand, but I hope that they will reconsider their position. We cannot tolerate sending our young soldiers into positions of substantial personal danger with that type of threat hanging over them, in addition to the obvious direct threat to their lives. I hope that Ministers will press the Home Secretary and others involved to ensure that there is a change in the law without delay, so that that does not occur in future.

I hope that our troops will shortly not be necessary in Northern Ireland, but I do not rely fully on that, and even if they are not they will be sent on parallel peacekeeping exercises, such as in Bosnia, where they must be equally protected against life imprisonment for stepping over the bounds in the exercise of what is otherwise their duty.

The Select Committee is going to see the pre-training area for Bosnia next week. It is slightly different from the one that I described, but I hope that it is still a useful exercise for our troops. Two weeks after that, the Committee will go to Bosnia.

The pre-training exercise that we give our troops is extremely good. I believe it to be the best in the world and plenty of other countries would like to share it with us, or hire it. Whatever happens in Northern Ireland, I hope that we will be assured—perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement can assure us later today—that our training centres will continue. However much we move towards a more peaceful domestic scene—I sincerely hope that we do—I hope that we will not lose the opportunity to give our troops such training.

I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State has decided to change the structure of our training operations so that we have a joint inspectorate general of doctrine and training at Upavon in Wiltshire. I believe that that follows the lines of the American army, and although I certainly do not recommend that we follow the Americans in many areas, I believe that that is a good example and that it will improve and enhance the control of our training systems.

In a recent report, the Defence Select Committee expressed some concern about the shooting skills of some of our soldiers who are not in infantry battalions, especially the Royal Engineers and the Royal Signals, who do not seem to be attaining the skills that we would hope for in our soldiery. When we raised that matter with the Ministry of Defence, we were told that it was "not seriously concerned" because engineers and the like

"have small arms issued for personal protection and shooting is not their primary skill".

That may be so, but they may come under attack in Bosnia and elsewhere, and they will not thank the Army and those responsible for their training if they are inadequately trained to defend themselves and their comrades. I hope that the matter will be given close consideration.

I believe that there are plans to change the shooting skills expected of soldiers and to make an allowance, which would mean that infantry soldiers would take a different test from those in support and logistics. If so, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will tell the House in detail what is proposed and be able to assure us that, whatever the new structure of the shooting test, all soldiers will be brought up to a standard that will enable them to defend themselves and others properly should they need to do so.

I was glad to hear that BATUS—British Army training unit Suffield—the training area in Canada, was fully used in 1994 and will be again in 1995. The Defence Select Committee had planned to visit it last year. Unfortunately, the trip had to be cancelled, so I have not seen it. I remain worried about the general level of collective training

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

available to the Army, especially the amount of live firing that is available to many troops. I welcome the fact that we are buying time at Hohne ranges for battle groups based in Germany, and look forward to hearing that collective training has been enhanced in those areas.

At the invitation of the Belize Government, two weeks ago I had an opportunity to visit our extremely valuable jungle training systems in Belize. Those responsible for training the British troops told me how excellent the facilities are. This year, we shall send seven company-strength training groups. Will my right hon. Friend the Minister confirm that we shall also send one battalion-strength training group next year? I hope that that will be a regular occurrence so that we can make full use of facilities in Belize.

My hon. Friends and anyone who reads previous debates will know of my strong belief that Britain has a duty to help Belize to defend itself, should it come under threat from Guatemala. It is much better to prepare for such an event and, hopefully, to prevent it, than, as with the Falklands, to send a weak signal and then have to react with military force. If we give Belize clear undertakings that we will not tolerate an invasion from Guatemala, it is much less likely that that event will occur.

We have frequently covered the subject of the emergency tour interval, so I shall refer to it only briefly. Last year, the Secretary of State gave evidence to the Select Committee in which he appeared to say that he thought, as we certainly did, that the 24-month interval was a minimum rather than an average. After he had given that evidence, I received a letter stating that that was not right and that 24 months was an average interval. That is not good enough; 24 months must be the minimum that is allowed. A shorter interval should be against the system and that matter should be reviewed. Many soldiers have much shorter intervals between emergency tours. We must deal with that important matter at group level and in terms of individual soldiers on attachment.

The Ministry has often said that it is not easy to provide the necessary figures. The Defence Select Committee does not find it difficult at all, and some months ago we sent a helpful template to the Ministry to show how easy it is, but have had no response. The Committee Clerks are extremely able, but so are Whitehall officials, and it is not beyond the bounds of the capability of the Ministry of Defence to provide proper figures showing the emergency tour intervals in individual units. I hope that we shall be given the latest figures for 1994-95 and the projected figures for 1995-96 in due course. I imagine that those will assume a two-battalion Bosnian commitment and no change in Northern Ireland. Will my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces confirm that to me later?

The Select Committee on Defence is undertaking a joint inquiry with the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. It has ambitious terms of reference but a fairly modest time scale—we hope to issue our report within the next four or five weeks after only four meetings. We are studying aspects of defence procurement and industrial policy, concentrating on ammunition, electronics and vehicles. I do not want to anticipate what the sub-committees reporting on the full Committee may say, but it is worth making one or two points about army vehicles as that subject has caused long-term concern. If my hon. Friends have been fully alert, they will have noticed that I have tabled a string of parliamentary questions on army vehicles.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Roger Freeman) *indicated assent.*

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My right hon. Friend indicates that he has spotted them.

The gist of my questions is whether the Ministry is properly considering alternative methods of equipping ourselves with essential equipment and whether it is considering leasing, buying or contracting out to the independent sector, as it said it would and which it promised would save some £90 million on the four-tonne truck fleet and a further £20 million by reducing peacetime holdings of commercial standard equipment.

My questions resulted in some inconsistent details. For example, our truck-mounted concrete mixers are built to military specification. That seems to be going to considerable trouble, because I gather that the Army requires only two. It is hard to believe that the civil sector could not provide two truck-mounted concrete mixers without our going to the enormous expense of having a special specification for them. I was told that ultra-light dumpers could not be leased because of cost and their extensive use in overseas deployment. Again, I find that slightly unconvincing.

I was told that fuel servicing vehicles, of which there are 675, must be built to special military standards and so cannot economically be leased; that we can buy 12 light dumpers only from Denmark; and that rough terrain wheeled tractors and container handlers also have military specifications, despite the fact that rough terrain fork-lift trucks were specified in an earlier answer from the Ministry as one of the vehicles that it was trying to buy from the private sector.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will look closely at how the Ministry of Defence is progressing on procurement and ensure that changes that should be made are made speedily. It should not be a red-tape operation, with some people in the Ministry trying to tie it down to its traditional long-term procurement policy.

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend has given notice that he cannot listen to the wind-up speech so, for his convenience and that of Opposition Front Benchers, I should say that his recent flurry of questions has concentrated minds wonderfully. I am happy to confirm that, by the end of this calendar year, we intend to have in place some—I hope, two or three—pilot leasing packages for the Royal Air Force and the Army. If we start with B-vehicles—non-combat vehicles—we can then explore extending the principle of leasing beyond those pilot projects. I am grateful to the Select Committee for helping to stimulate that valuable exercise.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am grateful for that assurance from my right hon. Friend. I am sure that he will keep a close eye on the matter and ensure that it progresses as it should.

Will he also look at the tankers that are currently used in Bosnia? When the Committee was last there, a year ago, we discovered that the tankers were extremely old. In May 1994, we were told that the burden of an aging fleet would shortly be relieved by a mix of the

refurbishment and purchase of new commercial tankers and the procurement of DROPS—demountable rack offloading and pickup system—fuel flat-racks.

I hope that, when we go to Bosnia in four weeks' time, we shall find that that has been done, at least to a degree. I look forward to finding a happy British logistic battalion with whatever it needs to make the necessary provision in difficult circumstances to our troops and our United Nations peacekeeping and humanitarian aid workers.

May I make some general points, and strike a suitably optimistic note? I am delighted to hear from my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces—we already knew it from the defence costs study, but I liked the way in which my hon. Friend emphasised it in his opening remarks—of the extra reconnaissance regiment and how we can enhance some front-line activities.

I am also extremely happy about the Territorial Army. Ex-territorial soldiers such as myself were afraid that we might suffer in the DCS and we were grateful to the Government, on whom the pressures were great. However, they were heavily resisted and the outcome is extremely satisfactory. The TA can play a much fuller role than it has been asked to do in the past 20 or 30 years and can usefully enhance our small but brilliantly effective regular armed service.

Will my hon. Friend consider introducing a few more senior Territorial Army officer ranks? At present, the senior ranks are almost exclusively filled by regulars. In the days when I served in the TA, the colonels of our regiments were territorial soldiers. I appreciate that demands have increased and the supply of Territorial Army soldiers with regular experience, which is what most of those colonels were, has decreased, so the change would present difficulties.

None the less, perhaps there should be more opportunity for outstandingly good territorials, particularly those who had regular experience beforehand, to progress to the ranks of colonel and lieutenant colonel and take charge of Territorial Army regiments. I should like to see more territorials reaching the rank of brigadier or general.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) has left the Chamber. I am sorry to have to comment in his absence on his remarks on the defence costs and on another review. We have had that debate fully in the House before. I do not believe that such a review would be in the interests of any of our armed services.

It is common ground across the House that we have been through great traumas in the past four or five years. Although it was not how I would have conducted it, "Options for Change" and subsequent reviews were to all intents and purposes a defence review, based on the false premise that the ending of the cold war would make the world a happier and safer place. As I say every time I speak in a defence debate, it is a much more dangerous place, but I will not labour the point. Another defence review now would be disruptive. Whatever the hon. Member for Motherwell, North might say, it would put a further cloud of uncertainty over the armed forces.

Ministers are absolutely right to reject such a principle. They have given undertakings here and elsewhere that there will be no further cuts in the armed forces. Anything that undermines the armed forces' confidence that they can regroup in their present strength and look forward with confidence to the future can only damage the way in which the United Kingdom is defended.

5.51 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): The hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) started his speech with a tribute to Nicholas Fairbairn. I concur with that sincerely, because Sir Nicholas was very helpful at the time of the worry and difficulty we were having over the Royal Artillery range at Benbecula. The fact that he was very supportive of the campaign to keep that base open makes me all the more sorry to have to join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to him.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the training that the soldiers undergo before being sent to Northern Ireland. I spent some time at one of those training camps with the second battalion of the Parachute Regiment some four years ago when I went around the very same mock village as members of the Defence Committee. I was extremely impressed by the comprehensive and thorough way in which soldiers were prepared for their duties and by the excellent briefings which they received, full of valuable political and social information about the background to the troubles in Northern Ireland.

The soldiers arrived quite knowledgeable about the general and particular context of the region to which they were sent, in County Fermanagh. I joined them again at a later date and spent a weekend with them. I went around with them in patrols, heavily disguised as a soldier. Again, I was impressed with how they were going about their job and implementing their training. However, I draw a different conclusion from that of the hon. Gentleman. We should not consider relaxing the strict guidelines and safeguards that were laid down for the soldiers. Those guidelines have played an essential role in bringing about the peace that we are now enjoying.

I am sure that all sides accept that errors and mistakes were inevitably made in the early years of deployment in Northern Ireland because the situation was so fraught and novel. The guidelines have evolved out of hard experience and should not be relaxed. There is a case for reviewing the judicial sentences that should be passed when cases such as that of Private Lee Clegg come before the courts, the requirement for mandatory life sentences and the need to pass sentences for murder rather than manslaughter. Those issues need to be reviewed, not the guidelines that soldiers have to follow.

I now turn to a constituency point concerning the Royal Artillery range in my constituency at Balivanick in Benbecula. The Government have accepted the need to keep that range open to carry out its valuable task but are moving towards having it operated and manned largely by civilian personal. How far has that process progressed? There is some worry in my constituency that some of the military aspects of the range are now being wound down without the civilian part being fully up to speed and there might be a gap between the two.

That obviously causes concern about whether the whole process will be carried through in the way that we understood from the Government it would. I would like the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to address that question and to give me the reassurance that my constituents seek—that, as soon as possible, the range at Balivanick will move towards civilian operation along the lines that the Government intended.

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

I should now like to turn to the most important overseas operation now being carried out by the British Army—in Bosnia. I would concur with what has been said by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the great majority of the operations carried out by the British Army. The majority of soldiers have carried out their tasks with great skill and bravery and, above all, a genuine desire to fulfil their difficult humanitarian mission. We have to commend them for the way in which they have gone about their work, and express our gratitude to them. We wish them well, in particular the new commander of UNPROFOR, General Rupert Smith, whom I met at a British Council seminar on peacekeeping early last year around the time of the imposition of the Sarajevo exclusion zone. Undoubtedly, he has an impressive record and we look forward to him adding to that record in his year in Bosnia.

I am afraid that I have to depart from the commendations that have been passed on the performance of General Sir Michael Rose over the past year. He has left General Smith a difficult task, not just to fulfil the humanitarian mandate he has from the United Nations but in large degree to restore the credibility of UNPROFOR in Bosnia, as it was much diminished by the performance—particularly latterly—of General Rose. We have to learn from General Rose's failures and mistakes if they are to be avoided in future.

In trying to discuss some of these failures, I should refer to the "Panorama" programme late last month, referred to by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and by the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan). I shall not dwell on what the Prime Minister of Bosnia said on that programme, because this is not a debate about him or about the Bosnian Government. However, I suggest that the Minister and the hon. Member for Blaby look at the transcript of that BBC programme. They will see that their accusation that the Bosnian Prime Minister made false claims about the situation in Bihac is spurious.

According to the transcript, in his famous confrontation with General Rose, the Bosnian Prime Minister said:

"There is no call for the air strikes from General Rose here or from Mr. Akashi—those are the responsible people. If a lot of people die in Bihac it is because of them".

It is clear that he meant that, if there was no action, many people would die. He did not say that 70,000 people had died, which would be an utterly absurd and ridiculous claim. The notion that the Bosnian Prime Minister misled General Rose or the world's press is false. Unfortunately, the "Panorama" programme made that claim, but one can see from the transcript—I shall happily show it to the hon. Gentleman later—that it is completely false.

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I should be delighted to see that transcript later. Following the press conference given by the Prime Minister of Bosnia, I believe that newspapers—particularly those in America—reported that 70,000 people had died in Bihac. I may not be entirely correct on that. At the end of the programme, the Bosnian Prime Minister was challenged about his claim that 70,000 people had died, and he lost his temper.

I am straying slightly from the point, but it is an important matter. We are talking about a very senior British Army officer who I consider has done a very good job. When General Rose went to Sarajevo in January last year, it was under intense artillery fire. Almost singlehandedly, through his own robust form of diplomacy, General Rose managed to lift that fire on Sarajevo.

Mr. Macdonald: I do not wish to dwell on the incident because it is not completely germane to the debate. The hon. Gentleman referred to American news coverage and I think that he derived his information from the clip that was shown on the "Panorama" programme. However, the transcript and the American news clip made no mention of 70,000 people having been killed. One was given that impression from the way in which the programme was constructed, but that is not the case.

Another aspect of the "Panorama" programme is germane to the debate. The programme contained an interview with General Rose in which he told John Simpson that Bosnian Government forces had engaged in ethnic cleansing of the Serbian population of Gorazde at the outset of the war. He made that claim while he was in Gorazde, and he invited the BBC crew to come to that city. It was the first visit by a television crew since the siege began.

In making that claim, General Rose challenged the perception of the Bosnians as victims and of Karadzic's Serbs as aggressors in Gorazde. He implied that Governments, in failing to understand that point, had misjudged the situation in Gorazde completely. According to the BBC transcript, General Rose said:

"Yes, practically every house in Gorazde has been damaged, but most of the damage was done in the fighting that had taken place some two years before"—

in 1992—

"when the Bosnian Government forces drove the Serbs from this town, and there were twelve and a half thousand Serbs at that time living here and they were all driven off".

General Rose went on to describe what had happened to the Serbs as "ethnic cleansing". He concluded:

"And, of course, at that time, the international image of what had happened in Gorazde was very different from the reality. What was dangerous was that policies were beginning to be put together on both sides of the Atlantic about what we should do in Gorazde, but these policies have been put together on totally flawed information."

If General Rose's accusation is correct, his description of the forcible eviction of 12,500 Serbs from Gorazde in 1992 would count as one of the major war crimes to occur in the Balkans, for which the Bosnian Government should be held to account. But is there any evidence that that occurred?

The most comprehensive and authoritative report about war crimes in the former Yugoslavia is the report of the United Nations commission of experts which was set up by United Nations Security Council resolution 780 in 1992. The commission was chaired by Professor Cherif Bassiouni and its final report was published in May last year. Annexe 4 to that report is currently at the printers and it is supposed to be published at the end of March. It deals exclusively with ethnic cleansing.

In neither the final report, which was published last year, nor, I understand, annexe 4 is there any evidence of ethnic cleansing of Serbs in Gorazde, as was claimed by General Rose. I have talked with Professor Bassiouni and with others who have worked for the commission. No one knew anything about that claim—indeed, some officials expressed amazement that such a claim was made.

Mr. Robathan: I am again grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in giving way. He may be right; I do not know how many Serbs used to live in Gorazde. However, other hon. Members and I visited Gorazde with

the United Nations in September 1993. It is true that a great many buildings have been destroyed in the fighting. I cannot say who was responsible for that destruction, although I suspect that the Serbs were largely responsible. It is true that the enclave was besieged by Serbs. However, it is also true that a large number of Christian Serbs lived in that town at some stage—I saw a destroyed Christian church on the way out of Gorazde. I have no idea whether there were 12,500 Serbs in Gorazde, but they certainly were not there when we visited in September 1993.

Mr. Macdonald: The hon. Gentleman takes an interest in these matters, so he will know that it was the practice of the Serbian paramilitary to inform the Serbian population of towns and villages of an impending assault and to encourage them to leave before that assault began. That made it easier for the assault to take place. Those who were left behind would do everything they could to retain those Serbs for as long as possible as a kind of insurance policy.

Mr. Robathan *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Macdonald: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but that point is made in the report by the commission of experts which was published last year. If he refuses to accept that, he will have to produce evidence—which the United Nations commission could not find—to substantiate his position.

I tried to learn about the situation in Gorazde by examining 1992 and 1993 press reports from the Serbian press agencies, as I thought that if I were to find a report of ethnic cleansing anywhere, it would be among those reports. However, I did not find any contemporary reports about ethnic cleansing of Serbs by Bosnians in Gorazde. I even checked with some "propaganda" material published by pro-Karadzic groups in the United States. I examined a publication by the Serbian-American Voters Alliance entitled "The Suppressed Serbian Voice", which takes a very pro-Serbian line about the events in the Balkans and contains a chapter called "The Truth about Gorazde". It makes no reference whatever to any ethnic cleansing on that scale.

Dr. Reid: I know that my hon. Friend takes these matters very seriously and looks at them in detail, but I must caution him, however, against investigating matters through press reports. From experience, I have found that, depending on the person to whom one speaks in an area that has been cleansed of a particular group, one group will claim that it was ethnic cleansing and another group will claim, precisely as my hon. Friend did, that the Serbs left because they were encouraged by the Serbs, or the Muslims because they were encouraged by the Muslims.

The inadequacy of press and media reports was brought home to me. I stood in Gorazde and listened to the BBC World Service, which was saying that, for several days, a major artillery bombardment of Gorazde by the Serbs had been going on. I stood with the Muslim commander and not a shot had been fired for five weeks. Yet the BBC was continually repeating the news that the Serbs were bombarding Gorazde. I merely add a word of caution: a propaganda war is going on, and none of the press reports can be taken at face value to establish the facts.

Mr. Macdonald: I am not relying on press reports, as my hon. Friend would realise if he had taken on board what I said. I started by referring to the report published last year by the United Nations commission of experts on war crimes in the former Yugoslavia. It is by far the most authoritative source—I would regard it as the only authoritative source. I concede that we cannot rely on press reports from one side or another, but we have to rely on people who investigate on behalf of the United Nations or the international community, and those are the conclusions that they reached.

I must ask my hon. Friend: if things are as murky as he claims, how could General Rose make that quite remarkable assertion without any evidence whatever to back him up? It appears to me, from the research that I have done, that what General Rose said was simply not true. The ethnic cleansing of 12,500 Serbs from Gorazde never happened. It was a complete fabrication. Why General Rose would wish to make such a fabrication, only he knows, but I rather suspect that it was to excuse the failure of his own mission in Gorazde last year, and to smear the Bosnian Government forces and the Bosnian Government themselves.

The matter could be clarified by the Government. Ministers could clear up the matter very easily. They could say whether they know of any evidence whatever to back up General Rose's accusation of massive ethnic cleansing by Bosnian forces in Gorazde. If they do know of such evidence, they should present it to the UN commission on war crimes and to the war crimes tribunal in The Hague; it would be a major war crime, and they have a duty to present that evidence. If they do not have such evidence, I must ask them whether they think it acceptable for the most senior British officer in Bosnia to have broadcast such a fabrication about the Bosnian Government via the BBC.

It is small wonder, given that background, that General Rose's relations with the Bosnian Government had sunk to rock bottom by the time he left his command. Nor was it surprising that he should have been showered with gifts—two oil paintings, no less—by General Mladic, Mr. Karadzic's commander, on his departure, but his happy acceptance of such gifts is just another example of his lack of judgment. What I find truly extraordinary—

Mr. Freeman: I have listened with great care to what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I think that the House would feel that he has gone too far. I honestly believe that the charges that the hon. Gentleman is laying against General Rose are unfair and unjustified, and I hope that he will reconsider his position.

Mr. Macdonald: I would happily look at any evidence that the Minister cares to present to me that shows that what General Rose claimed happened in Gorazde is true. He made a very serious claim. To have a senior British officer making such a claim is serious. I would welcome any evidence from the Minister that what General Rose said was true.

Dr. Reid: I do not want to debate the whole issue with my hon. Friend. I think that what may have caused offence was the implication that General Rose was being showered with gifts from the Serbs, said in the context of an accusation of bias. It is clear what implication could be drawn from that, and I hope that my hon. Friend will take

[Dr. Reid]

the opportunity to put on record that he was in no way suggesting anything that could impinge the honour of that British officer.

Mr. Macdonald: Absolutely. I will happily do that. No implication whatever of that kind was intended. My point was that General Rose showed a serious lack of judgment in accepting such gifts. I hold to that firmly.

I want to come on to a different aspect of General Rose's performance over the past year, because I think it is important that we go over these things if we are to learn about mistakes—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman continues, I remind him that the proposed subject of debate tonight is the Army. Of course, it is in order to make reference to particular points, but I think that he is going rather beyond the brief if his speech is entirely centred on one person.

Mr. Macdonald: I take that on board absolutely, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is why I want to move on to the subject of the relationship between the senior British commander in Bosnia and NATO, because their ability to work together is crucial to the success of UNPROFOR in Bosnia and the British forces in Bosnia.

I visited NATO headquarters in Brussels just before the Bihac debacle last year. Even then, I found senior officers dismayed and exasperated at the failure to enforce the Sarajevo exclusion zone and at the failure of UNPROFOR to pursue the humanitarian mandate in the robust fashion that officers in NATO thought necessary. They were deeply concerned at the consequent erosion in the credibility of NATO itself.

After Bihac, of course, NATO's mistrust of UNPROFOR plumbed new depths. I have already referred to that in an intervention. NATO eventually threatened to withhold details of aid patrols from UNPROFOR headquarters for fear that they would be divulged to General Mladic, thus putting NATO aircrew at risk. I have put much store in those news reports after Bihac, simply because the same remarks were made to me at NATO before Bihac.

We must learn lessons from the mistakes of General Rose and the failures of UNPROFOR over the past year, because, as has been pointed out, momentum was gained when the exclusion zone was first imposed around Sarajevo in February last year, but it was thrown away at Gorazde just two months later. The failure to defend a safe area from sustained attack dealt a body blow to the credibility of UNPROFOR. General Mladic, it seems to me, clearly won the battle of wills between himself and General Rose. Afterwards, he redoubled his defiance of UNPROFOR and his obstruction of the UN humanitarian mission.

There are many examples of that, including the failure to allow any medical supplies to go into Gorazde since the siege last year. In effect, citizens live in a giant concentration camp. To this day, the airport at Tuzla, which was ostentatiously reopened in March last year by the United Nations special representative, Yasushi Akashi, has not seen a single aid flight land. The safe area of Bihac did not receive any aid between May 1994 and the outbreak of intense fighting there just before Christmas: all the aid was blocked by Karadzic's Serbs. Convoys to Bihac continue to be obstructed.

The humanitarian mission led by General Rose ended in failure—failure to get his convoys through; failure to deliver aid; failure to defend the area from being ransacked, or "raped", according to a young Coldstream Guards officer whom I met recently. By those means—ironically—Karadzic's Serbs have received more aid per head than the Bosnians themselves, including vital military supplies such as fuel. I am referring to United Nations figures.

There was also the failure to protect the civilian populations in the safe areas. As has already been pointed out, General Rose was given a mandate for that in Security Council resolution 836, but he failed to fulfil it in Gorazde and Bihac. Finally, there was General Rose's failure to protect even his own soldiers—British soldiers—who were threatened, obstructed, clubbed and beaten to the ground by Karadzic's forces, who experienced no effective reprisals or punishment.

In defence of UNPROFOR, it has been argued that, although it had a mandate to deliver humanitarian aid and to deter attacks on safe areas, it did not have the means. It has been said that the blame rests with the United Nations, and with Governments and the Security Council in particular. I believe, however, that we must learn the lessons of the failure of the past year. The humanitarian mandate provided by the UN cannot be fulfilled by a policy of compromise and empty threats; it can be fulfilled robustly only through tough and determined action, and the use of force when necessary.

Of course, UNPROFOR does not have a mandate to impose peace in Bosnia. It has no mandate to retake Bosnian territory by force. It does, however, have a mandate and a duty to provide humanitarian aid, using whatever means are necessary, and to deter attack on safe areas. That is a limited mission, but a clear one: any party that gets in the way of it should be told to stand aside, and if it does not stand aside it should be pushed aside.

We are talking about a strictly limited objective, not an open-ended commitment. It is nonsense to claim that the international community has not the means to carry out that limited mission. It has the means; what it lacks is the will—and, without that will, we must see more generals going the way of General Rose.

6.22 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I am keen to observe the normal courtesies of the House, for it is thus that we stop ourselves falling into the uncivilised brutalities of Bosnia. I must, however, tell the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) that his speech was misguided, ill informed and—I have to say—somewhat unworthy of him.

I believe the hon. Gentleman to be a decent and honest man, but his speech did not give General Rose due credit for work that he did in incredibly difficult circumstances. It did not reveal that Sarajevo now lives in what passes for peace and quiet because of General Rose's actions; nor did it take due notice of the fact that General Rose could not single-handedly make the Bosnian Serbs, Muslims and Croatians sit down together and make peace when they did not want peace.

I intend to speak about the subject tabled for debate—the Army. First, let me do what all Conservative Members wish to do: I welcome the opportunity to quote Sir

Winston Churchill, especially to his grandson, who has now returned to the Chamber. On 8 August 1904, Churchill said:

"The Army was not an inanimate substance, it was a living thing. Regiments were not like houses; they could not be pulled down and altered structurally to suit the convenience of the occupier and the caprice of the owner. They were more like plants; they grew slowly if they were to grow strong; they were easily affected by conditions of temperature or soil; and if they were blighted or transplanted they were apt to wither, and then they could only be revived by copious floods of public money. That was true with regard to any Army, and it was still more true with regard to a voluntary army."—[*Official Report*, 8 August 1904; Vol. 139, c. 1415.]

I believe that it is as true now as it was nearly 91 years ago.

I welcome the commitment to stability given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. I agree with nearly every word that he said. Since "Options for Change" there has been great disruption, and there is a danger—which I think that my hon. Friend will appreciate—that the Army is already blighted, and may wither if we do not take care. At present, the dust is settling and we can see what has been left; I urge my hon. Friends the Ministers to ensure that we have sufficient soldiers to fulfil our commitments.

As my hon. Friend the Minister of State will be well aware, since "Options for Change" 14 tank regiments have been reduced to eight. We shall have fewer than 400 tanks by 1999. France will have approximately 1,000 and Germany about 2,000. Already 29 countries have larger tank fleets than the United Kingdom. Comparisons are not always worth while, but I believe that four years ago to the day we were using 1 Armoured Division in the Gulf—under General Rupert Smith, who has already been mentioned. Would we be able to do that now?

Four years after our invasion of Iraq, we can hardly consider the world a safer place. My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) said as much a moment ago. There is the problem of Iraq, and various other problems in the middle east; there is the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Only yesterday, there were reports of gas being used against the Karen tribe in Burma. There is also the growth of ethnic and national conflicts, especially around the edge of the Russian Federation in Chechnya. I think that we have heard enough about Bosnia today, but there is a risk that that conflict may spread.

As the world becomes less safe, the capabilities of unfriendly nations are growing. Iraq, for instance, has largely rearmed. Meanwhile, we can no longer rely on the same level of speedy United States support as in the past. We accept the need for the Army; we must therefore eradicate any blight, and watch for any sign of withering.

I must tell my hon. Friend the Minister—in supporting him—that great uncertainty and unhappiness remains in our forces. That needs to be assuaged. The Bett review hangs like a storm cloud on the horizon; it may or may not burst over us. Above all, in all ranks there is a perceived erosion of the quality of life—a difficult concept.

There is a new breed of civil servant, which is thought to be chipping away at every perk or benefit that may exist. That is the perception, whether or not it is true. There have been attacks on senior officers in the press: it has been considered ridiculous that they might live in staffed houses. We read that cavalry men are going hunting in Army time, and that that is disgraceful. Let me say this to those who run down that practice: what more does a man leading a tank attack need than courage and a love of throwing himself into the unknown, across a hedge at full tilt, on a horse? I do not hunt, and I am not advancing any particular defence of hunting; but I think that it is good training in courage and spirit for young officers.

At the same time as those reports appear in the press, financial and time restrictions are imposed on the quality of life in all ranks. The perception exists, and it could be a sign of blight. We do not pay our Army all that well, certainly by the standards of life outside, but we expect soldiers to work hard and to die if necessary.

Lady Olga Maitland: They are well paid by the standards of Members of Parliament.

Mr. Robathan: Indeed: I would be earning more if I were still in the Army. That is unusual in terms of standards outside.

Mr. Soames: Worth a hell of a lot more.

Mr. Robathan: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment.

Mr. Soames: I entirely endorse what my hon. Friend has said. May I reassure him that there is not an army of civil servants chipping away at the ethos and standard of service life? There is, however, an insidious and disagreeable drip of disaffection and ignorance from the Labour party, which causes great unsettlement and deep and abiding resentment. I agree with what he says about the Bett review and about the fact that, plainly, people are anxious about it, as they inevitably will be. He knows, and will wish to confirm, that that review is entirely independent. It will be presented to the Government. It is for the Government then to decide how they will dispose of its recommendations.

Mr. Robathan: I agree with my hon. Friend. The next few months and year will be an opportunity to restore the confidence that has been eroded to a certain extent, because of the cuts and the changes that he acknowledged. I agree that the suggestion that the Opposition might provide a better defence policy is ludicrous.

Soldiers are different. They are not just civil servants or salesmen in uniform.

"A soldier is not as other men and when he thinks he is, he ceases to be their guardian."

My hon. Friend, among others, will know that that is a quotation from Julius Caesar, a fine soldier and a successful politician until 15 March.

We cannot treat our soldiers in exactly the same way as we treat people in other jobs, as no other job expects one to leave one's family at the drop of a hat for months or years to go to war, possibly to be killed or to kill one's fellow men. No ways exist of measuring productivity in peacetime. One can measure efficiency, but it will not be productivity.

That subject relates to contracting out and market testing. It is true that a Chieftain tank can be easily dealt with by a civilian mechanic in Bovingdon, but it would have been very different on the approaches to Basra four years ago, or in the drive towards Berlin 50 years ago. In the same way, an appendicitis in Britain can be treated by the national health service, but gunshot wounds under fire

[Mr. Robathan]

require dedicated medical personnel, field ambulances, and field and base hospitals. I urge my hon. Friend to consider closely the reductions in medical provision. Although such provision may be unnecessary in peace, that is rarely so in war.

I welcome the support of the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) for the regimental system. The Army has many quirks that do not stand up to late 20th century cost analysis. They include ceremonial bands, bearskins, kilts and red berets, but try telling the tourist boards that they are not necessary. One hon. Member is keen on getting rid of such things as ceremonial swords, and he makes a great fuss about them in newspapers.

I am sure that it is shocking to many hon. Members to know that, seven years ago, when I was serving as an officer in London, among his other duties, a soldier cleaned my kit for extra pay while I was taking part in trooping the colour and other ceremonial duties. In Northern Ireland three months later, that same young man worked extraordinarily hard as my personal escort in an entirely operational sense. I hope that people would say that I was worth protecting at the time.

It is easy to say that there is no reason why soldiers should not live in the same conditions and in the same way as civilians, but one tampers with all the ceremonial, tradition and, as it were, baggage of the Army at one's peril. It contributes to making our Army so greatly admired at home and abroad, as we have heard from hon. Members on both sides of the House today.

The Territorial Army is being restructured. In Leicestershire, my own county, I have had representations from 7 Royal Anglian, which is being disbanded. I regret that enormously. Of course, there is no immediate need for the TA in peace, but there will be in war. When we are reducing our regular forces, the last thing we need to cut is our reserves—the reverse should be the case. In peacetime, the TA acts as a conduit between the public and the armed forces. In a society that is less aware than ever before of military life and of military structures, it is essential to give our TA all possible support. The enthusiasm exists. I understand that the London University Officer Training Corps is oversubscribed by five applicants to each place. That may be a comment on student grants, but it shows the enthusiasm that exists. The TA may wither away if it is not well regarded, so I urge my hon. Friend to make best use of those enthusiasts. I support the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster and I go further than him—a senior TA officer should direct TA policy in the Ministry of Defence.

I am delighted that there is greater co-operation with our European partners. I hope that a further standardisation of equipment, ammunition and vehicles for industrial and operational reasons takes place among our North Atlantic Treaty Organisation partners. I hope that greater co-operation will arise between industrial companies making the military equipment that we require. But we must be careful as we contemplate any moves towards a single European army. The Franco-German Corps, renamed the Eurocorps, is nearly half the size of the British Army, but, so far, it is not renowned for its operational efficiency. We should be delighted to co-operate, especially at planning level, as we are doing with the air force, but let us consider the facts.

NATO has protected the peace in Europe for nearly 50 years and it remains our best vehicle to do that. France may be part of the Eurocorps, but it withdrew from the military side of NATO some 30 years ago and, I understand, it has shown no intention of coming back. Hon. Members may recall that Belgium refused to supply ammunition to Britain, its NATO ally, during the Gulf war.

Germany has just re-established diplomatic representation in Baghdad, which is in contrast to Her Majesty's Government's policy. In the Gulf, France, which played an active and honourable role, launched its own peace initiative without allied knowledge, just before the outbreak of war. That is not specifically to criticise all our NATO allies, but our strength must be in our own forces. I say yes to co-operation, planning and alliances, but I cannot envisage the circumstances in which we should move towards a single European army.

We must beware of inflicting blight on the Army. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench and to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. They are doing an excellent job, but that does not mean that some of us do not retain some concerns, which we would like to have assuaged. They must not ignore the reasons for the Army's high reputation. Not everything the Army does in peace will stand up to rigorous logic and cost analysis, but it goes towards making a culture, ethos and esprit de corps that is admired throughout the world, and that has been commented on by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

In the last defence estimates, under the title, "A Sharp Sword in a Steady Hand", the Government said:

> "Our armed forces are widely regarded—and rightly—as a valuable and prestigious national asset. The possession of such an asset is not a luxury; and it is not something we could surrender without grave injury to the security and reputation of this country."

I wholeheartedly agree with that. The Government have my and, I suspect, the House's support in that. This valued national asset needs careful nurturing.

6.38 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Hon. Members will know that this is the first opportunity that I have had to participate in a debate on the Army. I have listened carefully to the speeches thus far, and it is clear that the format of concentrating on a single service provides an excellent opportunity to focus, in this case, on the role of the Army in the United Kingdom's defence. It is also clear from those speeches—in the main—that a wealth of experience and detailed knowledge can be contributed by hon. Members. I am sure that that will be reinforced by hon. Members who speak later.

Although I do not propose to challenge the expertise developed by hon. Members over many years, I will confirm certain principles that should be considered and that should perhaps govern our defence policy in relation to the Army. I shall then concentrate on more local matters in relation to Eastleigh and to Hampshire.

I have been interested as, during the debate, hon. Members have, in various forms, discreetly and modestly, displayed their distinguished military careers. I should add that I am the first male member of my family this century

not to have followed a professional career in the Army, which some might describe as a small footnote to the peace dividend.

Today's debate is perhaps a little low key compared with the earlier debates on "Options for Change" and "Front Line First", but we must not forget that, although the political decisions have been taken, many of them are still being implemented, with the inevitable disruption that they will generate still to be faced in many quarters. The feedback from commanders at all levels and throughout the armed forces carries the clear message that what they need above all is a period of calm and stability to come to terms with and to absorb the effects of implementing "Options for Change" and "Front Line First". That is important not least to prevent morale from declining further.

Hon. Members have referred to the worries about the on-going Bett review. The concern is that it will have a damaging effect on forces' morale. I was glad to hear the Minister recognise that concern in an intervention.

There is an overwhelming case for conducting defence policy on a series of clear principles. I express my support for the views that have been put forward in a recent debate in the House by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). The first principle is that foreign policy should dictate defence policy; secondly, resources should match commitments; and, thirdly, we should endorse the presumption that the stability that our senior commanders are seeking can best be met, now and for the foreseeable future, by no further reductions in the defence budget.

When considering the first principle, developments in the debate on Europe must have a direct bearing on our debate on the defence of the United Kingdom. The award of associate membership status to the Western European Union for nine eastern European countries has widened that debate. Ministers will acknowledge that they have recognised that the evolution of the European Community defence policy is now an inevitable outcome of the Maastricht treaty.

No one expects such developments to take place overnight, or that such policies, which in some quarters might be received with suspicion or even condemnation, will be evolved rapidly. However, the evolutionary process has begun and elements of common policy are already in place. As the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) said, for nearly two years France and the United Kingdom have been engaged in extensive, although little publicised, co-operation, particularly on nuclear matters. Some five months ago, co-operation on air resources between France and the United Kingdom was announced. Hon. Members will know that the United Kingdom and Dutch amphibious force has existed for some time.

For over a year the opportunity has been recognised within NATO for the development of combined joint task forces, making NATO's resources available to European members of NATO for operations in which the United States would not expect or may not wish to take part. Those are factors of prime importance in developing our defence policy.

Hon. Members have already mentioned the fact that there is some doubt about the direction that the United States' defence policy will take in the future in terms of its commitment to involvement in events in Europe and elsewhere. There are strong signals, which should not be ignored, that Europe should seek to be more self-sufficient in meeting its defence responsibilities. The existing policies for co-operation within Europe at various levels and the changing attitudes in the United States will lead eventually to the evolution of far greater integration of defence policies within the European Union.

The evolution of a common European defence policy may cause concern and fears in some quarters. However, it must be viewed in the light of the tragic developments in former Yugoslavia, to which many hon. Members have referred, as well as the outbreak of conflicts elsewhere. There is a rising tide of political and economic instability among the emerging nation states on Europe's eastern borders. They are now free of Russian rule, and they have been released from the constraints that that omnipotent regime ruthlessly applied.

Our armed forces are performing a vital role in Bosnia under the auspices of UNPROFOR. Their bravery and professionalism are major factors in maintaining the humanitarian effort and in curtailing the worst excesses of that war. It is vital that the House opposes any lifting of the arms embargo, either unilaterally or multilaterally. We must not allow the humanitarian effort to be compromised by lifting the arms embargo. In my view, it would be impossible for our forces and those of other countries to remain in Bosnia with any degree of safety in such circumstances.

It is not feasible to consider pulling UN forces out of Bosnia in the current circumstances. Commanders have made it abundantly clear that such action would be very difficult logistically and would be highly dangerous. We should not forget how long it took to deploy the UN force, and any withdrawal would be an equally painstaking process.

The traumatic events in Bosnia have highlighted the importance of developing and maintaining a defence procurement policy that provides—

Mr. Robathan: Did I understand the hon. Gentleman correctly? Did he say that he is opposed to the lifting of the arms embargo in Bosnia? I thought that his right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said something rather different recently.

Mr. Chidgey: I am not aware of what my right hon. Friend may have said in the hon. Gentleman's presence. I can say that only a week ago, during the debate on the Royal Navy, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East, our defence spokesman, made the very points that I have been reiterating today. I know that, so I can confirm it.

Lady Olga Maitland: A split?

Mr. Chidgey: Hardly.

As I have said, the traumatic events in Bosnia have highlighted the importance of developing and maintaining a defence procurement policy which provides the Army and our other armed forces with the specialist equipment that they need, and of maintaining a capability in British industry to service those needs. Opportunities to provide equipment to other European nations, often in partnership, will no doubt increase as the common European defence policy evolves. Furthermore, Britain would reap massive economic benefit from specialisation, inter-operability and common procurement. As has been said, all that is hard to achieve, but those options could become available with greater European co-operation and integration.

[Mr. Chidgey]

Without a strong home base, built on local procurement by our armed forces, British industry will be disadvantaged. Our European partners are unlikely to take seriously the claims of British manufacturers if they are unable to secure orders from their own Government. I urge the Minister of State to make an announcement soon about how many attack helicopters the Ministry of Defence envisages and which helicopter it will be buying.

On this point, if on no others, I agree with the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. There is a clear military need for an attack helicopter as soon as possible. The weapons system offers the ground commander an invaluable addition to his tactical flexibility and, in cases such as Bosnia, the attack helicopter's excellent reconnaissance and intelligence-gathering capabilities, together with a formidable precision weapons system, offer a degree of flexibility that is not currently available.

In the general context of defence procurement, I should like to return to more local matters relating to my constituency and to my county of Hampshire. Under "Options for Change" we have already suffered the sad demise of the Hampshire regiment—the Tigers—which could trace its origins to the scaling of the Heights of Abraham to defeat Montcalm at Quebec. Although it is sad to lose those historic ties, the impact of "Options for Change" and "Front Line First" on Hampshire's economy is far greater.

The armed services' presence in Hampshire is the largest single component in the region's economy: Aldershot is traditionally the home of the British Army; Portsmouth and Gosport have provided the Royal Navy with dockyards, munitions and victualling establishments since before the reign of Henry VIII; Farnborough has been a leading centre for aeronautical research since military aircraft development began; the headquarters of the Army Air Corps is at Middle Wallop; and it was from Eastleigh airport that the Spitfire, the forerunner of thousands of aircraft produced in local factories which are today a vital part of the local defence industry, made its maiden flight.

I cannot emphasise too strongly how important defence is to Hampshire. In 1992, the defence-dependent economy in Hampshire employed some 127,000 workers, or around 20 per cent. of the county's work force. Nearly three quarters—some 81,000—were civilians engaged in defence-related industrial employment. Research undertaken at Portsmouth university reveals that in 1993-94 £1,750 million was spent on United Kingdom defence equipment procurement in Hampshire. In terms of industrial production, the £1,750 million accounted for 50 per cent. of the aerospace output, 40 per cent. of the shipbuilding and 30 per cent. of the electronics output and involved more than 500 local companies in the region. Hon. Members will not be surprised to hear that Hampshire has been classified as having the most defence-dependent economy in the country.

Inevitably, the implementation of "Options for Change" and "Front Line First" has had a major impact on our local economy. More than 13,000 military and civilian personnel jobs have been lost, more than half of them in the defence industry. Equally important in the structural planning of Hampshire's economy are proposals to release no fewer than 27 sites occupied by the Ministry of Defence, representing more than 1,200 hectares.

I hope to emphasise the dramatic influence of the MOD estate on local land use and am therefore glad to see the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) in his place, because I wish to mention his constituency. More than one third of the land area of the borough of Gosport, a town with a population of some 70,000, was until recently occupied by the defence forces and support organisations' establishments. Clearly, that would have a dramatic effect on any community.

"Options for Change" and "Front Line First" have been instruments of deep structural change in the economic base of Hampshire. The many large firms in the defence industry in Hampshire are continuing to downsize as a direct result of defence cuts in what have been our main growth sectors—electronics, marine engineering, aerospace and research and development.

Whereas in 1990 the rate of unemployment was only 3.4 per cent., by 1993 it had almost tripled to 9.9 per cent. The determination and skill of our defence sector firms and their workers in developing diversified markets and products has been a major factor in reducing that level of unemployment slightly to around 7 per cent., but it is still twice as high as in 1990. That proves that successful diversification in our high-technology defence industry becomes a hostage to fortune if left to market forces alone.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The hon. Gentleman mentioned my constituency. I am well aware of the research done by Portsmouth university. I remember that one of its lecturers attended a meeting in Havant and said that, at the rate we were going, Portsmouth and Gosport would become like Liverpool. I suggest that the reverse is the case. Although there have been changes in the defence forces, Portsmouth and Gosport have come through "Options for Change" and "Front Line First". Thanks to a concentration of naval presence in the Portsmouth and Gosport area, we have done quite well. If there is a high level of unemployment, it is mainly due to the loss of civilian jobs, especially in a television factory in my constituency, and is nothing to do with the Government's defence policy.

Mr. Chidgey: The hon. Gentleman probably does not know that he and I trod the same streets in our youth. In the 1950s and 1960s, I remember thousands of people employed in supporting or serving in the Navy. I agree that Gosport, Portsmouth and other parts of the south coast in Hampshire have benefited from the restructuring of the Navy, but my point was that in the industrial sector of the defence industry there has been an inevitable loss of orders because of "Options for Change" and "Front Line First".

Mr. Soames: I know that the hon. Gentleman does not mean his speech to be a litany of gloom, so perhaps I can assist him. What my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) said was correct. Last week, I had the honour to be invited to speak for a colleague—an unusual event, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman will admit. In fact, I spoke for my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts). GEC Marconi has a factory at Waterlooville in his constituency. It has just received an enormous order

for torpedoes from the Royal Navy, and I was assured that the defence industry was booming in that part of the world.

Mr. Chidgey: I do not doubt the Minister's deep knowledge; I merely wanted to question certain principles. The research that I have cited and the region's employment level prove that there have been problem in Hampshire, although I accept that there have also been successes. My point is that we could do much better if—to use a hackneyed phrase—we had the level playing field that we need in Europe. We could benefit far more from a more integrated, co-operative European defence policy. I accept that there have been successes and I welcome them, but we need to do better and to do more.

The unemployment rate is still twice the 1990 rate. The successful diversification of our high technology industry will be a hostage to fortune if it is left to market forces. We have to recognise the fact that, in other European countries, national and regional government resources have been and are being provided to help defence sector industries to accelerate their diversification. Assistance is being provided to develop management, strategic planning, marketing and technical skills, over and above the support that has been available under the Konver programme, from which Hampshire also benefits.

I take Bremen as an example. It is the smallest federal German state and has less than half the population of the county of Hampshire. It is a relatively minor player in the defence industry, but is already receiving DM10 million a year for an arms conversion programme. It has been receiving that sum since 1993 and will continue to receive it for the foreseeable future. That is in addition to moneys that it receives from the European Union Konver fund. The level playing field concept is important.

I have the highest regard for the entrepreneurial skills and determination of our defence sector firms, but it is unreasonable to expect them to compete effectively in the marketplace if there is uncertainty in procurement policy at home and if their competitors abroad are benefiting from proactive state support. It is therefore imperative that the defence industry in Eastleigh and in Hampshire generally should enjoy a period of stability and calm and that the Government should make the major procurement decisions with all due urgency so that they can become part of industry's forward planning.

I now draw attention to an aspect of defence procurement which, although minor in terms of expenditure, provides probably the best investment for any expenditure in the defence budget. I am referring, of course, to the funding provided for the Army and other cadet forces. For very little outlay in the defence policy, the cadet forces provide as much as one third of all armed forces recruits. They are young men and women who have already developed a knowledge of the demands of service life and are well adapted to pursuing careers in the forces where they continue to excel.

In Eastleigh, as in other constituencies, there has been a phenomenal growth in interest in the cadet forces. The number of cadets in the Air Training Corps 1216 Squadron in my constituency has more than doubled in the past year. The enthusiasm of the cadets, coupled with the help that their involvement gives in guiding them through the difficult early teenage years, reinforces the value of cadet forces to the community. I hope that the Minister recognises the value of the cadet forces and ask him to confirm that there are no plans to reduce the level of funding and support currently provided to them.

It would be a gross omission to let such an occasion pass without paying tribute to the courage and professionalism of our armed forces, especially the Army. Everyone in the House and in the country at large can and should be proud of the remarkable contribution that they make, often in extremely difficult circumstances, to British and United Nations operations in spheres of conflict throughout the world.

6.59 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): It is some five years since I had the opportunity to speak in a defence debate. I am therefore honoured, and approach the defence arena of the House with some humility. I have not been neglecting defence issues—how could I?—as I hope that I shall show.

I link my words to the spirit at least of the Member of the European Parliament for Itchen, Test and Avon, Mr. Edward Kellett-Bowman, with whom I have worked closely on a number of defence issues. Together, we keep an eye on, for example, Konver funds. It is vital that we recognise the importance of putting in the European Parliament the British point of view on defence, otherwise the opinions of European politicians on British defence may be, shall we say, not the same as ours.

We must address not only the challenge of the defence of the realm but the management of change. I congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench on the way in which they have managed change over the past few years. That has been manifest in my constituency, where I have seen the most tremendous management problems resolved with great success and sensitivity by not only people in the Ministry of Defence in London, but local management, which quite often depends on retired officers and men who have enormous experience. It is always good to feel that we are in safe hands when it comes to, for example, the management of the Salisbury plain training area.

Mr. Soames: I want only to endorse my hon. Friend's point and join his tribute, which I should have made from the Front Bench, to the work of retired officers, their enormous importance to the management and their breadth of experience and steadiness. I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for highlighting that and I apologise for not having raised that matter myself.

Mr. Key: As ever, we are at one.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) was right to refer to the importance of cadet forces of all services. They flourish in my constituency, as in his and, indeed, across the country. I did not have the privilege of serving in the forces as a regular soldier, sailor or air man. I was, however, in the cadet force at school, in which I rose to the dizzy ranks of company serjeant major and played tuba in the school band. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to mark the importance of the cadet forces.

In my constituency there are no fewer than 13 Ministry of Defence establishments. I do not want to dwell on my constituency, but it is home to a cross-section of service establishments, especially Army establishments. Pre-eminent among them is the headquarters of UK Land

[Mr. Key]

Forces at Wilton, shortly to become Land Command on 1 April. We are immensely proud of that establishment in our constituency. It grew out of the old Southern Command, which I recall so well from my childhood days in Salisbury. It has an immensely important role, not only as a major local employer but because we know that the community I have the honour to represent is at the heart of the defence of this country.

We also have Old Sarum, which still retains an important military presence. It happens to be the oldest operational airfield in the United Kingdom; a source of some complaint to the residents of Stratford sub Castle who now feel that the airspace is becoming a little crowded as diversification into civilian flying takes place. We also have Bulford, which is known to almost everybody in the British Army, past or present, of any rank. It is a very fine example of the interface between the military and civilian communities, on which I should like to dwell.

The relationship between the military and civilian communities has changed very much over recent years, particularly as people have come back from overseas, especially from Germany, and pressures on civilian communities have been redoubled. At Larkhill, too, we have a wonderful relationship with the Royal Artillery, which is very much appreciated. The large garrison there is an important part of the military and civilian communities for so many people. Rollestone camp, for example, is a sort of standby camp. It has been used by the Home Office as an overflow prison. In the summer, it is used for Territorial Army exercises and, on one occasion during the Gulf war, it was Britain's only prisoner of war camp. I had the duty to visit Rollestone camp during the Gulf war to check, to my satisfaction, as a Member of the House of Commons, that the Geneva convention was being observed, which of course it was.

At West Down camp, another operational camp for territorial and other regimental activity, we see an interface between the civilian and military communities. I was sad at the decision to close Netheravon in future and to amalgamate the Army Air Corps activities in Hampshire over the border at Middle Wallop, but I was delighted that the Ministry of Defence made such a great deal of effort to try to ensure that jobs would be transferred to other units rather than simply lost. That effort was made for not only the military personnel but some hundreds of civilian personnel who had worked there for a long time. West Dean represents the Royal Navy's interest in my constituency and the activities there need no explanation in this debate, although it is a very important part of the constituency.

It is with sadness that I recall the closure only last month of RAF Chilmark, a distinguished Royal Air Force base, which has served the Royal Air Force so very well for more than 50 years. It was very moving, and an illustration of the continuity of defence in this country, that the station flag, which was hauled down for the last time, was presented to a fine old gentlemen in a wheelchair, who had been one of the first employees on day one of the opening of RAF Chilmark.

The aeroplane and armament experimental establishment Boscombe Down is the sound of freedom to the local community, with the sound of Tornados keeping us awake during the day and sometimes at night, too, supplemented at weekends by the welcome presence of the Southampton university air squadron. One of the highlights of life in the local community is the battle of Britain celebration at Boscombe Down, which thrills everyone who attends. It has rightly been somewhat scaled down in recent years. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) that we discard at our peril what he described somewhat unkindly and self-deprecatingly as the baggage of the military. It is a great tradition.

The importance of the research base is often not mentioned in defence debates. Some years ago, when I was member of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, we investigated the science budget and discovered that a substantial part of it was, in fact, paid for out of the defence budget. In my constituency, the chemical and biological defence establishment is at Porton Down, but there are a number of other establishments with a scientific base.

Porton Down is remarkable and has done perhaps more for the defence of the west than people will realise for many years to come. I pay particular tribute to Dr. Graham Pearson and his scientific staff, who not only lead our efforts at Geneva in defence and disarmament in chemical and biological weapons but have had an immense impact on the policy of the United States on chemical and biological defence. They have made an enormous difference to the stability of the world, no less.

At Porton Down we also see an interface with the environment in the remarkable landscape and precious ecology known for the great bustard, which I suspect no longer resides there. Certainly, it has the largest colony of juniper trees in the country. The way in which the MOD has opened up its landscape to local ecological and environmental interest groups, wildlife trusts, and so on is very much to be commended and gives the lie to the idea that once the Ministry of Defence takes over the landscape, that is the end of it. Far from it. If it were not for the Ministry of Defence in the south of England, we would not have such wonderful environmental havens at Salisbury plain, Porton down and, closer to the coast, Lulworth.

The nuclear, biological and chemical school at Winterbourne Gunner is another establishment I have the honour to represent. It, too, has done enormous work in training our soldiers in chemical and biological defence techniques. Quite remarkable activity has gone on there and that activity has spilled over into the United States and into the whole defence of the west.

The final establishment which I must mention, because it is known around the world to all British service men, is the NAAFI—the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute. The headquarters at Amesbury has fed and watered British troops for a long time and is an excellent organisation. When it moved out of its headquarters in London and went to Amesbury, it brought with it 300 jobs, and we were grateful for that. I was, therefore, sad to read the Defence Committee's third report on food supply to the armed forces, which was printed on 25 January this year. Although it is a matter for the Comptroller and Auditor General, all I can say is that, if there were an opportunity for me to give evidence to suggest that the NAAFI was an excellently run organisation, I would leap at the opportunity of giving it.

The NAAFI is not just the best brewer of tea in this country at its tea factory in Amesbury but a remarkable logistical organisation. When we had a substantial garrison in Germany, the NAAFI delivered 12,000 loaves of bread a day from Britain to Germany. It did not come back with empty trucks and it does not do so today. Potatoes feature

largely in an effort to supply the British market with slightly cheaper potatoes than farmers in Britain can currently produce.

Employment is crucial in any community that has a defence presence. It is not just a question of the number of serving officers, men and women but a question of civilian employment. In my constituency, we are fortunate to have seen only a small drop in the number of service personnel. There has been a drop of about 260, but there are still almost 5,000 personnel. There are more civilians working directly for the Ministry of Defence than there were. The NAAFI has 600 jobs at Amesbury and another 500 in shops and clubs in the area. It is a substantial employer.

Once again, I pay tribute to the retired officers, men and women of all ranks who enrich our community by choosing to return to their roots. If ever there was a rootless career, it is in the Army, the Royal Air Force or the Navy. That is especially true of the Army; Salisbury seems to draw people back. We are glad to have those people because they contribute so much to the community. That is true of any community that has a defence interest.

One of the problem areas which I want to highlight in the interface between the military and civilian populations is the responsibility of our local authorities for housing, for example. When soldiers leave the Army, they have a dilemma. Do they go back to their place of origin in, say, Liverpool or Newcastle, which they left when they were 16? Alternatively, do they stay in the area where they have spent much of their life, often married life, and in which their children have gone to school? That puts a particular strain on district councils as housing authorities. In Salisbury, the relationship between the local managers of Army housing and the district council is good, as is the relationship with Wiltshire county council, which provides other services such as education and social services.

There are, however, still problems that need to be addressed, such as the huge problem of empty Army housing. I know that the Government have addressed it, because I was a Minister for part of the time when we had the working party on empty housing and I am aware of the work done. However, it still needs to be rounded off and assistance needs to be given in certain circumstances to ensure that housing is not empty. I understand that there are many reasons why it is empty. Sometimes, the quality of housing put up in the 1950s and 1960s for service men is now too low and is unacceptable for civilian use; it would therefore represent a bad use of local authority money. Nevertheless, there is a problem and I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to address it.

Planning is another problem. We must grasp the nettle of Crown exemption in planning for Ministry of Defence land. In my constituency, there are thousands of acres of such land, not just in one large area but in many areas. I have already said that there are 13 establishments owned by the Ministry of Defence in my constituency.

On the environment, I pay tribute to the defence land agent and his staff. The headquarters is at Chessington and I pay particular tribute to the DLA at Durrington. The impact on the local community is enormous, not just in terms of the relationship between the Army and farming. The Army is a big landlord of tenanted farms across the country and especially around Salisbury plain.

The matter goes wider than that. There is, for example, the planting of trees. The Ministry of Defence has been assiduous in planting trees on Salisbury plain, which is not a happy environment for the tree. It is ironic that it has planted so many that I have started to get complaints from environmentalists and ecologists that there are too many trees and that they are upsetting the balance of nature. One cannot please everybody all the time. The Ministry of Defence has done well there. An article in the national press last month pointed out that the tank tracks—the scars gouged out on Salisbury plain—have become a haven for certain flora which otherwise would not have been established in the area.

I now turn to the question of roads across the plain. For many years, at Salisbury plain and at Otterburn, there has been a real problem of the environment being eroded by heavy military vehicles. Of course there will be a conflict between the use of land for military purposes, the use of land for civilian purposes and conservation. However, the decision taken to spend a good deal of money on the provision of these roads is welcome. It has not only taken pressure off local roads used by the civilian community but enhanced the environment and prevented the wholesale rutting of many hundreds of acres of land. It is a huge success.

My right hon. Friend the Minister may like to know that the DLA at Durrington has leased earth-moving vehicles to perform the task—no doubt, on an experimental basis, if he has not yet heard about it. The vehicles work extremely well, and the sight of fast-moving earth scrapers and movers is familiar around the edges of the plain.

There is, of course, a problem of noise from the firing of guns. The AS90 has been put through its paces and we are glad that its trials have now finished. It was a bit of a trial for us in the local community. The people of Otterburn should not worry too much about the noise, not just because they will get used to it—they have been used to such noise for many years—but because the story has been overwritten.

I was absolutely delighted to see on today's Order Paper a petition from the residents of Otterburn drawing attention to the fact that there are moves in the local community in the north-east of England to try to get the Army out of the ranges at Otterburn. The petitioners clearly ask that the Army does not leave Otterburn, because it provides enormous assistance to the local economy. I am sure that those of us who have the defence of the realm at heart are grateful to the people of Otterburn who have signed that petition. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) who has asked me over the past few months about noise on the Salisbury plain training area and about the extent to which it is disruptive. I know that he will be able to convince his constituents that it is a price worth paying.

I was delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) mentioned vehicles because I, too, have been pursuing one or two little queries about vehicles. There are a number of problems here and I asked some parliamentary questions. I wondered how many vehicles there were in the Ministry of Defence. I thought that it would be an immense challenge for the Ministry—as if it did not have enough to do—to count the number of vehicles. I was delighted that the MOD managed to produce a very good answer, stating that it owns 109,279 vehicles while there are 246,926 personnel. That is not a bad ratio in terms of vehicles to people, but it raises a serious issue about the procurement of vehicles—a subject in which the Select Committee on Defence is interested—and the way in which those vehicles are currently maintained, registered and used.

[Mr. Key]

The registration of military vehicles is somewhat arcane. I am sure that it is performed very well, but I wonder whether the time has come to computerise and amalgamate that registration with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency operation and possibly link it into the police national computer. In terms of value for money, that point could be worth exploring, as that is a very large vehicle fleet, by any standards.

In a community where there is military activity, there is often aggravation between civilians and the drivers of military vehicles. When a regiment moves to a training area and the drivers are unfamiliar with the roads, people will take wrong turnings, no matter how brilliantly the training area staff sign the roads as unsuitable for vehicles, forbidden to military vehicles, and so on.

We must also consider the non-standardisation of military vehicles. I am not too bothered about standardisation per se. However, it is difficult when vehicles are used and run according to the Joint Service Road Transport Regulations 1988, which bear very little, or no, relationship to the Road Traffic Acts and to the construction and use regulations that apply to other vehicles on our roads.

Many of the vehicles in the MOD fleet are tanks. Although we do see tanks on the roads in my constituency, we do not see them in large numbers. However, we often see 38-tonne lorries with military registrations pounding up and down our motorways. Under military regulations, tractor and trailer are registered separately and have different registration numbers. A police car in front of such a vehicle would see one registration number, while a police car behind it would see another. If the parts are swapped around, matters become a little tricky. I believe that all that is rather over-bureaucratic. I suggest that there may be value for money for the taxpayer if that problem with registration is considered and action taken.

We are very fortunate in this country with regard to our police forces. However, a problem is developing which must be addressed. Citizens in my constituency may encounter no fewer than six different police forces. The primacy in policing lies with the Wiltshire county constabulary—primus et optimus, first and best. It is the case throughout the country that the Home Office constabulary has primacy.

However, there is an interface with the MOD police. Some years ago, I served on the Committee on the Ministry of Defence Police Bill and I am aware that that legislation has had a very beneficial effect. There was always tension between different police forces, particularly between the MOD police and county police forces. That situation has improved dramatically, which is good news. In the Salisbury area and in the Salisbury plain villages, we are grateful that the MOD police are present to deter crime as well as to look after the interests of the MOD. The fact that the MOD police are now full constabulary policemen and women is very good news for us.

The Royal Military police are also in evidence in my constituency. They are not a constabulary force and legally and technically are not policemen in respect of civilians. That sometimes causes problems. I wrote on that point to the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, who is in another place, on 23 January and anticipate an answer quite soon.

If a military police vehicle is on a public highway, looks like an ordinary county police car and has a blue light, it is technically illegal for that vehicle to be on the road, whether or not the light is flashing.

In addition to the police forces to which I have already referred, we have the Guard force and we even see the provost-marshals from time to time. We also have the Atomic Energy Authority police and the British Transport police. There are also private security firms. I want to flag up the problem in communities where there is a military presence, as there is sometimes confusion between the different police forces in terms of what they are doing, what they can do and what notice one should take of them.

I am sure that my hon. Friends will be glad to hear that I have nearly finished. However, I must mention the education of forces children. In defence debates, we sometimes forget that we are not just talking about fighting forces; we are talking about communities that involve families. The British forces have a fine tradition of educating the forces children.

This is a difficult matter. I know many people, as I am sure all hon. Members do, who have been to school in perhaps a dozen different establishments during their school days. Two organisations are now responsible for the education of service children—Service Children's Schools (North West Europe), which has a responsibility mainly in Germany, and the Service Children's Education Authority UK, which is a non-departmental public body with responsibility in the United Kingdom.

I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench are considering the education of those children. Education matters enormously to children who live a peripatetic and often a global life. We must ensure that they have the finest education possible.

When I was a Minister in the Department of the Environment with responsibility for the poll tax—*[Interruption.]*—that was indeed an honour—it fell to me to be responsible for the payment, or non-payment, of poll tax by Her Majesty's forces. I had some interesting negotiations with the Treasury and the MOD. On one occasion in my constituency, the commanding officer of a unit on the plain busted down several score of soldiers who had defaulted on their poll tax to make the point that soldiers are part of the civilian community and that they and their families need to be regarded as such.

In these days of citizens charters, public consultations and public inquiries, it is important to be absolutely clear where the families of service personnel stand with regard to their civil rights. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces answered a parliamentary question from me which makes it clear that

> "The families of service personnel enjoy the same rights as other citizens to make representations during public consultations and public inquiries and to make complaints under the citizens charter. The same rights apply to service personnel provided that the impartiality of the armed forces is not compromised, and that such representations do not involve the disclosure, without permission, of information obtained in the course of their official duties."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. *565*.]

That is an important point because there are pressures on the families of service men and women. Conflicts can sometimes arise.

I would not suggest for a moment that military discipline should not be observed. It is absolutely right that it should be. We cannot have soldiers rushing off and contradicting the good discipline of their unit. On the other hand, where

military communities are threatened by civilian activities, there is a case for listening rather carefully to what they have to say.

I flag that up as a problem area in the case of Stonehenge in my constituency, where the Department of Transport has a proposal to put a dual carriageway within 100 m of married quarters at Larkhill. I hope very much that it will not be a case of, "Oh, they are only soldiers' married quarters, so we need not pay attention to their concerns," in circumstances where, I suggest, a road simply would not be considered if it were to affect one of the villages that we have the honour to represent.

This has been a remarkable debate so far and I look forward to the contributions of my hon. Friends. However, it is a great honour to represent a community like Salisbury which is a microcosm of the military community in this country. I look forward to representing it for many years to come.

7.29 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I was astonished to hear that the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) had served as a company sergeant major, albeit in a cadet force. He is nothing like some of the CSMs I have met in my admittedly dated military experience.

Rightly and properly, the Minister paid tribute to the soldiers who have served with such bravery and stoicism in deeply disturbing theatres such as Northern Ireland, Bosnia and elsewhere. I echo that tribute. Many of those soldiers, of course, came from Scottish regiments.

In his opening remarks, the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) paid an equally fine tribute to Nicky Fairbairn; I was pleased to hear that. Nicky Fairbairn and I came from opposite ends of the political spectrum, but in all my dealings with him he always behaved with extreme courtesy and friendliness. It was always a pleasure to watch him, as a member of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, cross-examining Ministers and civil servants with those brilliant forensic skills for which he was so justly famous in Scottish legal and political circles.

I part company with the hon. Member for Upminster over the deeply disquieting case of Private Clegg. Those who speak to people in Ulster about that affair hear opinions of it that contrast starkly with the view honourably offered by the hon. Gentleman.

I thank the Minister for his robust and emphatic assurance that the press speculation surrounding the possible merger of Scottish and English infantry regiments is just that—sheer speculation, which must be discounted. Infantrymen have to perform—or, I would like to be able to say, had to perform—such arduous roles in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, and the infantry regiment is the best kind of institution for such service. As I said to the Minister in an earlier intervention, infantrymen must have complete trust in their NCOs and officers, and that is best found within an infantry regiment rather than in a larger organisation of soldiers.

Is it the MOD's intention to acquire more land for Army training centres in Scotland in the near future? The Minister may not be able to answer that question immediately but I would be grateful for an answer eventually, because that matter is of some concern to many people in Scotland, despite the assurances offered by the hon. Member for Salisbury.

I was pleased to hear the Minister claim, with his usual honesty, that there are now widespread promotion opportunities for talented male and female NCOs. I do not expect an answer to my question this evening, but I would like to know how many serving officers have come from our public schools and how many from our state schools, how many have been promoted from the ranks and what ranks those people now hold. Is the Army on a level with the other two services in terms of promotion opportunities for other ranks? That is an important issue for young highly intelligent non-commissioned officers. I would also like to know how many female officers have come up through the ranks.

I shall not talk about strategy in my brief speech—at least, it will be briefer than some of the fine speeches that we have heard this evening. I am concerned with what may loosely be called welfare matters.

What guidelines have been issued to commanding officers concerning the treatment, counselling and advising of women soldiers and officers who become pregnant? Not long ago, a woman constituent came to see me after reading about one such case involving a former woman soldier at an industrial tribunal claiming unfair dismissal by the forces because of pregnancy. I must confess that when I looked at the lady I thought that she probably had not served with the forces recently, and she admitted to me that she had become pregnant in 1945. When I wrote to the Ministry of Defence, I was told that her complaint was time-barred.

I am given to understand that nowadays, where appropriate, women soldiers and officers who become pregnant are encouraged to remain, or to return to the Army. I would like the Minister to confirm that, because my information may be wrong, although I hope that it is not.

Staying with the theme not necessarily of pregnancy, whether unwanted or otherwise, but of the welfare of our constituents who have served so honourably in the Army, I noticed that the Minister paid tribute to those who have been killed or wounded while on active service, but that he made no mention of the treatment and care of soldiers who have been wounded, in some cases severely. I should like to know what energies and resources are devoted to their welfare and rehabilitation, and to their being brought back into the regiment, or into whatever arm of the services they were with when they were wounded. Is the Minister satisfied with the treatment and care of those soldiers?

Early-day motion 616 refers to Gulf war veterans. Again, the Minister may not be able to answer my question tonight, but how many soldiers or former soldiers who served in the Gulf war have claimed to be suffering from what is known as Gulf war syndrome? I am trying to be as fair-minded as possible but I must ask whether, as is alleged in the early-day motion, the Ministry of Defence and the Government as a whole have treated those soldiers much less favourably than the American Government have treated their counterparts who served with the United States armed forces. What is happening to those soldiers?

I shall now say something about discipline. I have no sympathy for soldiers who commit serious and violent crimes and then receive what appears to be only a mild reprimand from their commanding officers. What guidelines are issued to commanding officers for dealing with such soldiers? Admittedly they are few in number

[Dr. Norman A. Godman]

but none the less they bring their regiments into disrepute with their violent behaviour. I would like to know something about the guidelines on dealing with them when they have been convicted in the criminal courts of violent crimes against individuals. Those who bring disgrace on their regiments should be dismissed. I do not believe in punishing a person twice for committing a crime, but our soldiers must conduct themselves with honour while going about their leisure activities.

The hon. Member for Upminster mentioned the yellow card and the tragically inadvertent shooting of civilians in Northern Ireland. Perhaps the Scottish charge of culpable homicide should have been introduced long ago to deal more fairly with such cases.

I have met many young men from my constituency who serve in the British Army, usually as NCOs or private soldiers with infantry regiments. All of them are extremely proud, and rightly so, of their military careers and vocations. I am proud to represent them in this place, which is why I seek to ask questions concerning general welfare matters.

In some respects, the armed forces have been ahead of large industrial organisations in terms of defending the interests of personnel. For example, grievance procedures were introduced in the forces many years before such procedures were introduced in industrial organisations. As recently as 1972, the Industry Act persuaded many industrial organisations to introduce formalised grievance and disciplinary procedures, but I can remember many years ago when I was in the forces that a private soldier had recourse to such grievance procedures up to the senior ranks.

We must examine the role of the British Army within the framework of NATO. The impression I get is that there is an increasing disaffection among Americans—not just American citizens, but politicians—concerning the involvement of their forces in continental Europe. In the not too distant future, we may have to examine the implications of a Europewide defence review because of the growing disillusion felt by so many Americans.

Gore Vidal—he is not a politician, but a would-be politician—gave a speech not long ago in California and said that his opinion, which is shared by many Americans, was that Europe was rich enough and powerful enough to look after its own defence interests, and that the day would come when the Americans would pull out of Europe. One may have little respect for Gore Vidal and one may think that he should stick to writing historical novels, but he reflects a growing body of opinion in America. The view among ordinary Americans to whom I have spoken and among American politicians—both Republican and Democrat—is that the time is approaching when the American military presence in continental Europe will be reduced to a minimum.

My interpretation of what has been told to me by many Americans and what I have read in American newspapers and periodicals may be wrong but I think that that is the shape of things to come. We may well have a European defence force buttressed by a European treaty that will not involve the Americans. That might sound unnecessarily gloomy, but we must accept that there is a growing American disaffection for all matters European. One can see that in the American attitude to Bosnia, and in other respects. The Americans do not want a single body bag returned to the States from a European theatre.

That alienation from Europe will grow. I do not wish to make a party political point, as we should all be involved in discussions on this matter. That is the way in which we Europeans—principally, I believe, within the European Union through the Western European Union—are heading, perhaps with an enlarged European Union. NATO will have to change, and it will change dramatically because of American decision-making and not because of the way in which we in Europe think.

7.45 pm

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): I follow the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) with pleasure, although I was a little surprised that he was surprised that my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) was a former company sergeant major in his school's army section combined cadet force. My hon. Friends would not want me to hide my history under a veil, so I shall say that my hon. Friend is not the only one who has served with distinction in that capacity.

Unlike some of my hon. Friends who are in the Chamber, this is the first time that I have spoken in a defence debate. I bring to it my experiences as a former young rifleman with the 1st battalion the 51st Highland Volunteers, and also as someone subsequently commissioned into the Gordon Highlanders. Very few hon. Members at the younger end of the spectrum have served either as a volunteer or in the Regular Army. It is therefore important that those of us who have, take a particular interest in the armed forces.

It is entirely right and proper for me—before I make any remarks concerning the Army—to follow the lead of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) in referring to the sad and untimely death of Sir Nicholas Fairbairn. Nicky was a colourful character and I always enjoyed his company, as did other hon. Members from both sides of the House. One of his ancestors was a founder of the Gordon Highlanders, and he and his family had a great deal of history behind them. He will be sadly missed.

Before I speak on the youth wing of the services, the Territorial Army and the Regular Army, I must say how much I enjoyed the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury, whose tour de force around his constituency brought back happy and nostalgic memories of Salisbury plain. If I may say so, it brought back some unhappy memories as well.

Both my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury and the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow referred to the Army cadet force. In this annual debate, it is important that we do not lose sight of the fact that there are the adult forces, if I can call them that. I pay tribute to the officers and adult instructors throughout the British Isles who give up so much time to put so much into the Army cadet force. It is a tremendous, cost-effective and well-recruited organisation, which encourages young people who wish to have a career in the services and also those who do not. In the case of the former, it can bring on the brightest and the best, while in the case of the latter, it helps equip young people to be better citizens in their communities.

I also pay tribute to the officers, non-commissioned officers and other ranks of the Regular Army and Territorial Army. They are going through a most challenging period of change and they continue to do what politicians ask of them in the most professional of ways.

Under "Options for Change", the strength of the Army has been reduced from about 156,000 to 116,000. In February 1993, that strength was raised to 119,000 and 2,000 posts were saved in the support arms, which were transferred to front-line units. In December 1993, a further 3,000 posts were transferred from rear to front-line units. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said, that has allowed the re-roling of the Royal Armoured Corps Regiment, as an armoured recce regiment, which reduced the cadreisation of the Royal Artillery and the Royal Engineering units and allowed for the retention of an additional battery of 24 Air Mobile Brigade Artillery Regiment. Apart from those changes, "Options for Change" is largely complete.

There have been further reductions in the defence budget since those changes were announced but, to take up a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster, the introduction of further commercial management practices in certain areas should be welcomed, even if not necessarily in all quarters.

The Bett review and final withdrawal from Hong Kong is likely to mean that the strength of the Army will fall to 115,000 by the turn of the century.

The Territorial Army has also undergone substantial reductions and change through "Options for Change". I very much welcome the moves to which my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces referred, to integrate our volunteers more closely with the Regular Army. As part of the restructuring, I welcome the increased role of the Territorial Army in national defence, as well as the wider role as a national reserve. About 57 per cent. of units were allocated to national defence roles and the remainder dedicated to NATO's Allied Command Europe rapid reaction force, which means that our volunteers could be deployed anywhere from Norway to Turkey.

The shift has meant that in the move from teeth to combat arms, the infantry has been reduced from 41 to 36 battalions and from 164 to 109 companies. I welcome the increase in specialist areas—I emphasise the fact that it is an increase—especially in the Territorial Army's Armoured Air Corps, which will be increased by about 50 per cent., and in the Intelligence Corps, which will be increased by 40 per cent. All that restructuring is due to be completed this April.

I am not entirely sure whether disbanding the Territorial Army in Germany is necessarily a good thing, but in general the greater integration with the Regular Army and the fact that some proposed cuts—there has been much speculation—have not taken place emphasise the importance attached to the Territorial Army and the cost-effective contribution that it makes to our military capability.

On the possibility of new reserve forces legislation, the terms of service for Army reservists are governed by the Reserve Forces Act 1980, which was drafted in response to the Territorial Army's enhanced role after 1979 in resisting a possible Warsaw pact assault on NATO. It sanctions Territorial Army mobilisation in the event of national danger or national emergency. That and other blunderbuss sections of the Act are unsuited to the multiple and low-level conflicts in which Britain's armed forces might become involved and in which the Territorial Army might be needed in the 1990s and the 21st century.

Present legislation undoubtedly hinders the use of reservists, as was seen in the Gulf war. We need to establish new categories of reservist—those of high readiness, subject to immediate call-out, especially combatants, those in the support arms, sometimes linguists and the ready reservists, to be mobilised to serve as a general pool and a back pool for regular personnel deployed abroad in an emergency.

I welcome the moves in that direction encapsulated in the consultative document published in October 1993, entitled, "Britain's Reserve Forces—a Framework Document for the Future". Some reservists have rightly expressed concern about the possible effects on cohesion of having different categories of reservist in one unit. Nevertheless, that is an important change and I look forward to hearing what my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement has to say on that topic when he replies to the debate. I also hope that he will express a further willingness along the lines that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces referred to earlier—a willingness to allow reservists, and where possible their units, to serve with regular forces more often.

That has long been the practice in Denmark and Canada, and the successful exercise to which my hon. Friend referred, when 40 territorial soldiers—Territorial Army volunteers from the Royal Irish Rangers—served alongside 1 Royal Irish in the Falklands in 1994, is an important and significant step forward, which needs to be expanded and improved upon. I look to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to give us a lead in that respect in his reply. Specialists, such as linguists and public relations experts, are working with regular forces in Yugoslavia and with United Nations forces in particular.

The one-Army concept is very important and was first embarked on some years ago. The legislation that I referred to and the changes that we are embarking on are very important and I hope that it will not be too long before legislation is introduced.

I also want to ensure that a Territorial Army soldier does not have to be almost discharged and re-enlisted in the Regular forces to undertake certain engagements of a more Regular nature. The one-Army concept should be entirely seamless.

This has been an historic week in Northern Ireland. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred to the peace initiative in the Province in a statement to the House. I wish the people of Northern Ireland well in their discussions about the way forward for their community, but I am concerned that there has been speculation that, as the peace process continues, the size of the Army presence in Ulster might be reduced. It has always been suggested that such a withdrawal might lead to an eventual reduction in the strength of the Army. In the short term, units on six-month tours might be withdrawn altogether. If that were to be the case—I hope that it will not be—it would lead to even further overstretch within our armed forces.

In 1992, the number of Regular battalions in the Province was increased from 10 to 12 as a result of increased and heightened terrorist activity. A reversal of

[Mr. Matthew Banks]

that decision might lead to the abolition of the six-month tour. More long-standing peace might bring pressure to bear for further infantry battalion amalgamations.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman has said, but surely he cannot be suggesting that we keep troops in Northern Ireland because we have nowhere else to put them. If we needed 10 battalions in 1991 and the peace continues, surely we should be able to look forward to bringing some of the 12 battalions back to the mainland.

Mr. Banks: Having made those earlier remarks, I look to my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to reassure me that no hasty decisions will be taken on that matter.

Additional responsibilities have made it impossible to ensure a 24-month interval between emergency tours. My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster referred to concerns in the armed forces and in the House on that matter. The fact that the Ministry of Defence was unable to meet its target in that respect meant that a couple of the battalions that might have been amalgamated earlier this year were not. It led to the withdrawal of a unit from Belize.

In 1995-96, regardless of further commitments of which we are not currently aware, some 10 major units will breach the 24-month guideline for gaps between tours, if the Select Committee on Defence is correct. My right hon. and hon. Friends at the Treasury would not put up with a gap of less than 24 months, so our soldiers and service men should not, either.

That is why I expressed my concerns in the House and, perhaps more appropriately and effectively, privately, about the amalgamation of the Gordon Highlanders, the Queen's Own Highlanders and some other units. Behind the scenes, many discussions have taken place and I am pleased that the points concerning overstretch were well taken by my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench. I recognise the pressure on them, not least from our right hon. and hon. Friends at the Treasury.

I cannot continue without reminding my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement of the assurances made at the time of amalgamation. It is vital that the limited funding to maintain two regimental headquarters officers, in the case of north-east Scotland, in Aberdeen and Inverness, is retained. Without it, it will be impossible properly to carry out civil-military liaison, recruitment activities and other matters in such a large, disparate geographical area. My right hon. Friend should allow for a replacement to be made in the establishment in Aberdeen when the current grade 3 officer retires. At present, there are no plans to replace him, but I believe that he should be replaced.

I always understood that "Options for Change" was intended to reduce our armed forces to the minimum necessary to retain capability in all areas of low and high-intensity warfare. That appertains to equipment, as it does to size. The Government confirm that the Army will receive 259 Challenger 2 tanks, and orders are expected soon for helicopters. Much of the Army's equipment was, understandably, designed in the 1980s. In these days when defence inflation outstrips average inflation, there is genuine concern about whether there will be sufficient funding to procure replacements for all the Army systems at the beginning of the 21st century and beyond.

If commitments are maintained and spending is not increased, a further defence review will be inevitable, particularly in Germany. I believe that the Foreign Office budget should shoulder a greater weight of the financial burden of some of our international peacekeeping operations, and I should be surprised if many of my hon. Friends, particularly in the Government, did not agree with me.

I have had time in this debate only to scratch the surface of many of the important issues. I shall finish where I began, by paying genuine tribute to the men and women of our armed forces, particularly in the Army. They have always been professional in carrying out the duties that we as politicians put before them, often in very difficult circumstances. How I felt for some of those Army officers, non-commissioned officers and other ranks who, while serving in the difficult terrain of Bosnia, were called to see a senior officer one day and told that they had to go.

I am reminded of how many Ministers over the years, irrespective of which Government have been in office, have managed to survive a reshuffle because they have been taken away from London or were abroad at the time. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, and we should not advocate one thing in one place and act differently somewhere else. My hon. Friends understand only too well my concern in that respect.

Having listened to some of the contributions by Opposition Members, not least an amusing and witty speech by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), I believe that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces was right when he said:

"There is no area of policy where the Labour party is less convincing than defence."

I have no doubt that Britain's defence interests are best served by a Conservative Government.

8.4 pm

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): I am particularly glad to be called in this debate as it releases me from the dubious delights of the Finance Bill Committee.

First, I re-emphasise the plea for stability in the Army after the inevitable disruption resulting from the three major exercises over the past three years: the prospect study; "Options for Change"; and the defence costs study. I objected to some of the proposals and welcomed others. I do not propose this evening to revisit those issues but I warn that, if the leaked proposals for a corps of infantry in planning project BA2000 are based on fact, my right hon. and hon. Friends in the defence team will experience the sort of whirlwind foreshadowed in some of the "Options for Change" potential amalgamations, which were later wisely shelved.

Mr. Freeman: I should not want to allow my hon. Friend to continue his speech with any sense of foreboding or depression, so I give him the absolute assurance that there is no plan whatever to reorganise the Army into a corps.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I am delighted to receive that assurance from my right hon. Friend, which will have the double benefit of reducing the length of my speech.

I emphasise that rumours that reach the newspapers aggravate the uneasiness that many soldiers feel about their job security and quality of life. They are concerned

for themselves and for their families but they often hide or disguise those feelings in the interests of the duty that they have undertaken, to serve the country. Any further factors—I am glad to hear that any reform of the infantry is not to be one of them—will clearly adversely affect recruitment and retention.

The second point that I wish to make is about training. In this country, only Salisbury plain and Otterburn are suitable for proper collective training. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) expressed his views clearly and I am sorry that he is no longer in the Chamber because he knows that, as a part-time constituent of his—I spend only occasional days in the year in his constituency—I am careful not to trespass on his territory in the political sense.

However, Salisbury plain has been under increasing pressure since the return of soldiers from the British Army of the Rhine. I happen to think that the Army is one of the best conservation agencies in the country, protecting habitats and preserving marvellous parts of our countryside relatively and, perhaps paradoxically, undisturbed. Salisbury plain is now criss-crossed with roads to prevent damage from a greater concentration of tracked vehicles and, if that continues, it will ultimately look like an asphalt parkplatz—something that no one in the House would want. It would serve nobody's interests.

When my right hon. Friend winds up, will he say what progress has been made in assessing new training areas? What is the point of having a training area in Alberta, Canada when, owing to our present commitments, we cannot supply enough men to exercise there? In any case, it is an expensive operation to maintain.

The Army admits that it is not as well trained now as at the time of the Gulf war. What will be done to redress that? Simulation, although it has a role, can never be as good as field training. What progress is there to report on the former GDR, Poland, Hungary, Romania and the Czech Republic as potential alternatives? We need to exercise at proper levels and I hope that the tanks and other elements of the Army that we have at the moment will soon be supplemented by a fourth recce regiment and attack helicopters.

My third and last point is to urge a rationalisation of our defence commitments, integrated as closely as possible with our foreign policy interests. In common with the whole House, I welcome the ceasefire brokered with such skill and determination by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Having served in South Armagh in the bad old days of the early 1970s, I found the difference in atmosphere when I returned to Ulster two weeks ago totally amazing. I shall not comment on the political situation, given the delicacy of the matter following the publication of the framework document this week. I have no intention of prejudicing any talks taking place at the moment, although I join my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) in welcoming the assurances that have been given that further force reductions will not result from a possible lasting peace.

However, I question the rationale behind the deployment of our troops around the world. It all seems somewhat haphazard to me. It was never clear to me why we went into Bosnia, other than as part of a larger NATO, WEU or United Nations operation. Do we really want to get embroiled in Angola? I have visited the war zone there and it has endured the most ghastly civil war for the past 20 years. Would not our particular skills, which have been admired worldwide, be better harnessed in other parts of the world?

If the United States tends to become more isolationist, as the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) said earlier that it would, we certainly cannot be expected to be everywhere. Should we not be taking the lead in developing NATO on both sides of the Atlantic, or the United Nations with a proper command structure to combat the new menaces of today, such as drug trafficking, terrorism and nuclear proliferation?

In other contexts, our training teams do admirable work—which is often not publicised—in several parts of the world in passing on skills and developing the goodwill that is invaluable to future relationships and trade. Should we not be expanding, rather than contracting, that work? Why, in some affluent, anglophile and well-disposed countries in South America, for instance, are we reducing the number of military attachés so that they have to cover groups of countries, thus reducing their effectiveness and bringing about the loss of goodwill and trade from Britain to the United States and our European Community partners, who are often our commercial rivals?

Why does one come across the ludicrous situation of an NCO, however capable, being passed off as a subaltern to represent our interests in a particularly important part of the developing world in Latin America? Why do we have mere colonels as defence attachés in other significant countries in the far east when brigadiers, and now even major-generals, are being made redundant? I suggest that officers of the rank of colonel do not have access at the right level, and that their efforts in Britain's interests are prejudiced by their being relatively junior. One has only to look around gatherings in countries in many parts of the world to find that our attachés are of junior rank and have less effective access than their competitors.

I urge my hon. Friend to address that problem. I understand that talks are taking place at present between his Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I very much hope that he will address the matter with great enthusiasm and I urge him to involve the DTI in those discussions.

It is only in some ways—which may sound peripheral, but they are extremely important for the abiding and excellent influence of Britain overseas—that those matters are promoted and thus British interests, so ably looked after by our Army over the centuries, can best be developed effectively.

8.14 pm

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Army. Like my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, I served in the Army a quarter of a century ago. I served in The Life Guards, one of the two regiments of Household Cavalry, and I was fortunate to serve in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. Back in Europe, I served for a short time at Windsor and performed public duties here in London before being sent to Northern Ireland toward the end of my military career and at the beginning of the present troubles.

It is amazing to look back over the short distance of five or six years and consider the changes that have taken place in the world since then. We have seen the collapse

[Mr. Michael Stephen]

of the Warsaw pact, and the western world has gone through the worst economic recession since 1929. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that there have been significant changes our in military forces.

It is remarkable that Britain has managed to maintain defence spending at its current level. We spend 3.7 per cent. of GDP on defence, whereas France spends 3.4 per cent. and Germany spends only 2 per cent. It has been possible to maintain defence spending at that level only because a prudent Conservative Government repaid debt during the good years so that we had the capacity to borrow to see us through the bad years.

What is the purpose of our armed forces? I suggest that they exist for three reasons. First, to maintain the security of western Europe, and with it the security of these islands; secondly, to maintain internal security, particularly in the Province of Northern Ireland; and thirdly, to perform a miscellany of tasks which, for the sake of argument, I shall call the optional extras.

The first two tasks simply must be afforded; there can be no question about that. Twice in the lifetime of many of our constituents, Europe has been convulsed by war. Twice in their lifetime, Britain has been caught napping and soldiers, sailors and airmen have been sent to die in the first battles in very large numbers. That must never happen again.

The extent of our spending on defence must, of course, depend on the assessment of the risks that the country faces from time to time. It is important to emphasise that the security of these islands rests upon the structure of NATO. It is a dangerous delusion to believe that western Europe, through the medium of the Western European Union or any other organisation, can effectively defend itself against a threat such as that which we faced from the east throughout the 1950s, 1960s 1970s and most of the 1980s. We hope that that threat will never arise again, but we live in a dangerous and unstable world and we cannot be caught napping again.

The Warsaw pact has now been dismantled. The formidable East German army is now on our side and the same can perhaps be said of the Poles, the Czechs, the Slovaks, the Hungarians and others. We have entered into a new period of friendly and constructive relations with the Russian people—the Ukrainians and other component parts of the former Soviet Union. Long may that continue. Every sinew needs to be strained by the Foreign Office and the country in general to ensure that that constructive relationship with the peoples of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is built upon and thrives.

The threat that we face today is much less certain than the one that we have been used to. Today, the threat comes from further afield, from smaller countries with less formidable capabilities but still with the capacity to cause immense disruption to the interests of the western world at almost a moment's notice. Therefore, our forces must be flexible and additional effort must be put into intelligence gathering. We must always stay one step ahead in the present unstable international situation.

We must remember that, if we again face a major threat to our security, we shall not be able to mobilise either our men or our equipment as quickly or as relatively easily as we did before. It will be much more difficult next time. We must therefore ensure that we have adequate reserves of trained manpower and equipment and we must organise our military procurement strategy so that equipment can be produced and delivered to our armed forces much more quickly.

Secondly, internal security can pose a risk to our national security, and Northern Ireland is the most important at present. I am sure that everyone in this country and on the island of Ireland is immensely grateful for the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his colleague the Prime Minister of Ireland and the efforts of all of the Ministers and civil servants who have been involved in the peace process.

The peace process did not just happen; it has evolved from immense thought, careful planning and, not least, political risk, on the part of those involved. All those who wish to see peace in Northern Ireland must pay tribute to the work that has been done. It is too early to say whether that work will bear fruit, but I sincerely hope that it will. I think that the Prime Minister and his colleagues deserve the support of the House and of the whole nation, particularly at this delicate stage in the negotiation process.

In the Northern Ireland context, I wish to address the subject of criminal liability to which our armed forces and our armed police are exposed. An armed soldier or an armed policeman has a duty to place his life at risk to protect the public. He is under a duty to fire his weapon, should that prove necessary, in order to protect the public. Therefore, I do not believe that he should be held to the same standards of criminal liability as those of us who are not under that obligation.

I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General should bring before the House for debate a form of words which would afford armed soldiers and policemen who are acting bona fide in the performance of their duties wider protection from criminal liability than presently exists. That situation is quite different from the recent incident where off-duty soldiers made a violent attack upon a civilian. Those soldiers were not on duty and were under no obligation to place their lives at risk. They should be held to the same standard of criminal liability as applies to the rest of us, and I understand that the Parachute Regiment Association concurs with that view.

Thirdly, we require our armed forces for optional extras. Those forces are deployed in support of our foreign policy objectives, which are essentially a matter for debate in the foreign affairs context. I sometimes think that when the House debates foreign affairs, we tend to concentrate too much on specific foreign affairs issues of the day. We do not stand back and consider what we need military forces for—what are the foreign policy objectives for which we maintain those forces.

We maintain military force in general support of western strategy, for example, in the Gulf. Although it does not threaten our security directly, stability in the Gulf is immensely important to the world's trade and to its strategic balance. World trade is immensely important to a country like Britain which, throughout its history, has lived by trade.

Armed forces are necessary to preserve respect for human rights around the world, but we cannot be a world policeman. We should play our part, but we must think carefully about the degree to which we wish to involve our soldiers, sailors and airmen in enterprises of that kind.

We must support the Security Council of the United Nations. We are an important member of the world organisation and I hope that we shall remain so. I should like Britain's armed forces to be used more often in support of the Security Council. We should be proud of the fact that the British fighting man is among the best—I would say is the best—in the world. This country can make an important contribution to the work of the United Nations by deploying our soldiers, sailors and airmen in support of the Security Council.

However, I do not see why we should pay for it. I believe that, when our armed forces are made available in support of the United Nations, those who are not prepared to put their armed forces at the United Nations' disposal should bear a greater share of the cost involved. It might be said that we would be offering our armed forces in a mercenary role. I do not think that that is the correct way of looking at it. Even if it were, I see nothing dishonourable in making our armed forces available in support of the United Nations, on the basis that other members of that organisation pay for it.

We should debate in an objective manner our foreign policy objectives and the use to which we wish to put our military force. I do not think that journalists like Kate Adie, or anyone else, should be allowed to make British foreign policy. Whatever we decide, our armed forces should be properly equipped and manned for the role that they must perform.

I congratulate the Government on their commitment to order 259 Challenger 2 tanks for the Army and the new attack helicopters. The Army is also equipped with the Warrior, one of the best infantry armoured fighting vehicles in the world, and the AS90 self-propelled gun, which has proved to be one of the most versatile and effective artillery pieces available.

Our armed forces should be manned adequately, but I am concerned that, all too often, a minor unit is detached from its parent unit in order to support another unit, taking part of its regimental headquarters with it. As a result, what is left of the parent unit does not constitute an effective fighting force. We should also take care to keep the correct interval between tours. If we are to maintain the right calibre of men and women in our armed services, it is vital that there is adequate time to train them for the role upon which they are about to embark and to retrain them upon their return. They must also have adequate time to spend with their families.

I also believe—this is perhaps the most important point I wish to make in relation to manning—that we must have adequate training at brigade level and above. Almost an entire generation of brigade and corps commanders have not been able to exercise their formations. Simulators and exercises without troops can help, but there is no substitute for exercises with real troops in co-operation with naval and air forces.

It is also essential that our Territorial Army be integrated much more with the Regular forces, and I welcome the Government's position on that issue. If future hostilities were to occur, there would not be time for those soldiers to be integrated with the Regular units. It is better for them that they are integrated with the Regular units, so that their training is more realistic and much more in tune with what their Regular comrades are doing. It is essential for the defence of the nation that they should be integrated.

I should now like to say a word about the ceremonial role of the Army, having myself served on public duties here in London. Those duties are not, of course, essential to the security of our country, but they are essential to the maintenance of our traditions. They are a tangible reminder to our people of the great history of our country. They are also one of the major reasons why so many tourists come to this country. Those units probably pay for themselves, which is more than can be said for any other unit of our armed forces. I hope that we shall always be able to maintain the tradition of public duties in London, and that the Government will always ensure that the units that have to do those duties are properly manned and properly equipped.

We run the risk today of our armed forces being undermanned. I know that the economy is going through a difficult period, but I have the confidence that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is pursuing the right strategy. I am confident that the economy is improving, and when we begin to see more of the results of that economic recovery, I hope that we can have another look at the manning of our armed forces. I would like to see our Army maintained at a minimum of 120,000 trained men, with 12,000 more in training.

I also hope that, whatever decisions we may take about the manning of the Army in future, we remember the importance of the regimental system. It is absolutely vital that the regimental system, which has been built up over 300 years or more, is preserved, because when a man goes into battle in the British Army, he is going into battle not just for his country but for the honour of his regiment. That may seem to be an intangible thing for anyone who has not served in one of our great regiments, but for anyone who has it is a very real factor and an important source of motivation at what can be a very stressful and difficult time.

I congratulate the Government on the skilful way in which they have negotiated the past five years, which have been immensely difficult for any Government, in terms of the economic resources; the dramatically changed nature of the threat; and the consequent need to restructure our forces. They have done well, but I hope that in future we can do better.

8.32 pm

Lady Olga Maitland (Sutton and Cheam): I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister of State's robust commitment and support for a lean and fit Army and armed forces in general in the "Front Line First" programme. Indeed, I was encouraged by the enhancements that have been made and the promises of the enhancements to come.

The danger, in my view, is that there is real doubt as to whether the Army will be considered sufficient to meet all today's needs; in general UN peacekeeping terms it probably will, but I very much doubt that it could cope with a real emergency requiring sustained and intense support over a period of months. In that, I share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), who spoke in last week's Navy debate. He warned us then that the 25 per cent. cut from our defence spending overall was wrong. Indeed, he repeated that comment today. He said, quite rightly, that, in a dangerous world, we must

"begin to re-establish the strength of our military forces."—[*Official Report*, 16 February 1995; Vol. 254, c. 1166.]

How right he is.

[Lady Olga Maitland]

I trust that the Government will keep an open mind and start preparing now for greater flexibility on defence spending. I fear that some were too euphoric in the ending of the cold war. The new world order did not necessarily become a better world order. Indeed, with a loss of a certain and identifiable potential aggressor, it has become a significantly more dangerous place, and certainly more hazardous. A seemingly small local conflict could explode and take on an international dimension. It would very likely affect us, for we are not just a little coastal nation.

We are but one of the few countries in the world with real global interests. We are a member of NATO and the Western European Union. We are a permanent member of the Security Council and are just one of the five nations in the world with a nuclear deterrent. We are an active member of the Group of Seven leading industrial nations. Some 47 per cent. of our trade is outside Europe. We head a Commonwealth of 51 nations. No other country holds all those positions of international prominence and responsibility. With those positions of influence, and with them the potential to be threatened in any number of areas, we are living on luck if we believe that our current level of forces will see us through every eventuality. They will not.

I believe that we should take a lesson from history. Man does not change in character, despite modern technology. It just means that we can be even more devastating in warfare. One potential enemy goes; another will surely take his place.

Paul Beaver, who is well known for his work with *Jane's Defence Weekly*, in a presentation in the House some weeks ago, identified 44 flash points in areas of British concern for this year. He pointed to the new fighting in regional and ethnic conflicts, the continued regional and ethnic conflicts in former colonies, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the rise in Islamic extremism and the threats to our trade routes.

It would be a mistake to say that there would be no British strategic interest at stake in any one of those cases. Indeed, I recall the rueful comment made by Lord Callaghan, while Foreign Secretary, following the rescue mission by Turkish troops in North Cyprus in 1974. He said:

"Wars begin in the smallest and the most unexpected places."

It was true then. It was certainly true later with the Falklands, when we had to scrabble over the map even to find the islands.

This May celebrates the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Europe. It should be recalled that we entered the second world war unprepared. Do not forget the ignominy of 158,000 men being booted off the Dunkirk beaches, with the loss of all the equipment. They were hopelessly outgunned and outclassed by their German opponents. The same was true of our French allies.

Similar disasters were to follow in Norway, Greece, Crete and Singapore. The only encouraging development was the battle of Britain, fought by "The Few", Wavell's offensives against the Italians and the first defence of Tobruk. So why was there such a parlous state? The dead hand of politicians, I confess, in 1919, who were so horrified by the first world war—termed the war to end all wars—that the Cabinet brought in the notorious 10-year rule, which assumed that, for the purpose of defence funding, the British empire would not be engaged in any war during the next 10 years, and therefore no expeditionary force was needed.

The Geddes axe decimated the armed services, which were then made unfit for anything save imperial placing. That certainly applied to the Army. In today's somewhat more sophisticated scenario, I refer to our activities with the UN peacekeeping duties—worthy in themselves, but I very much doubt that we could cope with a conflict on a much wider scale.

The 10-year rule was still in operation in 1932, paralysing all defence development. After that, the Treasury did not lift the lid on defence spending until the day when Chamberlain, most reluctantly, had to see the light after appeasement in Munich in 1938. In no time at all, we were fighting for our lives—scrambling, almost too late, to repair the damage.

Surely we should not miscalculate a third time, and repeat that sorry chapter of disasters. Even if we accept that in future all security threats will be tackled by an international force, we must recognise that a sufficient body of organisation and troops will be needed for a sustained campaign. We are completely unable to contribute that today.

I pay tribute to Field Marshal Lord Bramall, who last month addressed the Defence and Security Forum of which I am proud to be president. The forum grew out of my anti-CND campaign Families for Defence, which I launched in 1983. Lord Bramall warned that after the cold war and the introduction of "Options for Change"—or perhaps I should call it "Options for Cuts"—we were caught out. We entered a full-blown war in the Gulf, ransacking men, tanks and equipment in Germany to keep ourselves going. Today, Lord Bramall told us, we could not possibly mount a repeat performance. Even in the Gulf we could not have sustained a prolonged campaign: we did not have the resources. We coped with 100 hours, but 100 days would have landed us in serious trouble.

Today our armed forces, especially the infantry, are over-extended. It could be at least two years before we achieve a proper tempo of unaccompanied service with gaps of more than 24 months. Lord Bramall argued forcefully that we should radically rethink our defence policy, and prepare with more realism for a sustained threat in the future. A man of his enormous calibre should be listened to very carefully.

I accept that modern war-fighting is changing rapidly, with more emphasis on high technology—which I acknowledge we are obtaining. None the less, I do not consider that we are in sufficiently good military health to cope with a serious and sustained threat to our interests. The Treasury must accept responsibility for its influence on "Options for Change". It is short-sighted to trim so bare to the bone to cut public spending. It seems to have been forgotten that to be ill prepared for a major war will cost us infinitely more than temporary savings today. Our current budget for 1995-96 is just £22.7 billion—only just more than what we spend on support for disabled people and their carers.

We have taken the stoic professionalism of our armed forces and their officers for granted, pushing their loyalty and efficiency to the limits. To slash the Army—at the Treasury's insistence—from 165,000 to 116,000, when even the General Staff and Ministers agreed that 123,000 would have been more appropriate, showed a minimum

of sensitivity and understanding. It was a relief that there was a reprieve, and the figure was raised to 118,000. That would just about fill Wembley stadium.

The truth is that the Army is overstretched, and is likely to remain so for as long as Bosnia lasts in its present form. That may be some time, for our troops are trusted and highly respected by all sides. Praise coming from the Serbs I know is praise indeed.

At this point, let me pay tribute to the skills of General Sir Michael Rose and condemn the appalling attempt at character assassination by the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald). It was unworthy of him, and I hope that he will withdraw his remarks on another occasion.

The Army in Bosnia might be stretched even further: more troops would be needed if we were to supervise a political settlement. The real difficulty is that none of our infantry battalions or engineer units is strong enough without reinforcements to deal with more than day-to-day service, let alone anything that might constitute a real emergency. I do not see how we could ever contemplate any military intervention involving a brigade or more for at least six months.

There are serious gaps in our equipment. Jane's Information Group has identified 13 areas in which we are below admitted par—and that applies to the Army alone. The catalogue of items that it provides reveals a "stop, cancel and postpone" movement in procurement. Even with the order of a further 127 Challenger 2 tanks by the year 2000, the United Kingdom main battle tank fleet will still be just under 400, although I accept that 200 Challenger 1 tanks will be available for training purposes.

We should compare that with 2,800 main battle tanks in Germany and just under 1,000 in France. Twenty-nine countries have larger main battle tank fleets, including Switzerland, Egypt, Iraq, Japan and five NATO countries. Fifteen nations, including three NATO allies, have larger holdings of armoured personnel carriers than the British Army's conventional forces in Europe inventory of 3,003.

Stocks of ammunition and spares remain too low for a sustained campaign, although I welcome the ordering of 400,000 rounds of 51mm mortar ammunition from the royal ordnance, which will help with current needs. We have no artillery with a range greater than 30 km save our multiple launch rocket systems, whose numbers have been cut. It should be said that both Iraq and Iran have artillery with a range of more than 40 km. Thirty-one countries have bigger stocks of artillery and multiple launch rocket systems, including six NATO partners. Nor is it helpful to reduce the amphibious bridging regiment to squadron size. I could continue with my catalogue, but I hope that the point is getting across.

I had understood that we had reached a period of stability in cost-cutting. The principle is welcome, but cost-cutting creeps on: gaps in our equipment needs are not being closed as rapidly as they should be. Cost cutting is continuing through the deferring of decisions. Let me give some examples.

The original intention was to order 107 British Aerospace Rapier 2000 surface-to-air missiles for the Army and RAF regiments; that has been cut to 57. It was originally planned to order 1,048 Warrior armoured personnel carriers, but that was cut—

Mr. Soames: I have been listening carefully to my hon. Friend. Can she tell me what further artillery pieces she feels would be needed, and what their task would be?

Lady Olga Maitland: It is only fair to point out that it is not incumbent on me to tell an expert where the real needs are. I can only identify the areas where serious concern is being caused. It would, I think, be a mistake to be deaf to the experts who have commented; the comments that I have made are not mine alone. As a proud patriot, I wish only to ensure that we do not bind ourselves into a cost-cutting exercise today so that tomorrow we are unable to rise to a serious challenge.

Mr. Martlew: I agree with much of what the hon. Lady has said, but how are we to fund the provision for which she asks? Are we to cut social expenditure, or increase taxes?

Lady Olga Maitland: We should be taking a flexible attitude, and preparing for the fact that in the end we shall have to spend more on defence. As our economy is steadily improving—and I have no doubt that it will continue to improve—there will eventually be room for manoeuvre; it depends very much on where the political will exists.

We should bear it in mind that one day we may have to rise to a serious challenge that would threaten all that we hold dear, for which we fought so fiercely not only in the second world war—which we commemorate—but in wars since then. Unless we bear that in mind, we shall have great cause for regret. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reassure me that he will bear that seriously in mind and start preparing for a flexible and more realistic approach.

It would not be appropriate for me to enter into a debate on defence without paying some attention to Opposition policies. I have expressed some genuine concerns about future capability, but it must be admitted that I am much more confident that this Government will be able to respond satisfactorily. That cannot be said of the Opposition.

For the past two years, we have been hearing of the Opposition's robust call for more active intervention in Bosnia. I have sympathised with the spirit of it. However, the past performance of the Labour party should give no comfort to anyone that it is capable of real action. History tells us that it is a lot of words.

For a start, fiery words have blinded the public to the fact that massive defence cuts, ignoring strategic need and pandering to social prejudice, are on Labour's agenda. The socialist manifesto demands that Governments "spend less on arms". For six years running, the Labour party conference has called for cuts worth £6 billion a year. That would represent the annual budget for any of our services. Which one will the Opposition cut—the Army, the Navy, or the Air Force? It is all totally unrealistic.

I note that the Labour defence spokesman tried to wriggle out of that embarrassing commitment, weaving and dodging the issue when challenged. The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) has used Labour's proposed "defence review" as an escape clause, as did the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) earlier. When challenged on what they expected the so-called review to

[Lady Olga Maitland]

recommend, no answer came—just more words that lacked any clarity. That is not surprising as the review would embrace the massive defence cuts that the Labour party conference called for.

Ducking difficult defence issues has won Labour no friends, even on the left. The *Independent on Sunday* accused Labour of "wet and vapid thinking." Writing in *The Guardian*, Hugo Young said:

"There is no field in politics in which Labour is less convincing than defence . . . Its Conference votes for massive defence cuts, its spokesmen can barely admit that a single job should disappear. Although this may not quite be the economics of the madhouse, it defines the statesmanship of the nursery."

I may have my reservations about the Government's future defence planning, but no one in his right mind would commit his security to a party that is so woolly minded on defence. The chaotic but deeply dangerous days when Labour pressed this country to surrender to the then Soviet Union on our nuclear deterrent could be repeated if today's thinking continues. I do not trust Labour to pursue a policy of positive direction when its history tells us only that there has been appeasement, appeasement and appeasement again and again. It tried that philosophy in relation to the Falklands. If a Labour Government had been in power at the time, heaven knows whether we would have ever budged the Argentinies from those islands. History has not shown us that our defence and security could ever be safe in the hands of the Opposition.

8.53 pm

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I listened attentively to the speech of the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). I found some of it interesting until she embarked on the ritualistic rant about the Labour party, which does not persuade anyone—people in the defence services, ex-service men and women, or people who observe our politics. If one listened carefully to her speech, one would have noticed that, midway through, she went into a catalogue of criticism, which is largely justified, about the reckless stewardship of our armed forces by Treasury Ministers. Tomorrow, I shall read closely what she said and I shall use it politically, and legitimately so.

The hon. Lady criticised the Government's recklessness in terms of equipment. She referred to procurement. She questioned whether it would be possible to embark on a number of ventures that have been necessary since the second world war to protect and promote the interests of the United Kingdom and peacekeeping. She prayed in aid Field Marshal Bramall, who is highly regarded and respected. He has been critical of our incapacity to mount actions that may be necessary to protect and promote our interests.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Mackinlay: I give way to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, as I referred to her.

Lady Olga Maitland: Would the hon. Gentleman be kind enough to give us some evidence that his party would build our defences when, at Labour party conferences year in year out, it says that it will cut defence spending?

Mr. Mackinlay: I do not want to delay the House's time by indulging in yah-boo politics. One of the beauties of tonight's debate is that, by and large, most hon. Members have concentrated on the subject. As the hon. Lady invites me, I shall refer, like other hon. Members, to our reserve forces, which are the subject of great anxiety among people who serve in them and who think that, strategically and militarily, they are extremely important.

No less a person than Field Marshal Bramall—and many others—think that those forces as extremely good value for money. They are perplexed at the Government's incapacity to introduce a reserve forces Bill, which they promised, to reassure people who believe in our reserve forces, in their skills and in the enterprise that they can give to our defences and peacekeeping. They are asking why no Bill has been introduced.

In the absence of such a Bill, there is a malaise among people who serve in the reserve forces. They are not sure about the future. I do not want to exaggerate it, but there is a loss of morale among them. That is against the backdrop that our reserve forces have one of the highest personnel wastage rates in the reserve forces of western Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. One must ask why. To some extent, it is because our armed forces have a low national profile. I look to the next Labour Government to raise with pride the profile of that service to the country. I regret that its profile is currently so low. A small proportion of the large sum that is spent by the Ministry of Defence might go to buttress and herald the work of the armed forces reserves.

I understand that the Minister prevaricated on this matter earlier, but why has there been no Bill, which the Secretary of State for Defence promised more than a year ago? Is it because the Minister is having difficulties with employers? If so, who are the employers' representatives who are proving difficult? I was interested to read in *The Daily Telegraph*, a newspaper that I thoroughly enjoy and read regularly—

Mr. Stephen: A good socialist newspaper.

Mr. Mackinlay: The hon. Gentleman makes a silly remark, as if Labour Members do not read *The Daily Telegraph*, which is my favourite paper. It is good value, particularly when it tells the truth, as it did on 19 November 1994, when Peter Almond drew attention to the fact that even the national health service, which the Government control, is making it difficult for people to serve in the Territorial Army and be available as specialist consultants to our regular Army during emergencies. It seems that there are difficulties with employers not only in the private sector but even in the public sector, for which the Government have some responsibility but which is not delivering the goods.

We need legislation to guarantee that the jobs of those who want to serve in our reserve forces with pride and motivation are secured should they be called up and mobilised. It is disappointing that the Government have not had the bottle or the guts to introduce a measure to provide for that. I suspect that they are prevaricating because such a measure would have ramifications for employment in other areas. I regret that. We will look to a Labour Secretary of State for Defence to do the right thing and introduce legislation to protect reservists and, ipso facto, promote the concept of the reserve forces.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam referred to Bosnia. I want to put a straightforward question to the Minister. Those of us who have been observing that terrible conflict wonder from where the conflicting forces

are obtaining their ordnance and arms. I accept that much of it was the property of the former Yugoslav national army, but there must be a great deal of arms smuggling in the areas of conflict.

Our intelligence organisations should know where that is coming from. I realise that it would not be appropriate to say too much on the Floor of the House, but we must know where it is coming from and what we are doing about it. I wonder whether the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign Office is doing enough to enforce the sanctions in former Yugoslavia, particularly in relation to arms. I hope that the Minister will refer to that when he replies, as it is of interest to hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I apologise to the Minister of State and to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for not being here at the beginning of the debate. I was with some Polish parliamentarians as I am secretary of the all-party Poland group and take a keen interest in that country. There have been moves by the United Kingdom and other NATO countries to accommodate Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and other central European countries into some security arrangements, but our Polish friends see that as wholly inadequate. It does not give them either military or political security.

Speaking entirely for myself, it is hypocritical that we in the west spent 45 years saying, "Look over the wall and see how bright and free the land is," yet, when communism collapsed and the wall went down, we would not let them join the club. We struggle to find spurious excuses for why they cannot join NATO or the European Union, although I acknowledge the economic aspects of their joining the latter. As there are problems in the Russian republic, it is even more important that they should have the same security arrangements as us.

I am proud to say that I held that view before coming to the House and, after developing my association with Polish parliamentarians, I feel it even more strongly. It is a great pity that we are letting them down. Ultimately, it is in our security interests that Poland and the other countries to which I referred should have the same security arrangements as us.

I have tabled a variety of parliamentary questions and I recently probed the Ministry of Defence about the scale of boarding school fees that it pays, primarily, although not exclusively, for the children of our officers. Like the majority of questions on the Order Paper, it was genuinely seeking information. I was staggered to learn that in the previous full financial year we spent £113 million on boarding school fees, mainly for the children of officers. Surprisingly, the figure had risen from £85 million in 1985-86. Although we are downsizing our armed forces, the money spent on boarding school fees for officers' children has gone up.

Mr. Freeman: I would not want the hon. Gentleman to be under any illusions about boarding school allowances. I am sure that he will want to withdraw the implication that there is any distinction between officers and other ranks in this respect. As he knows perfectly well, the scheme applies to all ranks and officers in the armed forces. I am sure that he would not wish to mislead the House.

Mr. Mackinlay: I must ask the Minister to be patient; I had not finished making my point.

I do not think that such expenditure is justified—full stop. It may have been justified when we had Army personnel all over the world and when it took officers and their children weeks on the Orient line or a camel to meet each other after a two-year posting, but nowadays all corners of the globe can be reached within 27 hours and we do not have armies or fleets all over the world. Expenditure on the boarding school allowance cannot be justified; it is nothing more than a hangover from the days of the empire. Of course, it is also a massive unwarranted subsidy for the private school system, which is indefensible. It is time that people knew what is happening.

In response to the Minister's argument, I must point out that, although the allowance is available to all ranks in theory, in reality the children of privates and ratings go to schools in garrison towns such as Portsmouth and Aldershot. If such schools are good enough for those children, they should be good enough for officers' children too. There is discrimination and it means that working-class taxpayers are subsidising the privileged, which is indefensible.

Mr. Robathan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but after that I shall not do so again.

Mr. Robathan: I apologise for not being here at the beginning of the hon. Gentleman's speech but, of course, he was not here for the first four hours of our debate. He is exposing not only his ignorance but the chips on his shoulder. He shows his ignorance in that he fails to understand the extent of movement required among all ranks in the forces. As one might imagine, there are more older officers because most junior ranks leave in their early twenties before their children reach school age, while officers remain in service until 55. That is right and proper and I shall not go into the reasons for it, although I suspect that even the hon. Gentleman would understand them.

The hon. Gentleman exposes the chips on his shoulders in that he does not understand that it is not fair to make a child move house seven times in six years, as happened to a friend of mine who certainly did not attend a private school. Would the hon. Gentleman have said that that child should have moved with his parents from school to school? I suspect not.

Mr. Mackinlay: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point about moving children but, in reality, the children of ratings and privates do not have the same facility as the children of officers. The children of ratings and privates are sent not to boarding schools but to schools in Aldershot and Portsmouth. In addition, officers are well paid but privates and ratings are not. Such distinctions should be borne in mind.

I think that it was the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) who referred to the ceremonial duties in which we take great pride. I accept that they attract tourists, but I cannot see why some of them could not be undertaken by reserve forces. Indeed, many ceremonial duties in the House are conducted by ex-service men who perform their functions very well. Some are also yeoman warders. I am sure that reservists could perform wider ceremonial functions with great pride and skill.

On 1 July, on a Friday morning, we had a debate on veterans' issues, which was much better attended than today's debate. I was pleased that the motion, which I

[Mr. Mackinlay]

tabled, commanded all-party support for a dedicated Minister to protect and promote veterans' issues. That support has since been endorsed by an early-day motion, which has been signed by 250 or 260 members of all parties. Arguably, if ones takes away the payroll vote, there would be a majority in the House of Commons for the creation of that post.

I regret that the Prime Minister does not recognise veterans' issues as popular. If a popular issue were painted on his eyelids he would not see it. Not only would such a dedicated Minister be a popular decision, but it would be the right decision and in line with practice in other parts of the world. I hope that the matter is reviewed.

The Royal British Legion has endorsed the call and has expressed some disappointment in the current edition of its magazine at what it described as "an inconclusive meeting" with the Department of Social Security and the Ministry of Defence in December to discuss the issue. It continues, however, to press the issue, and rightly so.

In the year that we mark the completion of hostilities, I would like to draw the attention of the House to one group of people—members of the Polish Army who served alongside British forces in the second world war. After the second world war, their pensions were treated differently from those of their British comrades in arms. That still rankles with Polish ex-service men and women who remained in this country, the majority of whom are now United Kingdom citizens and who have made Britain their home and whose children live and were brought up here.

For half a century, those Polish ex-service men and women have been treated less favourably than the indigenous British and they would like the situation to be rectified. The payment of their war pensions has been dependent on extensions, with Treasury consent, of the original five-year period because the then communist Government indicated that they would not meet their moral obligation to pay. It would be a small measure to rectify the discrepancy by statute so that those ex-service men and women could feel that they are treated in the same manner as their British comrades in arms. I hope that the Minister will consider it.

Millions of our fellow country men and women feel frustrated that there is not a medal to recognise national service. It seems a rather silly and petty omission. People who turn up at our ceremonial occasions in towns and villages, especially on Remembrance day, who will participate this summer in the commemoration of the ending of hostilities and who are proud to have served in the armed forces—the vast majority of whom, thankfully and mercifully, avoided conflict and being under fire—would like to be able to wear, on appropriate occasions, some sign of their service to the Crown and country.

I hope that the suggestion, which has again been made by the Royal British Legion, not myself—the genesis of it lies with the Royal British Legion and other ex-services organisations—that a medal should be struck for those who did national service will be considered. Instead of some of the silly comments about that idea which I have heard during the debate, I hope that the Minister may reflect that this year in particular it would be prudent, fair, appropriate and a very nice gesture if such a medal were struck.

9.13 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I had better put on record the Labour party's view on boarding school fees. Although I am a great admirer of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), I stress that his views on boarding school fees are his views alone. We accept that, in a modern Army, there will still be a need to send children to boarding schools. We are concerned—the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) touched on this point—about the quality of some of the education that service children get. I am convinced that we do not get value for money, and we should look at that problem.

However, I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock has a point about the differentials between officers and other ranks. The fees may be the same, but since 1979, the pay of a general has gone up in real terms by 15 per cent. whereas the pay of a private soldier has gone down by 15 per cent. There is little scope for the other ranks to send their children to boarding schools. The point is, however, that the Labour party would keep the boarding school scheme.

It seems that, no matter how few hon. Members there are in the Chamber, we always take up the full time. There was concern earlier that we might finish early; there is nothing wrong with finishing early. However, those concerns were wrong.

We have had some good speeches. I, too, pay tribute to our troops, who are the finest in the world. They are well led, well equipped, in the main, and well motivated. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces paid tribute to them well, as he always does, although his words are sometimes a little Churchillian and more apt for the dark days of the 1940s than for the post-cold war era. There is, however, no doubt that his words have support from Labour Members.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman is not in his place, so I can talk about a bipartisan approach. Many of the views expressed today are shared by both sides of the House. We do not play politics with our troops' lives. It is important that when our troops put their lives at risk, politicians do not play politics with those lives. Conservative Members sometimes do not give us credit for holding that view.

I was saddened by the comments on the Falklands made by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland). Many of us could say that the Falklands war arose because the Conservative Government sent the wrong signals to the Argentines. They withdrew the guard ship. There were negotiations about taking British passports away from the population of the Falklands. However, at the end of the day, when push came to shove, we were all on the same side. We had to free the Falklands and the Labour party supported the decision, as it supported the decision on the Gulf war. The only time since well before the second world war when there was disagreement in Parliament on political lines was over the Suez crisis. History will prove that the Labour party was right on that occasion.

I now turn to the present situation. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam and other hon. Members have referred to Bosnia. Again, we totally support the Government in their support for the peacekeeping role of the United Nations, using the expertise of British troops, although when the troops were sent, there was disquiet on the Labour Back Benches, as there was disquiet on the

Conservative Benches. I am sure that there are hon. Members on both sides who continue to be concerned about how we get out of the Balkans and we shall all have to turn our minds to that. We are doing a good job in Bosnia, but how long are we expected to stay there?

Lady Olga Maitland: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that his hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) should instantly withdraw his scurrilous remarks attacking the fine honour of General Sir Michael Rose? Will the hon. Gentleman dissociate himself completely from his hon. Friend's remarks?

Mr. Martlew: If I recall correctly, the hon. Lady made some scurrilous remarks about the Labour party and how it was not fit to defend the country, remarks that I totally refute. Other Labour Front-Bench spokesmen and I think that Sir Michael Rose did an excellent job in Bosnia. My hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) is entitled to his opinion. I totally disagree with him, but if Parliament is the place for him to express that opinion and if he feels that he must express it, so be it. Labour Front-Bench spokesmen do not associate themselves with those remarks. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. It is easy to sit here in London and to say that this or that decision should have been taken.

Like other hon. Members, I visited Bosnia. I came away with the feeling that all the warring parties there tell lies. We cannot believe any of them. There are wicked people on all sides. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles feels that the Bosnian Government are badly treated, and whatever we say today will not deflect his views in that regard.

I want to return to the bipartisan approach. I am a little surprised that there has been no mention of Angola, because that subject was flagged up. The hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) referred to Angola in a way that probably reflected the view of the majority of people in this country—that we should not be involved. As my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) made clear, if the Government were prepared to send British troops and they obtained the reassurances from the United Nations, the Labour party would support that move. I hope that the Minister will say something about that when he replies to the debate.

Our troops have been stationed in Northern Ireland for 25 years. I pay tribute to their total professionalism. I have recently returned from a visit to the King's Own Royal Border Regiment, which is my county regiment. That regiment appreciates the all-party political support—I am sure that that applies to the Liberal Democrats as well.

The personnel at the sharp end fully appreciate that all-party support. I returned from Northern Ireland with nothing but admiration for my regiment and for all our forces who have served in the Province in the past 25 years. They patrolled the trouble spots and they carried out their duties with tremendous professionalism and dedication, under enormous strain.

We must remember that, until the recent ceasefire, every member of the security forces was considered by the IRA as a target for assassination 24 hours a day, day after day. That was the kind of pressure that our troops were under. In many ways, it was a forgotten war. It was perhaps not forgotten here in Parliament; but in my constituency and in others, so long as the lid was kept on it, we were not really concerned. We took notice when the IRA started to bomb London and the other major cities.

We left our troops in that situation for 25 years and it is only right that we should pay proper tribute to the work that they have done. As the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said, 650 members of the security forces have been killed by terrorists. I am convinced that no other security force anywhere in the world would have been as tolerant as the British forces in dealing with the problems they faced in Northern Ireland. Overall, the British security forces in Northern Ireland have a record of which we and they can be proud.

There is another point in respect of which the Labour party has refused to make political capital and that is with regard to the sentence of Private Clegg. It would have been very easy for us to jump on the *Daily Mail* bandwagon which collected 1 million signatures. The release of Private Clegg was obviously a very popular subject.

However, the Labour party looked at the situation and we realised that it was not the time to raise the temperature. We fully support the Home Secretary's decision to look at the sentencing regime. I realise that the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) cannot be in his place at the moment. However, I support his view that perhaps the senior officers in Northern Ireland were wrong. Perhaps the decision to have only one sentence, that of murder, was the wrong decision. I hope that we can review that point. If the Home Secretary reaches a sensible decision, I am sure that the Labour party will support him again.

Mr. Soames: I would like to clarify a point. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) made the point about the views of the Select Committee on Defence on the yellow card and the question of our soldiers being quite clear. The hon. Gentleman has just visited his own excellent county regiment. I am sure that, like me, he spoke to soldiers in Ulster. Whenever I have been to Ulster and have asked soldiers whether they have come across anything during their service, when they were really up agin it, which they felt they had not been properly trained and prepared for, no one has ever told me that they had.

Mr. Martlew: I am sure that that is correct, and that our soldiers are well trained before they go to Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Upminster opposed the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North, who asked for a defence review. I think that my hon. Friend's speech will become a reference point for people who want to understand why we need a defence review. It was an excellent speech, as his speeches always are, and it was also important as a reference point.

The hon. Member for Upminster said that we did not need a defence review because, as he explained, we had already had two. The Government have always refused to say that we have had a defence review. According to the Minister, "Options for Change" and "Front Line First" were not defence reviews, so perhaps he will reply to that idea, because the Chairman of the Select Committee said that the Government had already carried out two defence reviews within the past four or five years. We call for a defence review because we want to know where we are going strategically. We were not happy with "Options for Change", and we were certainly not happy with "Front Line First".

[Mr. Martlew]

To return to what I said about the bipartisan approach, my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) told the House that the Government would have our full backing if they introduced a reserve forces Bill. We have long pressed for such a Bill, and I must tell the Minister that the cross-party support on that issue is disappearing.

Mr. Mackinlay: We shall have to introduce one when we come into office.

Mr. Martlew: That is true. We are puzzled and concerned by the Government's failure to introduce such a Bill. We were surprised that it was not in the Gracious Speech; when we asked questions, we were told that it would appear early in 1995. I remind the Minister that it is now nearly March. What does he consider early in the year? Perhaps today he will be able to give us a date.

The all-party approach to defence does exist. We also supported the Government on compulsory drug testing, although I must admit that I am now rather concerned about what they are doing. I understood that testing would be introduced in all the forces, but when I talked to people in Northern Ireland I found that only the Army is implementing the order. The RAF and the Navy have said that it is not necessary in those services. That is grossly unfair to the Army.

I heard one or two accounts of soldiers who had tested positive and who, I understand, were told the result, immediately asked to sign a form and made to leave the Army straight away. If that is true, the procedures should be investigated. What are the procedures for people who have tested positive for drug-taking? How are they to be treated? Will they simply be dismissed or have to volunteer to resign? Or shall we give our soldiers treatment? I suggest that, in many cases, that would be the best course.

I have outlined many areas in which there is cross-party support. That is fine, but the House would not expect me to leave it at that. Hon. Members from both sides of the House have made comments tonight, and I said in my speech on the defence estimates last year that I was coming to the sad conclusion that our armed forces, especially the Army, displayed prejudices that were not acceptable in a modern force.

The Army still displays sexist and racist tendencies, and class divisions are highlighted in the rank structure. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) referred to that, and asked for the figures. There is no doubt that there is still class bias in the higher ranks of the armed forces, and that is reflected in the pay structure.

I shall not talk at great length about the fact that millions of pounds have been spent on the houses of the top brass, even though most of those houses are now to be sold. I shall not comment on such perks as batmen, cooks and gardeners, or on the fact that the houses of the lower ranks are in such a deplorable condition that the Government have tried to privatise them, as that is the only way of getting then modernised. However, even that has failed.

I should like to talk about the differentials in the pay structure, and how the lower ranks have fared much worse than the top brass. To illustrate that point, in 15 years of Tory rule, a general's pay in real terms has increased by more than 12 per cent., a brigadier's by 17.3 per cent. and a colonel's by 15.4 per cent. That would be fine if the same had happened further down the ranks, but there is a contrast. A corporal's pay in real terms has gone down by 5 per cent., a lance-corporal's by 10 per cent. and a private's by 15.4 per cent.

In a debate yesterday, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces admitted that a private in today's British Army was worse off than in 1979. *[Interruption.]* It is on the record, if anyone wishes to look at it.

The comparisons to which I have referred are truly odious, but they are nothing more than one should expect from a Government who do not believe in equality or social justice—

Mr. Robathan *rose—*

Mr. Martlew:—and do not know when to sit down.

Mr. Robathan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Martlew: I must continue.

Mr. Robathan: I shall be brief.

Mr. Martlew: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could intervene in the Minister's time. *[Interruption.]* If I answer the hon. Gentleman, I shall take up some of the Minister's time.

Mr. Robathan: We have plenty of time.

Mr. Freeman *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Martlew: The Minister has suggested that we do not have plenty of time, and he is right.

I now turn to the continuing problem of sexism in the armed forces. *[Interruption.]* That always gets a laugh from the Tories, because they do not believe that women should be in the armed forces at all. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] They do not believe that women should hold any positions of rank.

I asked the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to give the percentages of women in different ranks in the Army. I shall not read his reply because we are short of time, but something was odd about it. I also asked whether the Minister would list those ranks of the armed forces where there were no women at all. There were no field marshals, no generals, no lieutenant-generals and no major-generals. It is all right for women to be cooks at the bottom of the scale, but they are being discriminated against because of the Conservatives' beliefs.

I do not believe that the Minister of State for the Armed Forces is anything but a male chauvinist on this point. In a recent debate in Committee on regulations on sex discrimination in the armed forces, the Government made a change in the law and introduced a catch-all phrase that women can be excluded from posts

"where their presence would impair combat effectiveness."

That catch-all remark could well affect women in certain positions today. I am not sure whether the young lady who qualified as a fighter pilot yesterday—we all congratulate her—will be affected by that phrase, but if somebody believes that she could affect the effectiveness of our forces she could lose her job.

In the same debate, the Minister said that the Ministry of Defence had

"no intention of compensating women for having had abortions."—[*Official Report, First Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c*, 7 February 1995; c. 4-13.]

Those women may have had to have an abortion to save their jobs in the armed forces. On 8 February, there was a case in which the armed forces were found guilty of discriminating against a woman soldier. It cost the forces £15,000 because the industrial tribunal found in favour of the woman, who had to have an abortion—she was the major breadwinner in her household at the time—to keep her job in the Army. Yet the day before, the Minister for the Armed Forces had said that the forces would not on any account—

Mr. Soames: That is right.

Mr. Martlew: Ministry of Defence money will go to pay that compensation. It is a scandal that it has had to pay so much in compensation to women who have had to leave, but the real scandal is that those women's careers were blighted because the Government did not change the regulations in time. If they had done that, we might have avoided paying £39 million or £49 million in compensation.

I do not want to say much about racism—not because it is not a major problem but because it would be inappropriate to comment at this time as I understand that the Commission for Racial Equality is preparing a report. I want the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to assure us that when the report is published, it will be made public and he will make a statement on it to the House.

I realise that time is getting on and that I keep asking the Minister questions and must give him time to reply. The point is that we have heard much talk about the Labour party cutting millions of pounds. Labour's record in Government has been very good. I am prepared to defend it and there is no doubt that it is excellent. I think that it was the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Banks) who commented on the fact that some troops were given their redundancy notices when on active service in Bosnia. If the Government had got to grips with the finances, we would not have had those problems.

I have here a document entitled "The Ministry of Waste", which was written by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields. I know that the Minister of State has a copy of it, as he requested one. It catalogues £7 billion of waste and it has been updated. The Government have wasted £7 billion. Just imagine what we could have done with that.

Lady Olga Maitland *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Martlew: Obviously, the hon. Lady does not believe us, but if she asks her hon. Friends, they will give her a copy.

There was a £2.2 billion overrun on the Eurofighter 2000 project and an overspend of nearly £1 billion on the Challenger 2 tank. We do not need to mention the £177 million wasted in Germany when we were pulling back, or the overspend of £800 million on Trident facilities.

Mr. Stephen: What about TSR2?

Mr. Martlew: I am sorry, but I was still at infant school when we cancelled TSR2.

We would not have needed to make those drastic cuts if we had had control of the finances. There is no doubt that that is the case.

In conclusion—I apologise to hon. Members whom I have not mentioned in my reply—what worries me is that there is no doubt that this Administration do not have the capacity to ensure that the scandals of the past, which are catalogued in the document prepared by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields, will not be repeated. The Government cannot control the finances, they are a wastrel Government and should not be trusted with the defences of Britain.

9.37 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Roger Freeman): This has been an interesting debate and it proves the golden rule that speeches expand to fill the time available. I always thought that finishing early tonight was not a runner.

I shall try to answer as many questions as possible, although I note that until the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) came into the Chamber, only two Labour Front Benchers and two Labour Back Benchers were present, and the speeches of the two Back Benchers were disowned by their Front Bench, which is a very interesting position.

I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces wearing the tie of the 11th Hussars and I notice that the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), who led for the Opposition, is wearing the tie of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, if I am not mistaken. I congratulate him and all other hon. Members who have participated in that scheme, which is excellent.

Anyone younger than me will have missed national service, and it is a sobering thought that, during the past 10 years, there has been a marked reduction in the number of hon. Members who have served in the Regular forces, let alone who did national service, who can participate in our debates. We are poorer for that lack of experience. I am grateful to British Aerospace, Rolls-Royce and Vickers for sponsoring that scheme.

As you can probably see from my tie, Madam Speaker, I am an honorary member of the City of London heavyweight division of chartered accountants. I notice that the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) is wearing a tie in honour of our dear friend Nicky Fairbairn. He would have much appreciated the tie and I associate the Government Front Bench with all the comments made about him. He was a colourful character and we miss his contribution to debates such as this.

In a thoughtful speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Shoreham (Mr. Stephen) set the context for our debate, albeit somewhat late in the proceedings, by speaking of the need for proper internal and external control of threats to our society and for flexibility. I am grateful to him for his comments about the adequacy of equipment for the armed forces and shall comment on that in moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) rightly discussed our international responsibility and global role. She spoke about equipment, but it is important to concentrate on the equipment's quality and capability rather than quantity. Her contribution was, however, much appreciated.

The Army equipment programme continues to provide highly effective equipment to meet the challenging demands that the Army faces. The Army has world-class equipment already in service and the forward programme will improve that position still further. That has been clearly demonstrated in former Yugoslavia, where the performance of our Warrior and our tracked reconnaissance vehicles has been particularly satisfactory,

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

despite the demands placed on them by difficult road conditions and high usage. Warrior is probably the best infantry fighting vehicle in the world. Last July, we placed an order with Vickers Defence Systems for a further 259 Challenger 2 tanks in addition to the 127 tanks already on order. That will permit the Army to field an all-Challenger 2 tank fleet—probably the best tank fleet in the world.

We expect to make progress this summer on a further major enhancement of the Army's anti-armour capability when we choose an attack helicopter. The final stages of evaluating the bids in the competition are now in progress, and that important programme is expected to cost some £2 billion. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) and the hon. Member for Motherwell, North asked me about the attack helicopter. I am glad to tell them and the House where we stand.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham advanced the case for the Cobra Venom, which, if selected, would be manufactured in Rochester. We need approximately 100, but the number that we procure will depend on the response to tenders. That is the order of magnitude. Our colleagues in France and Germany will probably procure more than that. I hope that the decision will be made before the House rises for the summer recess, and we therefore aim for a June decision. The date has slipped slightly because the competition has involved six contestants and we have gone into the matter very thoroughly. Final offers have either just been, or are about to be, submitted and we shall seek to reach a conclusion in June.

I expect the in-service date to be at the end of the decade. We are not seeking to confuse the House, but it is difficult to be precise until we know what further development work is needed on the attack helicopter that we choose.

The Royal Artillery is also benefiting from new equipment. Deliveries of the British-developed AS90 self-propelled 155 mm gun will be completed this year, giving the Royal Artillery a greatly increased depth-fire capability. The system is widely recognised as world beating and I am grateful for the kind comments that were made about it.

Those programmes will provide an impressive addition to the fire power and capability of the modern British Army. I pay tribute to the retiring Master-General of the Ordnance, General Sir Jeremy Blacker, who has done an outstanding job, and I look forward to working with his successor in due course.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North asked a number of questions about standardisation, inter-operability and Angola. On standardisation, it is not simply a question of buying off the shelf from the Americans. It is important to work closely with our colleagues, particularly in France and Germany, because they have similar-sized armies and similar requirements.

I am keen to make progress with replacing our multi-role armoured vehicles, which carry casualties from and take ammunition to the battlefield; we are in discussion with our opposite numbers about that. In terms of the doctrine of use—wheels versus track—the vehicle size and the timing of our requirements, we could enter a collaborative programme. However, we shall do that only if our colleagues in France and Germany agree to a competition before we place an order. We shall see whether we are successful, but that is one example of inter-operability.

The hon. Gentleman asked me where we stood on Angola. I can confirm that the United Kingdom has agreed in principle to a United Nations request to provide a logistics battalion for the peacekeeping operation in Angola. It will, however, be essential that both the parties in Angola meet their obligations under the United Nations plan. As part of that, we shall obviously wish to satisfy ourselves that appropriate contingency plans have been considered. We shall also ensure that our troops are issued with appropriate rules of engagement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), who explained that he could not be with us for the winding-up speeches, raised a number of issues. The first was Private Clegg. My hon. Friend echoed the view that I know is held by hon. Members on both sides of the House, that the rules of engagement in Northern Ireland should have legal status.

The yellow card summarises guidance on the law and does not in itself create any legal rights. The suggestion that compliance with the yellow card might be an automatic defence against a criminal charge is among the matters to be considered by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary in his review of the law in relation to murder as it applies to persons engaged in the maintenance of law and order. The Ministry of Defence is co-operating fully in that review.

In respect of the yellow card, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State said, we keep its contents under review and have amended it to make it more explicit that soldiers should not be justified in opening fire solely because a car has caused injury.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster also raised the issue of training, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Banks). I visited the British Army training unit Suffield some six or seven years ago as a Defence Minister. The training range at Suffield in Canada is a superb facility and we want to see more training abroad, not only because it is difficult to exercise above a relatively low level in Britain because of the size of our ranges, but for environmental and other reasons.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southport asked about Belize. Our current jungle training programme fully meets our requirements and although we keep the matter under review, there are currently no plans to send battalion-sized groups. We currently send a company-sized group to Belize. Very often, the training facilities available to us depend upon the wishes of the host Government and we must respect that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster raised the issue of tour intervals. I confirm what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said: that if we are able to bring troops back from Northern Ireland, which I am sure is the fervent hope and desire of both Front Benches, that will not mean a reduction in the size of the field Army. Soldiers who are serving there, in particular the regiments that have served in Northern Ireland in the past, will welcome my reaffirmation of that clear principle.

As to the request for the arms plot for 1994-95 and 1995-96 so that the Select Committee can work out what the tour intervals have been and will be, I am sure that

my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will provide that to the Select Committee. I see no reason why we should not do that.

The hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) started off in an uncontroversial way by referring to Benbecula. I confirm that we intend to continue using Benbecula, as it is an excellent facility. We test the Rapier missile system there and we have no plans to renege on that commitment.

The hon. Gentleman went on to attack General Rose's judgment. He immediately drew condemnation from the Opposition Front Bench and certainly from the Government Front Bench. I am grateful to my hon. Friends who endorsed the view taken by my hon. Friend the Minister of State and myself. The hon. Gentleman surely falls into the trap for which he is incorrectly blaming General Rose—that of being partial. The hon. Gentleman is being partial. He is claiming that General Rose did or did not do certain things to defend one of the parties involved in that sad conflict. I am grateful to Opposition Front-Bench Members for what they said on the subject. General Rose demonstrated balance, impartiality, diligence and determination and the Government are committed to defending his quite exceptional performance under very difficult circumstances.

I apologise for missing the speech of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey); it is one of the few that I did not hear during the debate. He spoke warmly about the cadet forces, and my hon. Friend the Minister of State and I share those sentiments. I must share a secret with the House, which I have not revealed to my hon. Friend: I served in the school combined cadet force and I rose to the rank of WO1. What is more, I received the joint services cadet badge from Frimley. I am a great supporter of the cadet forces.

Mr. Chidgey: I repeat the question that I asked in my speech, which, unfortunately, the Minister did not hear. According to the "Options for Change" document, the Government intend to continue to fund the cadet forces after some "rationalisation". Will the Minister confirm that that does not mean a decrease in financial support for the cadet forces?

Mr. Freeman: It would be wrong for me to give precise assurances when we are still discussing the long-term costings. However, I assure the hon. Gentleman that I speak for the Secretary of State, the Minister and myself when I say that we are determined to support the work of the cadet forces, not only for broader military reasons, but for social reasons. It would be foolish for any Minister to come to the House and announce significant funding reductions, and I do not intend to do that. There are 65,000 cadets in the Army cadet force and the school combined cadet forces and some 8,000 volunteer adult instructors. They perform a valuable service.

I am informed that the hon. Member for Eastleigh professed not to know what his leader's policy was in relation to lifting the arms embargo.

Mr. Chidgey: That is not true.

Mr. Freeman: If that is not so, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. The defence spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), made a very sensible contribution during the Royal Navy debate. However, I am not sure that his speech accords with the sentiments expressed by the leader of the Liberal Democrats. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman should advise his senior colleagues to get their act together on that point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key)—a former colleague at the Department of Transport who I hope will now become a respected voice on military matters in the House—raised a number of issues. I shall read his speech again and reply in writing to his specific points. However, I would like to comment on two of the matters that he raised.

The research carried out at Porton Down for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is extremely important. It will become part of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency on 1 April. I recently visited the CBDE, and I join my hon. Friend in wishing Graham Pearson all the best in his retirement later this year. He has done a fine job.

I do not think that the work at Porton Down is understood properly and I hope that the House will adopt a bipartisan approach in that area. I understand that the matter may be raised in the House at another time, perhaps during an Adjournment debate, and if it is, I am sure that the Government will respond positively and constructively to any suggestions that hon. Members may make about the management of Porton Down.

It is our clear intention to transfer all the married quarters into the private sector. There are a number of reasons for doing that. First, we need to raise sufficient cash to improve the quality of the married quarters through refurbishment and modernisation. That has always been a low priority for Defence Ministers, because our prime commitment is obviously to the front line. I am sure that that news will be welcomed by the troops. Secondly, maintenance and the sale of surplus properties should be undertaken by experts in the private sector rather than by the Ministry of Defence.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow raised a number of questions, and I shall try to answer some of them now. However, I shall re-read his speech and answer his other points in writing. We are looking for land to establish more training ranges for the Army in Scotland. I cannot go into detail at the moment, but as soon as the Army and Ministers reach a decision, either the Minister of State for the Armed Forces or I will bring those proposals to the House. I think that that will be welcomed, by the Army and certainly in terms of employment prospects in Scotland.

With regard to pregnancies and the role of women in the armed forces, I make it quite plain that we are very supportive. Yesterday our first lady fast-jet pilot, a flight lieutenant, flew a Tornado excellently from Lossiemouth. We welcome women who become pregnant and come back into the armed forces after their maternity leave. They must understand that they must make themselves fully available for deployment worldwide and assume responsibility for bringing up their children; that is their decision. But if they decide to come back into the armed forces and have made proper provision, we welcome their participation. Frankly, the investment in training and the development of their expertise is important to retain in the armed forces.

With regard to the Gulf war syndrome, British personnel who believe that they are suffering unexplained illness as a result of their service in the Gulf have been

[Mr. Freeman]

repeatedly invited to come forward for medical assessment. To date, 240 serving and former personnel have come forward. The onus is on them to make themselves available for proper medical examination.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southport raised a number of issues, but in particular the role of the reserves. The Ministry of Defence wants reservists to play a full and integrated—in so far as that can be done—role with our Regular forces. A Territorial Army platoon has already served in the Falklands. A TA company will begin a four-month assignment next month, and 30 TA personnel will be deployed to Bosnia in May this year with the Royal Welch Fusiliers. I agree with my hon. Friend's comments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) talked about training our forces. Salisbury plain is under pressure. We need to look, as I said earlier, at training abroad. The Air Force does low-flying training in Goose bay. The Army trains in Suffield. We must carefully examine prospects, perhaps in eastern Europe, where it is possible to train. I believe that simulation in training is important, particularly for the Air Force. We must also look at vacated sites in the United Kingdom, where we have wound down the involvement of the armed forces, and then we can consider use of those sites.

With regard to training others, I agree about the importance of defence attachés and training overseas students in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) raised the issue of the Reserve Forces Bill, as did the hon. Member for Carlisle, who replied for the Opposition. We plan to publish soon a draft Bill for consultation. The timing depends not on Ministers but on Parliamentary Counsel's timetable, as they are a limited resource in Whitehall. As soon as we have the draft—it is at an advanced stage—we shall publish it for consultation. I do not control the parliamentary timetable, and neither does my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, as the Opposition Chief Whip knows full well, but I hope that we can introduce the Bill in the next Session of Parliament. It will be unique that we shall have consulted on the detail of the draft, and I look forward to the hon. Gentleman's contribution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), in an excellent speech based on his experience, talked about stability. We are now looking to a period of stability in funding from 1 April. Broadly speaking, over the next three years, our resources will be at fixed level in real terms. We have already announced our manpower numbers, and further manpower cuts will not be made. No more cuts are coming.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North, who opened the debate, was disingenuous. Of course, "Options for Change" and "Front Line First" announcements still have to be worked through. We accept that. But the important point, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made very clear at the Conservative party conference, and which has also been made clear by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and by me many times, is that the armed forces—soldiers, sailors and airmen—can now look forward to a period of long-term stability.

I am not making a party political point. This is a perfectly serious point: if the hon. Gentleman aspires to government and if he believes that the first thing that he will do on achieving office in the Ministry of Defence will be to say, "We need a defence review," I can tell him that it will take him two years. At the end of that period, which will cause additional insecurity and instability, what will we have? We shall have the answers to questions that the hon. Gentleman is avoiding now.

Which commitments does the hon. Gentleman propose to cut? What proportion of the Government's total income is he prepared to devote to defence? The Opposition are avoiding those questions, and hiding behind a general statement: "Let's have a defence review." That is exactly what the armed forces do not want—and that is why I am confident that, if we were dividing on the motion, we would win.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

DEREGULATION COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Standing Order No. 124A (Deregulation Committee) be amended, in line 52, by leaving out the word 'sixteen' and inserting the word 'eighteen'.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

PETITION

Chinese Population Control

10 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I wish to present a petition with more than 19,000 signatures collected by the Movement for Christian Democracy. The signatures are in addition to those that have already been submitted to the House by many right hon. and hon. Members from all parties.

The petition concerns the scandal of overseas aid funds being given to organisations which in turn fund the appalling and abusive Chinese population control programme, which involves forced contraception, forced sterilisation and forcible abortions for Chinese women. The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble petition of the citizens of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland

Sheweth

That the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) and the IPPF (International Planned Parenthood Federation) receive money from the Overseas Aid Budget and in turn support the Chinese Population Control Programme which abuses the human rights of the people of China through forced contraception, sterilisation and abortion leading to infanticide and physical damage to women.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will ensure that no further funds from the Overseas Aid budget are disbursed to the UNFPA and IPPF while these organisations support, encourage, or act as apologists for the Chinese Population Control Programme.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Council Tax (Liverpool)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

10.2 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Let me return closer to home after presenting my petition.

I thank Madam Speaker for the opportunity to raise the subject of the level of council tax that is being paid in my city of Liverpool—the highest in the land—and the reasons for it. Those reasons are a combination of the effects of the standard spending assessment formula, mismanagement of resources and crippling and debilitating debts. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the Environment for seeing me earlier and accepting a dossier compiled by Paddy Shennan of the *Liverpool Echo*, which set out a number of concerns that had been raised in the local media.

I thank the Under-Secretary for being present to answer the debate, and for the long-term interest that I know that he has shown since our days together on the Environment Select Committee, especially in regards to housing issues connected with Liverpool. I also thank the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mrs. Kennedy), who, I know, shares in particular my views on the SSA formula and the calculation used to determine the amount of national resources to be made available to the city.

There is a certain inevitability in the fact that every year, as councils set their budgets for the following 12 months, city treasurers, finance committee members and council leaders issue warnings of impending doom. Even before the daffodils have bloomed, we will have been warned of record increases, and dire prophecies will have been uttered about cuts in services and job losses. Then, hey presto, as if by magic—certainly, it will be claimed, through the brilliance of the same council leaders and officials—the books will be balanced, and the bills are never quite as bad as the forecasts.

Whatever pain is inflicted is, according to local government, entirely the fault of central Government. Ministers often respond in kind, laying the blame at the door of local councils. Because those forecasts have been made so monotonously and so regularly, and because mutual recrimination has become such a tedious ritual, the truth has tended to be the first casualty in the midst of all the propaganda. I hope that the debate will be an honest attempt to consider the causes of the current financial crisis in Liverpool and the start of an attempt to put those right. Blame must be shared for the problems that face the city. A shared approach to sorting out those problems is needed.

Locally, plenty of reasons exist as to why we are already paying the highest council taxes in the country. The stark truth is that Liverpool needs to put its council in order. The council's debt amounts to more than £750 million, bigger than the debt of some developing countries. I asked the House of Commons Library to compile a list of countries whose national debt is greater than our local debt. It was interesting to find that countries such as Albania, Cambodia, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti and Uzbekistan have smaller national debts than Liverpool.

The practical outworking of that debt is that, each and every day, council tax payers in Liverpool must find £200,000, which is paid back to moneylenders. It costs each person on Liverpool's electoral roll £3 a week simply to pay back the moneylenders. To some extent, the "sins of our fathers" are being visited on the present generation. Many of our inherited debts were accumulated under Liverpool's militant Labour leadership. Not a penny of that £200,000 daily bill is available for the jobs and services that it talked about so much at the time.

Usurious rates of interest, grinding loans and crippling debts are destroying Liverpool's economy. Nor have we done ourselves any favours by the "can't pay, won't pay" culture, which has been actively promoted by some people. Last year, the city treasurer estimated that 5 per cent. of the council tax would not be collected. The effect of uncollected council tax, poll tax and rates on every other citizen in Liverpool has been disastrous. Last year alone, the cost of non-collection put almost £48 on the bills of the average B and D band taxpayer.

Although collection rates have improved this year—that is to be welcomed—there is still an enormous distance to travel in challenging a civic culture that has encouraged citizens to opt out of payments, and to ignore their obligation to the rest of community. With £68 million in uncollected poll tax and council taxes, we have the second highest deficit in the land. The "can't pay, won't pay" culture hurts not the Government, but every other Liverpool citizen, including the elderly, the poorest and the most vulnerable, many of whom struggle to pay their bills faithfully.

There is the issue of waste and sheer mismanagement. Last year, I asked the district auditor to investigate Liverpool's cable television contract. Liverpool was supposed to have made a profit of £2 million on the contract. At end of the fiasco, it turned into a deficit of £5.5 million, and the city is now embroiled in expensive litigation. The district auditor has rightly issued a damning indictment.

The sum of £8 million was committed for the new civic centre in Queen's square, a site that the council bought for £750,000, and then sold for £250,000 to a developer who will now receive £8 million to develop it. That is financial illiteracy. It is also hard to understand how nearly £2 million was spent on taxis and chauffeur-driven cars, how £500,000 was spent on mobile telephone bills, and how £1 million was paid in bonuses for work that was never done.

In addition, an estimated £1 million has been lost on letting council houses to council staff at peppercorn rents; another £1.4 million was written off on unpaid rates by street and market traders last year; £2 million was lost on a poorly advised computer deal; and £2.5 million worth of building supplies has been lost over five years. The position has been so bad that bailiffs have arrived at the council's offices on nine separate occasions to make it pay its debts.

The current council deficit is about £44 million and we are facing a deficit of £60 million. Last year's increase of 20 per cent. on the council tax will be matched by a rise of up to 11 per cent. in the next 12 months. Again, we shall be paying the highest council taxes in the country for some of the poorest services. All that is in a city that is designated as objective 1 by the European Community.

In the next 12 months, the Government will provide about £423 million to support the city. That figure is based on the standard spending assessment. The current methodology, which uses the social index to measure social deprivation, is a mysterious mumbo-jumbo, about

[Mr. David Alton]

as precise as a magical incantation. Under that formula, Liverpool emerges as the 48th most deprived authority in the United Kingdom, behind councils such as Westminster, which the formula says is fourth most deprived, as well as Bath, Norwich, Brighton and Wandsworth.

The children's social services SSA is particularly distorted in Liverpool. In that city, 40 per cent. of households and families live below the poverty line. I raised this matter on the Floor of the House a year ago and during the recent statement made by the Secretary of State. I know that Ministers recognise the problem and they are to be commended for that, but, nevertheless, Liverpool still lost £11 million on the children's SSA last year and will do so again—the third year running—in 1995-96 unless urgent action is taken.

The practical working out of that means that £13,707 is available for a child at risk on the child protection register in Liverpool. That compares with £17,412 for a child on a similar list in Birmingham, £15,934 for a child in Manchester, £27,008 for a child in Wandsworth and £30,874 for a child in Westminster. How can that possibly be justified? If a child is at risk in central London, more than twice as much money is made available for his care.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was first established as a national charity in Liverpool a century ago. I am currently the president of its local branch. Children at risk from physical or sexual abuse, poverty or neglect, should not be the losers in this annual Dutch auction, as they clearly are at the moment.

The SSA does not take into account the condition of either public or private housing. In a city where 30,000 council properties and 60,000 private sector properties are officially sub-standard, that is patently absurd. The social index is obsessed with the type and size of housing, so the formula is fatally flawed in that respect as well. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us how the Department will be reviewing those procedures.

Even more perversely, the Government's own index of local conditions, which combines social and economic indicators to determine overall deprivation, ranks Liverpool as the sixth most deprived authority in the country, yet the social index places us 84th in the league. In real terms, that puts an additional burden of £28 million—36 per cent.—on our social services bill. Put another way, the social index leads to Westminster gaining £18.3 million in SSA this year while we in Liverpool lose £845,000.

The annual calculation also includes an area cost adjustment. That leads to an extra £1.5 billion of SSA being distributed to authorities in the south-east. There is no corroborating evidence to confirm that the cost of providing services in the south-east is so substantially greater than it is in the northern conurbations such as Liverpool that it justifies that redistribution.

The situation is exacerbated by the outrageous way in which the business rates have been settled this year. It has benefited stores, shops and businesses in the south-east, while regions such as the north-west are being crucified. I commend to the Minister Disraeli's maxim of "one nation" as the Government consider this unequal north-south division of resources.

Liverpool has a lot going for it, not least its people, its ingenuity, wit and grit. If it is to prosper, it needs to have its financial crisis resolved once and for all.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Broadgreen): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way; I know that we are under pressure of time and would not expect him to deal with the current Labour administration, but I appreciate his comments about the efforts being made to tackle many of the problems.

Has the hon. Gentleman considered how the way in which funding is calculated affects the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority and, indeed, the police authority? Is he aware that the Merseyside fire and civil defence authority has just sent a letter to the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for the Environment, which refers to the

"masterful inactivity coupled with callous indifference"

displayed by the Government?

Mr. Alton: The hon. Lady has, characteristically, made her point effectively. I am sure that the Minister will deal with it, and I associate myself with her remarks. Time is moving on and I must leave the Minister with half the available time in which to reply properly.

I was saying that there is only so much that people can take. Grinding council tax bills are leaving people demoralised and depressed. Council tax bills in Liverpool have become a curse. Objective 1 offers us a unique opportunity but it is illogical to place the highest council tax burden in the country on an area declared to be one of the most deprived in Europe. There is also the additionality argument. There is a suspicion that the Government have used the declaration of objective 1 status to reduce their own spending commitments in the region in the hope that objective 1 money will make up the difference.

In addition, the capping mechanisms are making it extremely difficult for Liverpool to identify matching funding to draw down objective 1 grant. I was appalled to learn that, of the 106 European regional development fund applications made by December 1994, which were worth £30 million, 100 have still not been given approval. In other words, only six applications have been approved. Projects such as the A565 approach to the north docks, which had previously been given the go-ahead by the Departments of the Environment and of Transport, are now having to begin again because they are part of the objective 1 status. It is all process and no product, expectation and little result. Objective 1 is in danger of losing its momentum and impetus as the process silts up.

I have admitted honestly that Liverpool must put its own house in order, but it is obvious that at least half the responsibility lies with the Government. All of us must now become genuine partners in rooting out inefficiency, maladministration, red tape and unfair financial mechanisms.

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): I welcome the debate, especially as it has been secured by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), who is a former colleague on the Select Committee on the Environment. He has set out his concerns for the financial

position of one of England's great cities. It is right that the matters that he has raised should be considered in the House.

Liverpool city council today is somewhat different from the council of a decade ago. I acknowledge that the present political leadership of the city has tried to pull itself back into the mainstream of local government performance. The auditor still criticises them from time to time, as she did last November about overpayments to staff, but the response of the city leaders nowadays is generally responsible and realistic. However, they have a considerable distance to go in some respects, and the hon. Gentleman highlighted some of them tonight—council tax collection and housing repairs are two examples, although they are scarcely unique.

As the city has moved from confrontation to co-operation with initiatives that bring benefits to it, Merseyside has benefited greatly in the past few years. To date, a total of £55 million has been spent on city challenge initiatives, and a similar sum is in prospect. Over five years, more than one third of a billion pounds of private investment is expected, creating more than 10,000 jobs and more than 500 new business start-ups.

Liverpool has also been successful in the single regeneration budget. Both bids from the city council as lead partner were successful. The scheme at Speke and Garston will receive £17.5 million over five years, levering a further £130 million from other public or private sector sources. The scheme is a mix of employment and industrial development measures which should improve the quality of life for local residents. A second scheme—at Dingle—will receive £6.7 million over five years. It is expected to lever in more than six times as much from other sources and it should revive a very rundown residential and shopping neighbourhood close to the city centre. I hope, too, that the city council will begin to look at solutions for housing areas like Speke, such as large-scale voluntary transfers, so that standards can be improved and empty dwellings brought back into use.

As the hon. Member for Mossley Hill said, Liverpool's position has also been recognised by the European Community. We strongly supported Merseyside's case for objective 1 status. Objective 1 is a major opportunity for Merseyside, and for Liverpool in particular. The city has secured an acceptable level of resources under round one of the bidding. That includes major developments in the city centre, at Queen's square, and for other initiatives, such as its film office and community-based economic development.

If the city puts the necessary effort into preparing and implementing its bids, it should do well out of the competitive objective 1 process. We welcome the close involvement of the city in objective 1, which could make a major further contribution to the development in the city, for example in the Speke and Garston area and in north Liverpool.

The objective 1 process has recently been the subject of a thorough review, to ensure that it is transparent and equitable. Local authorities, including Liverpool, have been fully involved in that review at a political level. The Government are determined to ensure that the structural funds are allocated fairly, to the best projects: those which will have the greatest and most lasting effects on the economy of Merseyside. The support from our inner-city policies and from Europe are all contributing to the improvement of the physical fabric of the city, and the opportunities for economic regeneration.

The city council's continuing task is to enable the provision of local government services for Liverpool—a business spending approaching £500 million a year. Liverpool, like most of the rest of local government, obtains most of its finance from central Government, rather than from council tax payers. In its 1994-95 budget, less than a quarter of its budget requirement was to be met from council tax payers. The council tax has to bridge the gap between the authority's budget and the central Government support that it receives. The basis for that central Government support, therefore, will always attract attention.

The key to the central Government support for a local authority is its standard spending assessment, or SSA. That is the Government's assessment of what an authority would need to spend if all authorities with like responsibilities for services provided those services to a similar standard. Clearly, the cost of providing a common standard of services will differ between authorities. Some authorities will have a relatively large number of children to educate, others relatively few. Some authorities have many miles of roads to maintain, others a relatively short length of roads. Such factors account for much of the variation between authorities in our assessment of the cost of a common standard of service.

We accept, however, that other factors are relevant. It would, for example, be too simple to base the assessment for education simply on the number of pupils. Other factors matter. For example, we allow for the fact that, in sparsely populated areas, there is bound to be more expenditure per pupil on transporting children to and from school than there would be in an urban area.

As the hon. Gentleman has said, however, social and economic factors also have an important bearing on the need for services and the cost of providing them. We seek to make proper allowance through the SSAs for the factors of social and economic disadvantage. The SSA formulae incorporate more than 20 indicators of that sort. By way of illustration, a few of those indicators are the number of children of lone parents, the number of children of income support claimants, the proportion of children from ethnic minorities, the proportion of pensioners living in rented accommodation, or living alone, or relying on income support, the proportion of people unemployed, the numbers of households accepted as homeless with priority needs and the numbers of housing benefit claimants.

That is not a complete list, but it serves to indicate how SSAs take account of many factors which are likely to give rise to differences between areas in needs because of the social or economic conditions of people in the area.

It is, of course, an extensive task to assess the relationships between such characteristics and the need for spending, but we tackle the task in a thoroughly objective way. We conduct extensive discussions with the local authority associations about the case for and against possible changes in the SSA formulae, we have a period of consultation with local government before each year's formula is considered by the House, and we publish detailed information about the formula and its basis. Indeed, that approach was commended in evidence to the Select Committee on the Environment and in the Committee's unanimous report on the subject, which was published when I had the honour to be its chairman.

[Mr. Robert B. Jones]

The assessments share out a fixed national total among authorities. That, of course, means that one authority's gain is inevitably another's loss. So it is only to be expected that authorities are alert to arguing for changes which would work to their benefit, and against changes proposed by others, which would work to their disadvantage. Liverpool was one of almost 100 authorities which came to see Ministers this year to say how they would like standard spending assessments to be changed.

The city council made a number of points to us when it came on 11 January to see my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration. It was concerned about the changes introduced in 1994-95 for the part of the SSA relating to social services for children, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. As my hon. Friend the Minister told the House on 1 February, the Department of Health expects to commission research this year on which it might be possible to refine the SSA for children's social services. However, it would not be sensible to rush into further changes without sound material on which to base any alteration.

The city has also asked us to include in the elements of SSAs for education and social services the economic index that is used elsewhere in the SSAs. As with all parts of the SSAs, we are prepared to be persuaded by the objective evidence in support of alterations. Any change has to be defensible for authorities at large, not just for particular authorities such as Liverpool.

The city has been particularly critical of the social index used in the standard spending assessments. It asks, as the hon. Gentleman did, how it can be right that Liverpool is ranked 81st out of 364 authorities. That is a very selective approach to the evidence. On the economic index, Liverpool ranks sixth. On the social and economic indices combined, Liverpool ranks 17th. Indeed, of authorities outside London, only Manchester ranks higher.

Liverpool has a relatively low proportion of people in the ethnic minorities compared with some of the other major cities. It is not unreasonable that this difference should be reflected in the SSAs. Our analyses show that the numbers of people from the ethnic minorities are one of the factors associated with variations in local authorities' expenditure. Indeed, hon. Members from cities with large proportions of their population from the ethnic minorities urge us to make an even greater allowance for the extra expenditure of local authorities in supporting those groups.

I know, however, that some of the representatives of local government feel that we should look again at the indicators that reflect various forms of social and economic deprivation. My Department has, for instance, had developed an index of local conditions which some of the local authorities feel might be a preferable indicator for SSAs. If the local authority associations wish to set out the arguments for and against such a change, we should be willing to consider them.

The city also believes that the standard spending assessment relating to debt charges should be based on the actual debt of an authority, rather than on a notional debt. I certainly cannot agree. Authorities have discretion over the size of their debt. It is up to them to decide how much debt they redeem. They are required only to set aside a specified percentage each year. Basing the SSA on the actual debt would disadvantage authorities that had acted prudently in paying off debts more rapidly than required by law. Indeed, this is the very point that Labour-controlled Lewisham made strongly when it came to see me.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the area cost adjustment. The area cost adjustment always provokes strong reactions. Authorities that receive it contend that it does not cover all the extra costs which they face through being in the south-east. Those who do not receive it are convinced that it is already over-generous. The hon. Gentleman's point tonight is in complete contradistinction to the point made by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) not long ago. We look at the matter objectively. We carried out an extensive examination of the area cost adjustment in 1993. We satisfied ourselves that it is, indeed, justified.

In the coming year, we intend to carry out research to see whether the zones on which the area cost adjustment is based can be better founded. It may be better, for example, to base them on travel-to-work areas. We would in any case expect to bring up to date the information on which the adjustment is based. One factor in this will be the revaluation of business premises where the new business rate bills can be reflected in the area cost adjustment for 1996-97.

In the end, Liverpool is bound to judge the SSAs by the level of expenditure they reflect. Of the 36 metropolitan districts, Liverpool's SSA per head of population is the third highest. Its SSA is exceeded only by Manchester and by the neighbouring borough of Knowsley. Liverpool's SSA per head is £887 in 1995-96. This compares with an average of £756 per head for the metropolitan districts as a whole.

I believe that this demonstrates that the SSA system already recognises that Liverpool is a city with spending needs considerably greater than most. If the evidence supports changes in the SSA formulas which would allow even more to Liverpool, we would certainly be prepared to consider changes. However, we must retain the objectivity of the standard spending assessments and seek as wide a measure of agreement as possible in local government so that the approach is as fair and open as it can be between authorities.

Meanwhile, I urge the city council to consider its priorities most rigorously and to sustain the search for efficiency savings to avoid the notoriety of having the highest levels of council tax in the country, as it did in 1994-95.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 24 February 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (REAFFIRMATION OF SOVEREIGNTY OF UNITED KINGDOM PARLIAMENT)

Mr. William Cash, supported by Mr. John Biffen, Sir George Gardiner, Sir Peter Tapsell, Mr. Iain Duncan Smith, Mr. Bernard Jenkin, Mr. Barry Legg, Mr. Roger Knapman, Mr. Neil Hamilton, Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mrs. Ann Winterton and Mr. Bill Walker presented a Bill to preserve the right of the people of the United Kingdom to govern itself within the European Community: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 3 March, and to be printed. [Bill 55.]

Referendum Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill provides for the holding of a referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of European Union. It proposes that a referendum be held before 31 December 1995, and that the questions be so framed as to invite opinion on whether the UK should continue along the path to a single European Government with a single currency and a single body of law, or whether we should remain in the Union only on the basis of free trade with a very substantial repatriation of our national sovereignty.

In 1996, the members of the European Union will hold an intergovernmental conference to review the terms of the European Union from the treaty of Rome through the Single European Act to the Maastricht treaty. The conference will provide an opportunity to reflect on where we go from here, and it will be a singularly opportune moment to find out what the British people think about what has happened in the 20 years since they affirmed their willingness to become part of what was then described as an economic union.

In the past 20 years, people have been asked to accept substantial changes about which they were not fully warned and which have amounted to a constitutional revolution. So far, they have not been given an opportunity through referendums or elections to express their views because, by and large, most of the parties have gone to the country at election time with similar policies—although we know that the Labour party in its not too distant history has done a U-turn on the matter.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Gorman: I shall not give way for a little while; hon. Members must wait their turn.

My hunch is that the time is right to ask people what they think about the European Union. One of the blessings of having the Whip withdrawn is that one is no longer tied to this place morning, noon and night. As a result, my Whipless colleagues and I have had the opportunity of going around the country and talking to ordinary people who are dealing day by day with the problems presented to them by European regulations.

For example, the fishermen at Lowestoft and Brixham are fighting to save their livelihoods with the Save British Fish campaign. Under the regulations of the common fisheries policy, they face the possibility of Spanish vessels coming into the remaining protected British waters to scoop out the basis of their livelihoods. Other fishing ports around the country have been destroyed by the policy during the past 20 years. For example, the last fishing vessel in Hull was burned recently. Imagine that—the last vessel in one of the great centres of our fishing industry burned because of the common fisheries policy.

There is no doubt in the minds of those fishermen that they want the repatriation of the fishing grounds of the British Isles, that they want the grounds back soon and that they will fight for them. It was a great pleasure and an honour for us to visit them and give them our magnificent support.

[Mrs. Gorman]

The farmers in Britain have also been pleased to express to us their concerns about what is happening in agriculture. We are sometimes given to understand that, with all its faults, the common agricultural policy is delivering the goods to British farmers and that they are all prepared to put up with it. That is not the case at all.

They pointed out to us that, under the quota system for milk, farmers who had large herds of cows could live off their milk quotas. They did not need to keep a cow. They could lease the quota to poorer farmers who desperately needed it because otherwise they would be forced to spray milk on to their fields. The supermarkets are full of ersatz processed European packets of milk and yoghurt produced anywhere but in Britain. There is a shortage of milk in Britain, while we throw the stuff down the drain.

Such examples have brought home to us the urgent need to consult the people. I promise the House that any party which adopts the referendum as a firm commitment— if not immediately, certainly in its election policy—will have enormous support in the country. We know that because we have had it, so to speak, from the horse's mouth—the people of Britain.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does my hon. Friend propose that the result of the referendum should be binding on most, if not all, politicians?

Mrs. Gorman: I most certainly agree with my hon. Friend.

May I review what different people have to say about the European Community. We know that our European Commissioner, Sir Leon Brittan, says that he is sure that there is no desire on the continent to create, for example, a federal united states of Europe. Yet I detect a great deal of scepticism in Britain among the people he represents about whether that is true.

Mr. Santer tells us that he wants a fully federated Europe and that he wants to see the end of our British currency before 1999. We know what the Chancellor thinks. He is a Euro-fan. He does not deny it. The other day, he said that it would be a mistake to believe that monetary union needed to be a huge step on the path to a federal Europe. Do we believe that? I am not sure that we do. In any case, do the British public believe that?

We know what Lord Howe thinks. He is another dedicated pro-European. He says that only by acting more closely with our European partners can we control our destiny. We could put up a good argument that the opposite is the truth and that control of our destiny would require us to repatriate many of the powers that we have given away to the European Community.

We also know what the Prime Minister thinks. He says that he wants us to be at the heart of Europe, but he has not spelt out just what will happen if, for example, there was heart failure. With the corruption that we hear about in the heart of Europe, it is possible that we may be bogging ourselves down in an institution that could drag us all down. Is it really necessary for us to continue in an organisation which is so obviously flawed?

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I want to put a point to the hon. Lady on the timing of her referendum, which I find a little curious. The first leg of her question is about pursuing full integration of the European Union and so on. Surely there are two other possibilities. One is that those issues will not feature on the agenda of the IGC in 1996. The other is that, if they do, they will be vetoed by the Prime Minister in his discussions with our European partners. In that case, that part of the question would be surplus to requirements. Will she comment on whether the referendum should perhaps come after the IGC?

Mrs. Gorman: I take my hon. Friend's point, but it is important that whoever negotiates at the IGC should have in their minds a clear view of how the British people feel about Europe now, 20 years after they originally voted to stay in it.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I hope that my hon. Friend will ignore that silly question. Does she appreciate that it would strengthen the authority of any British Prime Minister, whether Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat or anything else, if he could go to the IGC next year and say that he represented what the British people believed? That would be better than listening to some silly people who make stupid points to interrupt my hon. Friend. Does she agree that, instead of making his position more difficult, a referendum would strengthen the Prime Minister's hand enormously?

Mrs. Gorman: I agree with my hon. Friend, who has a noble tradition of fighting for the independence of the British nation.

Mr. Waterson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) to cast aspersions on my reason for intervening? I asked a question about a factual matter and the hon. Lady was good enough to give way in her normal courteous fashion. It is not acceptable for the hon. Gentleman, who has been in this place long enough and should know better, to make such remarks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a point of order for the Chair. One hopes that at all times hon. Members will maintain common courtesy and not play the game of insulting one another. That game appears to be rapidly creeping into the debates in the House.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is a point of order for you. It is pretty clear at this early stage in the debate that the anti-marketeer and pro-marketeer Tory Members of Parliament are beginning to fight one another and call one another names. I am putting in a direct request to you to place a splash apron between us and the Conservative Benches to catch the blood.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not for me to get involved in that matter.

Mrs. Gorman: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Gary Streeter (Plymouth, Sutton): My hon. Friend seemed to say in response to her hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) that a referendum before the IGC would strengthen the Prime

Minister's negotiating position at the IGC, but what if the people of Britain voted to stay in Europe? Or has my hon. Friend prejudged the outcome of such a referendum?

Mrs. Gorman: That was a rather silly intervention. It is perfectly obvious, as I am a democrat and we are all democrats, that if the British people voted strongly for a pro-European position, of course the Prime Minister would negotiate strongly and rightly from that perspective.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): My hon. Friend is putting an admirable case extremely cogently. Does she agree that it is paradoxical for Her Majesty's Government to propose a referendum to legitimise the framework for what they hope will be an ultimate constitutional settlement for Northern Ireland which will bring peace, while they deny the legitimisation of a process of integration within Europe which will eventually lead to such an erosion of our sovereignty that we will be no longer an independent nation?

Mrs. Gorman: Very well said, if I may say so.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Gorman: I will not give way for the moment, but I will a little later.

Recently, 107 of my colleagues signed early-day motion 581, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), in which he praised the firm line that the Prime Minister was beginning to take on a single currency. It is extremely important for the British people to understand the meaning of that. As we have gone around the country, we have found that, just as they were about Maastricht, people are confused. They do not understand the great significance.

We remind them what happened the last time we changed our currency. On decimalisation, the value of money halved and the price of everything doubled. People know what will happen to the pound in their pocket if and when we get a single currency. Before decimalisation, a doughnut cost a tanner. It does not quite cost a tenner now, but it costs 10 bob. When we put it in those terms, we see by how much our money was devalued by a change in the currency.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Gorman: I will not give way just now.

Those are the issues that concern the British people and which we hope we will be able clearly to bring to them. We are not alone in making these remarks. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) made a marvellous speech on Friday, in which he spelled out from his great experience of negotiating in Europe for so many years that there is nothing in it for the British people any more, that it is a costly extravagance and that it costs us more than we get out of it. Furthermore, he could see no way in which that position would improve. I credit him with enormous honesty for making those remarks. It is almost a pity, however, that we have to wait for people to leave office before we get to know what is going on behind the scenes.

There have been other remarkable conversions. Do any hon. Members remember Lord Young? I am sure that many will. Not so many years ago, he cajoled and bullied us into the single market, telling us of our great future and saying that it would be wonderful. Now that he is in the City and faces the problems of dealing with Europe, he is a reformed, born-again Euro-sceptic. He has come to the conclusion that there is nothing in it for the British people, as did the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames.

All those issues should be made clear to the British people in the run-up to a referendum, when they would be able to make their choice and have their say, as would all my colleagues who passionately believe that our future lies in Europe, and almost only in Europe—as if we would be adrift, anchorless, aimless and directionless in a rough sea without it. Many of our colleagues literally and sincerely believe that, but I think that it is gobbledegook.

We have gone over the business of having a referendum many times in the House. I am not what I would call a parliamentary expert, but we have had four referendums in the recent past and it is an established tradition. It is an important way to tap the British people's feelings outside of an election based largely on the one issue, which the referendum would bring to the people. There is an excellent reason for having a referendum and having it soon.

I want to say more about my personal experience in Europe, because it was Europe that brought me into politics. Before we joined the European Community in 1972, I was a small business woman, minding my own business and not politically involved or interested. Then value added tax was introduced, with all the problems that it caused the small business community. That was the first of the European impositions of which I became aware. I witnessed what it did, as customs men went round with crowbars, bending open people's filing cabinets to try to trap them into some petty book-keeping mistake—such mistakes happen in any organisation, including the European Community—and terrifying the life out of them.

Many other regulations were introduced which affected my ability to import and export. There were demands for standards and types of equipment and raw materials which were not necessarily appropriate to the products that I was making, but which the European Community required. I began to feel as though Europe was taking over my business. That made me interested in politics for the first time and it got me interested in looking for a party that might give me some salvation from that impost, caused me to join the Conservative party and, ultimately, brought me to this position today.

It makes me smile when I listen to colleagues telling me that, without the European Community, our country and our economy will go down the pan, that we will be unable to survive and will lose thousands of jobs. I can only tell them that there are thousands of jobs to be gained by getting out of Europe, if it means that we can get rid of this incubus of regulation, which is a nightmare for our business community.

When I listen to those on the Front Benches dictating these apparently wonderful and utopian ideas to us, I ask myself what they know about running a business. With the greatest respect in the world, most of them have come to Parliament from the law, or directly from institutions and research departments. They have not had hands-on experience of running a business worldwide. Well, I have, and I can tell the House that it has always been ten times more difficult to get anything into the French or German

[Mrs. Gorman]

markets than to get goods into the Pacific rim countries and to north and south America, which have strong traditional connections with Britain and still have an enormous respect for us.

To do business almost entirely into the European Community is to make life tougher than necessary for the business man. After all, Europe has only 10 per cent. of the world's population. The way we keep hearing about it, one would think that it was the whole world. It also has about 15 per cent. of the world's gross production.

We have enormous opportunities elsewhere and there is no reason why we should not have both, but we also know that the European Community is a cartel and a customs union. From my practical experience, I know that if people cannot trade into our markets it is 10 times more difficult for us to trade into theirs. They have to earn our currency to buy goods back from us.

I hear people going on about the importance of the single currency, which will make it easier for the business community. I promise hon. Members that that is a joke. If one is in business and doing business abroad, one buys forward currency, often dollars, because that currency is universally respected. It is silly to think that a single currency imposed on us in Europe will make life easier for the business community.

It is equally silly to suggest that a small island such as Britain, with only 52 million people, could not survive and prosper economically. Look at the Japanese—they have two small islands and practically no resources, but they do remarkably well without being trapped into one of these customs unions with which we are involving ourselves so deeply.

The fear factor has been suggested—it has been raised even at the exalted heights of the President of the Board of Trade from time to time—as a reason why we have to cling on to this European raft, but it is simply not a true representation of the facts. The British nation has always had a different attitude to the rest of the continent of Europe. We have always looked outwards in all directions and not just across to the European continent. Our great success has been that when we have had the largest amount of free trade, as we did when we finally dumped many of the trade restrictions in the mid-1800s, with the ending of the corn laws and all the rest, we moved—

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): The 1900s.

Mrs. Gorman: We abandoned the corn laws in 1846. I thank the hon. Gentleman for intervening, but I wish that he would get his facts right. I am neither an economist nor a historian, but that I do know.

British markets prospered and flourished right up until the first world war, in a way that they have never done since. That showed up in the increasing health of the nation and in the growth and increasing longevity of the population, all of which were factors in the increasing wealth. People went from living in what were virtually soil-floored, straw-roofed mud huts to little houses with brick walls, proper loos and lino on the floor—buildings that were so precious to the nation that they eventually caught the eye of English Heritage and got one of those awful "Listed building, do not touch" labels hung on them. All the pointers in our history show that the British people, when encouraged to trade universally and not merely into Europe, do remarkably well.

I sometimes think that we politicians are like bomber pilots. We drop our policies from a great height and are indifferent to their effect on people on the ground. I am telling the House what it is like for many people on the receiving end of Euro-regulations and trying to convince my colleagues who are fanatically pro-European and want all that harmonisation to think again about what it is doing to our country's prosperity. The idea of a level playing field, which is fundamental to the European mentality, is the antithesis of what free markets are about. They are about comparative advantage over one's potential rivals, and that is how one makes businesses and countries prosper.

Those are all the reasons why the British people should be given a chance to decide for themselves in a referendum. They may not agree with me and may decide to vote, as some of my colleagues hope, for the full European package—so be it. But attitudes have changed remarkably in the past few months. When people see European courts overruling British courts and ordering British taxpayers to compensate convicted drug smugglers for some technical reason, they are furious and want to know why British laws are no longer paramount.

When they see British Ministers trail out to Europe, shake hands with protesters against the veal trade and say, "I hope you can do something about it," what do they think of the power left to those Ministers? British Ministers are simply puppets who can no longer lay down what the British people want because, even if they put that view across, they can be overruled. If we continue in that way, they will be overruled on everything. To give more power to the elbow of our Ministers, it is paramount that we give the British people an opportunity to sanction their best interests.

My colleagues will make many points about the current position and deal with sovereignty and the details of a single currency, at which they are all much more competent than I. I am British—indeed, I am English—and I feel that that is my identity. People's identity and association with their country is paramount to that country's stability. When that is churned up and people are told that they must become something new—Europeans—they do not know what it means.

They do not understand the qualities of that society; what its laws expect of them; what they can expect from politicians; what the value of their currency should mean to them; what they have a right to demand of their politicians; and what they must pay their state in terms of rights as well as taking opportunities. All that is tied up in our national identity, and we disturb it at our peril, especially if we do so without first giving people a say.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Lady will be interested to know that I shall vote for her Referendum Bill, given a chance to do so, in line with the practice that I have adopted in the House since 28 October 1971 when a previous Tory Government took the disastrous decision to drag the British people into the common market. But I shall not do so for nationalistic or flag-waving reasons.

There are inherent contradictions within the common market, which is why I express such views. As I have declared that I will vote for the Referendum Bill today, will the hon. Lady guarantee that, in view of all her opinions on the common market and how the Government are carrying out their activities in Europe, she will join us

in the Lobby next Wednesday on a vote that could change the nature of the common market and, possibly, the Government as well?

Mrs. Gorman: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's consistency on Europe, but not to that of the Labour party, which is just as divided on the issue. For it to have the brass neck to table a motion criticising the Government's attitude to Europe is an awful cheek. The hon. Gentleman knows that, and he will not trap my colleagues and me into giving such a guarantee. However, we hope that the Prime Minister, who will address the House in that debate on Wednesday, will give a further commitment on a single currency.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): The Prime Minister is obviously considering that matter carefully and it is now apparent to the whole country that a single currency is about not economic but political issues. It is about whether we want to be part of a single United States of Europe dominated by Brussels. If, on Wednesday, our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that no Government of which he is Prime Minister could conceivably enter a single currency, would my hon. Friend then support the Government and oppose the Opposition motion?

Mrs. Gorman: I would certainly do so. That would be an enormous relief not just for my colleagues and me but for many people in the country, who want to see clearly which way the Conservative party and the Prime Minister are moving.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does my hon. Friend also agree that it would greatly enhance the Government's authority in Wednesday's debate and the credibility of its European policies as a whole if the Government were to support the Bill and the concept of a referendum before we moved ahead to a single currency or proceeded further along the path of European integration?

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right. My Bill is an olive branch to the Prime Minister from those of us who, although we did so on a matter of principle, were unfortunately deprived of the Whip. That has turned out to be nothing like as awful as it was meant to be, as it has allowed us to express our views more forthrightly.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend also agree that, for the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) to tell his party at its conference that he would never be isolated in Europe is simply not good enough for the British people, who may need a Prime Minister who is prepared to be isolated in Europe on important issues?

Mrs. Gorman: We certainly do not argue about that. I have no time for the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), because he is hypocritical and wants to get into bed with the Europeans. He wants a marriage for life and wants to tie the British nation to a federal European Government with a single currency and the whole shebang.

We should stop flirting with the British people. It is all very well for the British Prime Minister to give us winks and nods across the bar when we, the customers on the other side, are wondering whether we should buy our pints there or not. If he clearly does not believe that we should have a marriage with Europe, he should let the people have a say because this matter concerns our future. That is all that I am asking. We must have confidence in our people to decide on that, and any party that offers that proposition will gain the respect of the British people.

Ms Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): Can the hon. Lady clear up a problem about which she was asked earlier but failed to answer? The referendum that she has proposed is described as a consultative one. Does she regard the result of it as binding?

Mrs. Gorman: When the hon. Lady reflects on that, she will understand that the result cannot be binding in law, nor would one expect that. It is the Prime Minister's right to negotiate, but I believe that he should do so having received more information from the people. A referendum result on the specific issue of Europe would tell the Prime Minister what the British people have in mind.

Throughout history, great empires have come and gone. It always has been a utopian dream that, if we all got together in some union, whether through conquest or assent, the opportunities of the individual states within it would be enhanced. The last of those empires was the great communist dream, which has finally collapsed, causing great harm to the people locked into it.

Be it five, 10 or 20 years down the road, I do not want our nation to have a crumbling market and to have lost its connections with our natural marketing partners because they were unable to enter our markets. I do not want the standard of living of the British people to decline. I do not want their spirit to be suppressed, because they are getting awfully tired of being constantly cajoled and bullied into the idea that their future lies in Europe and nowhere else.

The British people have always had a strong entrepreneurial, buccaneering tendency which has done this country proud. We need to liberate that spirit again, but we cannot do it if we are meshed into the regulatory system of Europe. That system is like an octopus, because, as fast as one cuts off one bit of its tentacles, it sprouts another.

I can promise colleagues that a business man working in such an atmosphere finds that his daily round becomes a daily grind as he is immersed in more and more paperwork and subject to decisions made for him by people whose main interest is the creation and perpetration of regulations and not getting that business up and going. We need that entrepreneurial spirit for people to succeed and to have better lives.

The decisions about Europe are not just for the House alone, but for the people to make. I am asking my colleagues on both sides of the House to let us adopt the Bill and give the British people what I believe that they would now welcome: the opportunity to tell us, for a change, what they want for the future of their country in Europe.

10.12 am

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I have studied the Bill carefully, because I support the sovereignty of the people and their right to decide in a variety of ways what their governance should be.

I have no objection in principle to a referendum, so I find myself in the Billericay-Bolsover camp and not in that of those who say that Parliament alone should decide such matters.

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

During the summer, I was pleased when my right hon., then hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) made it clear in his leadership campaign for the Labour party that a referendum would be included in our party's agenda. That was a positive statement, and at the time I deeply regretted that the Prime Minister knocked that suggestion back, scorned it and said that it was not appropriate. He is a Prime Minister, however, who runs after events. On Wednesday, although I doubt that the right hon. Gentleman will give a pledge to rule out forever participation in a single currency, I am sure that he will make some general commitment to a referendum.

Mr. Heald: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he would rule it out in perpetuity?

Mr. MacShane: Does the hon. Gentleman mean a referendum or a single currency?

Mr. Heald: A single currency.

Mr. MacShane: Certainly not. We shall discuss the single currency issue later. This debate is about a referendum and is not a re-run of every aspect of the European question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I agree that the hon. Gentleman should stick to debating the Referendum Bill rather than the Referendum (Single Currency) Bill, which is the next Bill down for consideration.

Mr. MacShane: I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that my notes contain a mere passing reference to currency.

It is most singularly hypocritical for the Conservative supporters of the Bill to claim that they alone are seeking to give the people of the country some say over their destiny when, for 15 long years—I do not know when each of them entered Parliament—the Conservative Government have whittled away at the sovereign rights of the British people. They have abolished people's power to control themselves through local government; they have abolished the local authority of London, so that Britain's capital is the only capital without a mayor and a single governing authority; they have also abolished any democratic accountability in quangoland.

Mr. Michael Carttiss (Great Yarmouth): Is restoring to school governors the ability to determine their own budgets and run their own schools without reference to local authorities an example of a return of democracy to the people, or its removal?

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman must address that question to school governors who are currently writing in their thousands to the Secretary of State for Education complaining that it is one thing to give a certain limited authority to them as governors, but another to cut their budgets so that they have no ability to use that authority. In general, the Conservative Government have shown a contempt for democratic rights that is without parallel in the 20th century. Now some members of the Conservative party are calling for a referendum.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) asked a pertinent question about the consultative nature of the referendum, but she got no answer. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr.Skinner) also asked a pertinent question about how the anti-Europeans on the Conservative Benches will vote on Wednesday—again, he got no answer.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) can tell me what the question on the referendum paper will be, because one cannot hold a referendum without defining that question. The form of the question is vital. According to the Bill, two questions will be put—I have yet to hear of a referendum on more than one question. According to subsection (3), if those questions are unsatisfactory, they

"need not be in the exact words of the preceding subsection, so long as Her Majesty is satisfied that their wording reflects the true intent and spirit of this Act".

So, my goodness, we are going to ask Her Majesty to decide what the question should be. That will be a referendum horribilis for those at Buckingham palace, as they have to chew over the intent of the hon. Member for Billericay when she seeks to ask the people, via Her Majesty, what their future in Europe should be.

Sir Teddy Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is being a little silly about the consultative nature of the referendum. Surely he must know that, if people voted for the option in clause 1(2)(b), there is no way in which Parliament could implement that result. All it would mean is that the Prime Minister would be given the authority to seek that option. In the same way, there is nothing that we can do about the export of live animals. If people voted for the option in subsection 2(b), all it means is that the Prime Minister and the Government would be given some suggestion as to what we want them to try to achieve in 1996 and thereafter. There is no way in which our Parliament could do anything else.

Mr. MacShane: But we are invited to treat the question of the referendum as a sublime and supreme consultation with the people about the future destiny and essence of the nation in which they live. The hon. Gentleman is referring to an early-day motion, which he can table tomorrow, to obtain as many signatures as he wants, which will give a fair idea, according to the number of Members of Parliament who sign it, what the people—or at least MPs—want the Prime Minister to take to the intergovernmental conference.

If we must return to paragraph (2)(b), I shall read it:

"remain in the European Union, but only as a member of an association of states trading freely with one another, with substantial repatriation of sovereignty".

My learned friends the lawyers would have more than a field day discussing the meaning of that paragraph. It mentions

"an association of states trading freely with one another".

That is not a referendum for England; that is a referendum for all 15 members of the European Union. They would need to agree to the arguments made in paragraph (2)(b) of the Bill.

That may be a good thing. It may be good to hold a Europewide referendum on one issue or another, but if the hon. Member for Billericay wants a Europewide referendum, I must tell her that the House has no power over the people of France, Germany, Sweden and so on.

She should get herself elected to the European Parliament and continue her arguments there if she wants Europewide referendums.

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Gentleman is labouring on in a somewhat futile manner. He knows perfectly well the intent of the referendum. It is to ask the people whether they want a Heathite, Jenkinsite, Delorsite, Blairite European single state, or whether they want to be part of a single market, in which single market the rest of Europe can do precisely what it wants.

Mr. MacShane: I am responding to questions. I was trying to make progress with my speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I realise now that we have a new paragraph (c), mentioning a Heathite, Blairite, Jenkinsite state. Perhaps we shall also have a new paragraph (d), mentioning a Marlowite, Taylorite, Gormanite, Skinnerite state.

Mr. Skinner: No.

Mr. MacShane: We shall have a new paragraph (e) for a Skinnerite state when that need arises.

When we consider Europe, whether as Members of Parliament or as citizens, we regard it as a mirror in which we see reflected many things that show a great uncertainty about the future of this country.

I pay tribute to the sincerity with which people hold their opinions. An unpleasant remark was attributed to the Prime Minister about men in white coats coming for an hon. Member who was anti-Europe, I think mainly on agricultural issues. I found that deeply unpleasant. Everyone elected to the House has an absolute right and duty to express their opinions, and their opinions should be taken with all seriousness.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): Could the hon. Gentleman, and those who think like him, just try to make a small mental jump and to cease, once and for all, using the expression, "anti-Europe"? Those of us on both sides of the House who are sceptical about closer European union, in many cases have a great many friends on the continent, like the continent and have got nothing against the continent, but we quite simply cannot bear our country being told what to do. Will the hon. Gentleman stop saying "anti-Europe", because it is misleading and it is false?

Mr. MacShane: "Anti-Europe" conveys, more accurately than the rather silly word "sceptical", some—not all—of the passions that drive people in the debate. When I consider other European countries, and I consider the National Front in France and the Communist parties, who are so hostile to the European Union, I find there, I am afraid, a tinge of profound anti-Europeanism.

I have an affection for the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel). We share a great interest in allotments and gardening—

Mr. Jessel: And in skiing.

Mr. MacShane: —and, indeed, in healthy outdoor sports. Therefore, if he and his friends will stop using the term "federalist"; if they will stop using the phrase "selling out to Brussels" and all the other clichés that they attach to the opinions of any of us who support the European Union; if the hon. Gentleman will sign a Trappist oath not to use those words and pass it round all his colleagues, I promise him that I will stop using the word "anti-European".

As we look into Europe, we look into a mirror that reflects our uncertainties about the future of our country. We see the fault lines of Britain. I see a Britain centralised, unreformed, hierarchical, socially deferential. I speak very much as a republican, although I want to emphasise that I think that a modern republic can have a monarch as its head of state, just as, in France, what is in effect a monarchy can be in the formal constitution of a republic. I see the fault lines of a Britain that is unsure of its destination and destiny, and unsure of what the future organisation of governance of our state should be.

That lack of certainty is visible, above all, in the Conservative party. Perhaps I might try to unite the Members sitting there, so kindly listening to me, because it is obvious that the Tory party is tired of government. It yearns for opposition. The certainties of Thatcherism are replaced by the mediocrities of Majorism, yet the Conservative party has a majority. The Conservative party is condemned to administer a political economy the modernity and complexity of which it no longer comprehends, and to rule a people who actively detest the corruption and greed that pour through every pore of the Tory skin.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Bill is to

"Provide for the holding of a referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union."

Will the hon. Member address himself to the Bill?

Mr. MacShane: I have taken a large number of interventions that were not about a referendum. I would have finished by now, were it not for those interventions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is a matter for the hon. Member to decide whether he takes interventions or not, and, when he takes them, whether he responds.

Mr. Waterson *rose—*

Mr. MacShane: I give way to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson).

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman is talking about divisions that are allegedly in the Conservative party, but I wonder where he is hiding the 59 of his colleagues who defied the party Whip and voted against the Second Reading of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not debating divisions in any party, whether it is the Government side or the Opposition side. We are debating the Bill, and now hon. Members must stick to it.

Mr. MacShane: As William Butler Yeats once said—*[Interruption.]*—

"The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity."

On the issue of a referendum, we do have passionate intensity in hostility to Europe, which is manifested in the debate.

I want the best to discover some of their convictions. I want, perhaps next Wednesday, arguments to be advanced by more senior Members of Parliament that will put an end to the divisions on Europe, which manifest themselves in this morning's debate.

[Mr. MacShane]

It is obvious to me—I return to the argument advanced by the hon. Member for Twickenham—that the challenge is not to force Britain or Europe into some Procrustean federal bed. The challenge is more exciting, and it is not met by the Referendum Bill. The challenge is to create a new relationship between nations, peoples and, above all, values. There will be more hope for our country in searching for the common values in Europe to take us forward. As Edmund Burke said:

"All government, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter."

Compromise with the other European nations is essential for the creation of a economic and social cohesion in our country.

Mr. Marlow: The British people are concerned about Europe, which is why they should have a referendum. One reason why they are concerned about Europe is barter, the principle on which Europe is governed. The French said that they would allow European elections to go ahead last year if they could be guaranteed that a third Parliament building costing £300 million would be built in Strasbourg—that is barter and corruption.

Mr. MacShane: The Prime Minister said that Europe could have a new president last summer provided it was not Mr. Dehaene. I do not know whether that was barter or corruption—he was simply exercising his veto, which every other European state accepted. The Prime Minister thought that Mr. Santer was the right man in the right place at the right time—he does not appear to be any longer.

As Edmund Burke said, the essence of all social cohesion is a form of compromise. In my sincere judgment, the Bill's promoter and supporters are not interested in compromise. They want Britain out of Europe, while the rest of the peoples of Europe and a majority of people in this country want Europe to develop.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker have been fierce with me about straying from the Bill, but the hon. Member for Billericay spoke at length on the subject of a single currency. I wish to mention it briefly—I promise that I shall not take more than 30 seconds. I understand why some Conservative Members want to keep their hands on our currency. It is, and has been in recent years, the private plaything of speculators in the City—the surest way to quick money in a sick City of London.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will remember that Harold Wilson blamed the decline of the pound on the unnamed gnomes of Zurich. Today we can name the gnome of Davos, the right hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo), whose remarks in Switzerland earlier this month about how the Government would veto developments in Europe, led to the crisis of confidence in the pound. We can name the gnome of Great George street, the right hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), the Chief Secretary of the Ritz, who single-handedly drove down the value of the pound with his remarks about a European currency and eternity.

Those Cabinet members are the toast of every German banker—between them, they speak not a word of German, yet they serve the deustchmark better than Herr Tittemeyer, the president of the Bundesbank, or Chancellor Kohl. Truly, we can say with Schiller, "Mit solcher Dummheit Kämpfen Götter selbst vergebens"—against such stupidity, even the gods fight in vain.

The exercise that the right hon. Members for Enfield, Southgate and for Thanet, South engaged in was not just about Europe, just as today's referendum debate is not about Europe—it is about the war of succession inside the Conservative party. It is a war of position, a search for the right words for populism, a rehearsal for nationalist flag-waving, which will do our country great harm.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): Does the hon. Gentleman think that, after his speech today, any self-respecting Conservative Member of Parliament could possibly go through the same Division Lobby as him next week?

Mr. MacShane: I admire the Minister's efforts to restore unity to his party—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will now return to the subject of the Bill.

Mr. MacShane: I have no doubt that there will be a majority for the Prime Minister next Wednesday—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not talking about next Wednesday, which will look after itself. We are debating the Bill. I do not want to have to tell the hon. Gentleman again.

Mr. MacShane: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was taught to be polite and have responded to interventions, not one of which was on the referendum. Therefore, I am stuck—I do not want to say that I will accept no more interventions—perhaps I should do that as it would solve the problem. I shall speak simply to the Bill.

Mr. Heald: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The debate is rapidly becoming a farce.

Mr. MacShane: With respect to the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Heald), I should like to finish and let other hon. Members make their speeches. Not one of the interventions has been to the point and I have been justifiably rebuked from the Chair for my attempts to be polite and to accept those interventions.

We look to the Bill for some line on Europe that we can support. The Bill searches for some mechanism to bring a divided party out of its troubles and for a scapegoat to divert attention. What greater scapegoat is there than Europe? Cohesion, equilibrium and consensus are important to any development in the economic or social policies which are important to our country. They require consensus and compromise with all our partners, not just in Europe, but elsewhere.

The right hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate, responding to an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms

Abbott), described himself, in an affectionate way during a friendly exchange, as an immigrant on the make. I am the son of immigrants—

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): From the European Union.

Mr. MacShane: No, not from the European Union—from east Europe and other countries.

I appeal to the right hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate not to wrap himself in the nationalist flag or betray the republican virtues of his lineage or his legitimate striving to realise his ambition to unleash the base passions that a nation which is more and more divided into two halves is likely to produce. I am profoundly proud to be British and proud to be European. I am proud that my wife is Asian and proud of my love for the United States and the many friends I have there.

If I thought that the Bill would in any way advance my Britishness and my pride—in where I come from, where my children come from and the hopes I have for the world in which they will live—I would back it. The Bill does not achieve those aims, and I hope that it will not advance further today.

10.38 am

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): I am grateful for being called, and I should like to be brief. I may therefore appear to be discourteous by not taking interventions—I shall rephrase that, as I was speaking in a maladroit manner. I do not mean that I shall take no interventions, but I might not take all or most.

Mr. Waterson: What percentage of interventions does my hon. Friend estimate he will take?

Mr. Dykes: It depends whether they are in Euro-currency or national currency.

The experience of the patient Deputy Speaker—indeed, the Chamber—is that, if one accepts all interventions, speeches become very long, which is unfair on other colleagues who are waiting to speak. When my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) is wearing his suede shoes, I know that there will be trouble. We shall see what happens if he is called to speak later.

I respect the sincerity of my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), who is the promoter of the Bill, and her passion and skill in making her arguments. However, her arguments are so eccentric and zany that I am sure that they will have a deeply disturbing effect on most sensible people in the community.

The hon. Lady, who is an extremely successful modern entrepreneur, espouses bizarre arguments that are based on a mindset from the past. They do not apply to the modern European Union as it is now developing. I can understand the hon. Lady's anxieties and those of her sponsors—a very distinguished list of colleagues—some of whom may try to speak in the debate today if you call them, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I make no apology for my intention to use the phrase "anti-European". I do not mean to be offensive, but I think that it is the appropriate phrase to use to describe the small minority of my colleagues who are causing a lot of trouble in the parliamentary party and elsewhere over the European issue.

In the past two years, the Government have made a terrible mistake in not explaining boldly and forthrightly their enthusiasm for and positive stance on European matters. If the most senior members of the Cabinet and other distinguished members of the Government—such as my hon. Friend the Minister, who will give the official Government view later in the debate—create a vacuum of timidity, dithering and hesitation on the European issue, they will create a climate of hesitation, fear and anxiety among even the most educated members of society, let alone among those who have not had those educational advantages. I feel sorry for the vast majority of the public who have not been given the facts about the European question; they have merely received the poison propaganda.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) agrees with me from a different vantage point. That problem has occurred in other countries as well, and the Bill presents an opportunity to try to deal with it here. I understand that, but I do not think that it is the right way to go about it. Even with the recent Jopling reforms, I believe that there should be more private Members' time in this, the most ancient of European legislatures. If future Governments, of whatever colour, could be less obsessed with huge quantities of legislation which is poorly drafted, badly digested and, imperfectly passed and which must be redrafted a short time after its passage, we would have the opportunity to explore greater truths.

I respect the background to the Bill and, if it has a "populist" tag, I accept that as well. "Populist" has become a derogatory term. The former Prime Minister, Lady Thatcher, who is now in the other place, explained the Single European Act in comprehensive detail. With the help of the necessary whipping—which we know from our both bitter and congenial experience is a necessary concomitant of the process—the legislation was passed and it led to the passage of the Maastricht treaty. Maastricht passed through the logical second stage of the legislative process, enjoying the growing enthusiasm of other member states. My anti-European colleagues must accept that reality.

However, the Government explanations faded away and, for reasons that I cannot fathom, the weakness and dithering began. I cannot work out why the Government foolishly chose to follow that path and thought that it would prove successful. We all know from our own experience—national, regional or local—that if we believe a cause is just, we put forward our arguments very powerfully. We must sell the case for Europe very powerfully in this instance. Perhaps a minority will disagree, but most people will be convinced by the passion of the argument.

Instead of that, the Government have dithered and we have reached a halfway house on the European issue. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister—I do not criticise him personally—will reply to today's debate by performing a wonderfully skilful tightrope act, which will impress us immensely, because that is the Government's brief.

The debate on this excellent Bill will be inevitably overshadowed by next Wednesday's debate—because of what you said earlier, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall refer to it no further. Today we must deal only with the details of the Bill. I share the misgivings of those who claim that it is impossible to consider in advance the form and structure of the referendum question. I know that the

[Mr. Dykes]

Public Bill Office probably helped my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay to draft the Bill, but the words in clause 1 are an absolute nonsense. It is not possible to treat the Bill seriously because of the way in which it is drafted.

Mrs. Gorman: Will my hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Dykes: As my hon. Friend is the Bill's promoter, I know that I ought to give way to her. However, I will pursue my point a little further, and perhaps she will decide that she does not want to intervene.

That problem can be dealt with by sending the legislation to Committee, and I welcome that process as a genuine parliamentarian rather than a party politician. I hope that my hon. Friend will not suggest that we consider this constitutional measure in a Committee of the whole House.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Would the hon. Gentleman volunteer for the Committee?

Mr. Dykes: The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) is being mischievous; I did not mean that I would go that far. As we considered its details, we could have considerable constitutional fun in Committee with this badly drafted Bill.

It would be extremely difficult to frame a referendum question correctly. It is absurd to suggest that, for some reason, it could guide the Executive before the negotiations in 1996. If we accepted that argument, it would logically follow that we would have to hold another referendum after the event to see whether the Government's negotiations had produced the right result, and then we would have to hold referendums every six months, or perhaps yearly, just to keep up with future developments. It is utter rubbish in constitutional terms. It is a chimera that it allows the people of this country to have genuine democratic input into the decision-making process.

Mrs. Gorman: I would like to put on record the fact that the Bill was drafted for me, in co-operation with my views, by the distinguished parliamentary draftsman, Mr. Godfrey Carter. He has served the House for many years and he is a master of his craft. I think that it ill behoves the hon. Gentleman to pour scorn on the way in which the Bill is drafted.

Mr. Dykes: My hon. Friend misunderstands what I have said. I was referring not to the literal wording of the text, but to the concepts behind the words.

Mr. Carttiss: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise for interrupting the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). I have sought to obtain the details of next week's business from the Vote Office and I have been told that I must get them from the Whips Office. I believe that this is a matter for the Chair, but I raise it when the Leader of the House is in the Chamber. I know that that information is in *Hansard*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have no doubt that the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) is aware that there is a copy of next week's business in yesterday's *Hansard*. I repeat that we are not discussing Wednesday's debate this morning; we are discussing the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman).

Mr. Carttiss: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not asking for a copy of Wednesday's business; I am saying that an independent Member of the House should not be told to obtain the paper which sets out the business of the whole week—which is available to all Members of Parliament on a single piece of paper—from the Whips Office. The Vote Office has a copy of that paper, but I have been denied access to it and have been told to get it from the Whips Office. I do not have the Whip, and as an independent Member of Parliament I should have the opportunity to receive the same papers, in addition to *Hansard*, as are available to other Members of Parliament.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, I definitely agree with the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth. He must have the opportunity to receive such papers—by whatever avenue. I have no doubt that those on the Government Front Bench has taken note of what he has said, and I will make inquiries about the matter.

Mr. Dykes: I am glad that the my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House heard that point of order because it touches on the question of the rights on Fridays of hon. Members, irrespective of their adhesion to a particular party. I am not sure that my hon. Friend is correct, but it is possible for even a private Member's Bill to be concerned with high constitutional matters.

If the Bill received a Second Reading and went into Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay would find all the fault lines emerging. I am convinced that the Bill would be destroyed in Committee, so some hon. Members, in a Machiavellian way, might welcome it progressing to that stage.

The seemingly easy suggestion of a referendum and its particular timing is so problematical that my hon. Friend's sense of fairness will induce her to agree that that is where the major difficulties arise. That apart, the referendum's substance and the question that it would pose is so fraught that the whole thing just unravels, and one realises that one cannot proceed without doing the very thing that concerns some of my hon. Friends and certain Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who has left the Chamber—totally undermining and destroying the sacred sovereignty of the House and ourselves, who are charged by our electors to make decisions.

Although this has been said many times, it is worth reminding the House that the notion of a referendum on a particular policy or constitutional arrangement with which one personally disagrees is a convenient but dangerous path to constitutional and parliamentary ruin. This country does not, by and large, hold referendums except in special, unusual or esoteric circumstances such as those of Northern Ireland, and there have been one or two failed attempts in the past. The Labour Government's big mistake was to hold a referendum in 1975.

A referendum was not held to decide this country's participation in world war 2—the most fundamental, existential decision made on behalf of any nation by any Government. I concede that many people believed in appeasement in 1935, 1936 and 1937, and I am ashamed to say that some of them were Conservatives. Such people

might have decided that it would be a good thing to do a deal with the Nazi third Reich, keep out of the European cauldron, preserve our territory and other world interests, and be isolationist in that war—as some people suggested later.

Mr. Jessel: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dykes: Not at the moment.

That idea sounds phantasmagorical today, but one can see how changing circumstances distort the fundament of the original notion of a referendum. I believe that I am correct in thinking that we did not hold a referendum on joining NATO. I regard the defence of the realm as a much more existential matter even than being in the European Union.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Will my hon. Friend allow me to intervene?

Mr. Dykes: I will not.

Mr. Waterson: He never gives way.

Mr. Dykes: I do, frequently. That is one of the problems. *[Interruption.]* I shall continue speaking above the heckling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It does not worry me at all. In fact, I rather like it.

Under NATO, we could have been sent to war by a foreign general, but he would have been American, so that was all right—just as long as he was not European. Conveniently, a foreign commander-in-chief who happened to be American could send us to war, with Parliament not even meeting to debate and discuss the matter. Apparently, that would not be considered a loss of sovereignty. The most existential matter—the survival of a nation under attack—is not considered an issue of sovereignty or reason for a referendum.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Dykes: No.

Mr. Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend is misleading the House. He must give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Did I hear the hon. Gentleman suggest that the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) misled the House? If so, the hon. Gentleman—

Mr. Duncan Smith: He did.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman, on reflection, might wish to withdraw that remark.

Mr. Duncan Smith: With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if an hon. Member says that something is correct when it is not correct, surely he must be misleading the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All in the House are hon. Members, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Harrow, East had no intention of misleading the House. I invite the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) to withdraw his remark.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I cast no aspersions on my hon. Friend. I simply make the point that I believe that his comments misled the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman will concede that the hon. Member for Harrow, East might inadvertently have misled the House, that would be acceptable.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I do, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Dykes: That wasted valuable minutes.

I believe that I am correct in thinking that referendums were not held on lesser matters also crucial to the future of this country, such as Suez. There was no referendum on the Single European Act, which was just as important as Maastricht. That returns to the point that the Government and hon. Members have not properly explained European matters. The public are right to be angry and indignant. We parliamentarians must decide the best mechanism for coping with that problem.

My hon. Friend the Bill's promoter should not misunderstand my motives in hesitating over a referendum. Leaving European matters for a moment, it is interesting to reflect that we would not dream of holding a referendum on capital punishment, which many people might think justified. I shall comment later on the European Union's constitutional development.

Contrary to my views of the Bill's substance, if it receives a Second Reading, I shall welcome the opportunity to debate it further. I would not be averse to a referendum, from the point of view of the full public campaign that is needed to put over the arguments for and against Europe. That would at long last give a proper opportunity, I hope on an all-party basis, to make positive arguments about the European Union, which entails no loss of sovereignty for this country, but means closer and closer, partly integrated, co-operation, where necessary, between friendly member states in a friendly European Union, with countries and peoples actually liking and getting on with each other. That was the whole point of our original membership after 12 years of agonising delay and negotiations—a solemn decision made by Parliament on behalf of the British people.

A referendum campaign would turn around public opinion from being hesitant and nervous about Europe, which I understand, to being extremely positive. As chairman of the European Movement, I would inevitably welcome the Bill progressing through further stages, while not being intrinsically supportive of its content. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay now understands that distinction. It would be going too far for me to approve her Bill's content, but I support the Bill going forward.

I remember the dotty Labour Government's referendum of 1975, when public opinion was strongly against the renegotiated terms, but I suspect that it was also against our incipient, brand new membership of the then European Community. Look how public opinion turned around. The European Movement had a fabulous public sector budget to stage an all-party campaign. The great and good and all the decent people came out of the woodwork, instead of some of the maniacs, and there was a proper campaign. Look at the result.

[Mr. Dykes]

The same would happen now, but now it would be even more difficult to frame the referendum's questions. It was simple for Labour to hold a referendum for the same purposes—its riven parliamentary party was Labour's motivation for a referendum. The idea of a referendum from some of our more eccentric Conservative colleagues is also to deal with divisions in the parliamentary party and to some extent outside.

The questions for that earlier referendum were much easier to frame after renegotiating membership than would be the case now, particularly a question on a single currency. The mind boggles, not only at its effect on our national currency—and I am patriotically proud of our ancient sterling, which was a world currency and still is to some extent, at the margin. It is tragic to remind the House that sterling has lost 90 per cent. of its value since 1949, when the deutschmark started.

What fantasy world are my colleagues defending with the nonsense that there could be a referendum on a single currency? That would be even more dubious than a referendum on the questions in the Bill. That is why, even if the Bill is granted a Second Reading, the notions underlying it have to be resisted. I do not want to sound anti-democratic or suggest that one should not want the people to have a say; I believe that the people should have a say through Parliament and their elected representatives.

If there were a referendum, we would campaign vigorously for the correct outcome. I believe that Europe should be an all-party matter, as it is in most other member states, and as Northern Ireland is and always has been. In the last German general and European elections, there was no difference at all between the main political parties but, when I mentioned that to one of my colleagues, the response was, "Germany is not a real democracy like us, old boy." I do not want to sound condescending, but that is the corrosive reaction of colleagues who do not understand sufficiently what is happening in other member states.

Although I admire the noble motives that led my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay to draft the Bill, its final weakness is that it would mean that we wanted to act on our own while other member states, without any fear of loss of sovereignty, wanted to proceed with arrangements for the European Union for the greater strength and prosperity of them all. That cannot be gainsaid by even the most fanatical anti-European hon. Member. Britain would be left in isolation, which would mean the ruination of our national currency.

11 am

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I have long sympathised with the views of the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) on the development of the European Union, so it is a little disappointing to have to disagree with many of the arguments that he has deployed today about referendums.

The referendum has an important place in British constitutional arrangements and its place should be strengthened as we approach significant constitutional changes. Such arguments were deployed in a debate initiated by the Liberal Democrat party on the development of the European Union. My right hon. and hon. Friends cogently made the general case for referendums, and the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and some of her colleagues were kind enough to support us on that occasion. It is therefore with some regret that I find that I cannot take the road that she has signed, for reasons that I shall develop.

I believe that the hon. Member for Billericay said that the Bill seeks to strengthen the Prime Minister's hand in the forthcoming intergovernmental conferences by reflecting the views of the British people. As such, I believe it to be more of an attempt to establish an opinion poll than a true referendum. Referendums are best held to present the public with a choice between a decision to maintain the constitutional status quo or a decision to accept a new and clear proposal, which would enable them to decide whether they wanted to take that step. The Bill does not offer such a clear choice because it does not offer the maintenance of the status quo as an alternative.

The Bill hypothesises that there might be changes to which the public would be opposed, but it is not clear what those changes might be. The changes are presented so hypothetically that it is difficult for the public to decide what is in fact on offer. I do not think that the Prime Minister's hand would be strengthened at the intergovernmental conferences by the holding of this sort of official opinion poll on two propositions, neither of which represents the current position or the possible future position, following the negotiations. Indeed, I think that such an opinion poll would confound and confuse the public and the Prime Minister even more.

Mr. Carttiss: I know that it is not an exact parallel, but does the hon. Gentleman accept that, when the Danish Prime Minister negotiated allegedly better terms for Denmark at the Edinburgh summit in 1992, his hand was strengthened considerably by the desire of the rest of the European leaders at the summit to satisfy the Danish electorate who had said no to the Maastricht treaty in the referendum held in Denmark before the Edinburgh summit? The result was that the Danish Prime Minister held another referendum on the new terms that he said he had gained at the Edinburgh conference. If that referendum strengthened the Danish Prime Minister's hand, why should not the referendum proposed in the Bill strengthen our Prime Minister's hand at the intergovernmental conference next year?

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Gentleman was good enough to say that the two cases were not exactly parallel and, of course, they are not. What was negotiated and what the Danish Prime Minister proposed was certain, but the Bill presents us with a series of extremely hypothetical propositions of such abstraction that it would be hard for the public to know exactly what they were being asked to approve. That is why I do not think that a pre-legislative referendum on the European Union makes sense. I use the word "pre-legislative" in the sense of an agreement between those empowered under European Union arrangements to take decisions on behalf of participating nations.

There is a powerful case for a referendum should the intergovernmental conference result in propositions that would fundamentaliy alter the balance of constitutional power between Parliaments and European Union institutions of government. There has been too much reform by a process of "grandmother's footsteps", whereby Ministers have collectively crept towards their goal of European Union, but, when anyone looks at what

they are doing, they say that they have not moved. The reality is that significant moves have been and are being made all the time.

I served as a junior Minister for five years in the previous Labour Government and I regularly attended meetings of the Agriculture Council, perhaps as often as every second month. I was conscious of the fact that significant decisions were being taken which had a binding effect on the House. It was shortly after the referendum to which the hon. Member for Harrow, East referred that those decisions were, in a sense, ratified by decisions taken by the Government but also by the country in the referendum of 1975.

Mr. Dykes: All treaty arrangements have that effect. Decisions made among Governments have a binding effect on our Parliament and others. I do not see a problem. Would it not have been fairer to tell my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Carttiss) that referendums were compulsory in Denmark and Ireland only because of their written constitutions? France held a voluntary referendum, which resulted in chaos and mayhem.

Mr. Maclennan: I do not think that the way in which other countries handle such problems should necessarily guide us as we decide the best way to achieve constitutional change. I wish that the distribution of powers were set out more clearly. The frequent changes of the past decade, including the accretion of power by central Government and the winding-up of local authorities such as the Greater London council, have been made without the safeguard of a written constitution or the holding of a referendum to pronounce on whether those changes were acceptable. That is a very unsatisfactory arrangement.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): If there should be a referendum when there is constitutional change, I wonder what happened to the hon. Gentleman's party just two years ago. There was just such a vote during the passage of the Maastricht treaty Bill, and some of us voting then felt slightly lonely in the Division Lobbies, possibly because most of the Liberal Members were not there at the time.

Mr. Maclennan: It is true that there were differences of opinion in my party about that at the time, but our view has been much influenced by the developments that have followed, and by a sense that what was done in the name of the country at that time did not have the fullhearted consent even of those who allegedly supported the governing party.

That that is so is made manifest by this Bill, which is supported by eight Members of Parliament, none of whom now belongs to the governing party. I am baffled to know how they can feel that this Bill will strengthen the Prime Minister's hand at the intergovernmental conference. It is just a further display of how the Conservatives—clause 1(2) sums this up—tend to fight like ferrets in a sack. I cannot see how this sort of disarray helps the Prime Minister—or the Minister who will have to answer the debate.

I hope that I have adequately explained why I favour a referendum on the outcome of the IGC, if it involves major constitutional change that significantly alters the balance of sovereign power as between this country and the European Union.

I do not believe that we should have referendums every few years just to take the temperature of the country on the current state of European legislation. In so far as it simply carries out earlier decisions of Parliament to give effect to agreements that have been reached, it is only doing what it is constitutionally empowered to do. We should not hold referendums simply to try to reverse what has been done by the process of grandmother's footsteps, unless there is a clear alternative. This Bill certainly does not provide one, and that is perhaps its greatest weakness.

Clause 1(2) offers hypothetical alternatives: the development of a full European Union, which, if we are to believe what the Government have said, is not likely to come about as a result of the IGC; or remaining in the European Union,

"but only as a member of an association of states trading freely with one another, with substantial repatriation of sovereignty".

Anything less precise than that would be hard to draft—even with the assistance of Mr. Godfrey Carter, who was apparently prayed in aid by the hon. Member for Billericay.

I could not at all understand what the hon. Lady said about free markets and free trade. She said that free markets were not about level playing fields. She said that they are about giving our businesses an advantage to trade and to prosper—that at least was the gist of it. That struck me as a strange idea indeed. Free trade is either free or it is fettered by obstacles to trade. Anyone who wants to remove obstacles to trade must be in the business of regulation.

The so-called Euro-sceptics who do not like to be called anti-European have to come to terms with this conundrum. If they want free trade, there will also have to be regulation to ensure that it happens; otherwise national Governments will erect obstacles, such as the French provisions to exclude our chickens or eggs on the grounds of some health hazard to the French eating public. That is why there has had to be regulation in Europe: to free up trade.

Sometimes these regulatory arrangements can be extremely irritating to people in the business—that is understandable—but they exist to enhance genuine free trade.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Of course what the hon. Gentleman says is true, but our anxiety about the single market derives from the fact that it is a serious endeavour to take away natural advantage. It is the elements of natural advantage within economies which make for vigorous free trade and enable us to survive economically. Natural advantage is therefore to be encouraged, not to be diminished or done away with—that was the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay.

Mr. Maclennan: If we had to rely on our natural advantages, without the protection of free trade, we might find that we were suffering from a series of diminishing assets. Our pastoral economy, for instance, might easily disappear. The New Zealanders' capacity to breed sheep, and the Australians' capacity to breed cattle, are considerably greater than the capacities of those who raise these animals in the Cotswolds or in East Anglia. We are not in the middle ages any more. It was to protect and adjust the European economies that have been heavily dependent on such activities that the common agricultural

[Mr. Maclennan]

policy was introduced. It has wrought a remarkable transformation, from over-dependence on peasant agriculture to highly sophisticated industrial economies.

Circumstances have changed, and the CAP has had to change with them, becoming less protectionist. In time, therefore, we may view the prospect of greater trade between countries with natural advantages, such as Australia and New Zealand, and Europe itself. That is a welcome process—hence the willingness on the part of the European Union to adapt the CAP to take account of change.

The hon. Lady's theoretical idea—that free markets are not about level playing fields—will not come as music to the ears of the business men to whom she referred and who are alleged to be hostile to the European Union. I, too, for my own reasons travel around the country talking to business men. Although many of them find the regulatory regimes of the EU—especially those allegedly introduced for consumer protection purposes—extremely irritating, I have not heard any of them say that they oppose the objective of a level playing field. But the hon. Lady advanced that as an argument in favour of clause 1(2)(b).

The second major obscurity in the clause is the phrase "substantial repatriation of sovereignty". That seems to me about as long as a piece of string. I do not know what the Government—it would be the Government who would have to decide what that meant and recommend it to Parliament—would make of such a phrase.

Does it mean that we would exclude the European Court from the interpretation of enactments by the Council of Ministers? Does it mean that we would deny the European Court the authority to call to account other countries that break agreed rules? That would certainly be a "substantial repatriation of sovereignty." It would also amount to substantial destruction of the whole point of having a European Union and of the effectiveness of the system of reaching agreements that are then enforceable.

What other substantial repatriations might the hon. Lady have in mind? Does she wish to confine the decision-making process of the EU institutions to a narrow range of subjects?

It has been shown by the EU how, through the liberalisation of such measures as I have referred to—for example, health regulations bearing on the import of chickens—free trade can be destroyed. It may be irksome to have to deal with such regulations and perhaps it would be nicer to handle them locally. I can understand that that is so from the consumer's point of view. That is why the EU increasingly is asking itself—the matter was properly raised by the hon. Member for Billericay—what matters are fit and sensible for decision by national Parliaments, or even local authorities, rather than by European Ministers following proposals from the Commission.

That concept of what is called subsidiarity is becoming increasingly significant in the development of Community legislation, and properly so. The arguments of people like the hon. Member for Billericay fortify the efforts of those who, like myself, want to see the Community develop rationally, taking big decisions about big issues, and being effective in areas where by ourselves we find it more difficult to be effective.

I shall cite one example to illustrate the point. The EU has been massively ineffective in assisting the peace process in the Balkans. Member Governments recognised constituent parts of Yugoslavia at different times. They did not seek to co-ordinate, never mind to agree, foreign policies at the beginning of their ghastly embroglio. It seems entirely desirable that they should agree such policies if we are as member states to be effective in our conduct of foreign affairs and defence of our frontiers in Europe. We shall not see that process assisted by stripping down the EU and by what the hon. Lady has described as a "substantial repatriation of sovereignty".

I disagree with clause 1(3), which states that the interpretation of "substantial repatriation" would be a matter for "Her Majesty". I assume that the hon. Lady means the Government, who must be "satisfied that their wording"— that of the questions—reflects

"the true intent and spirit of this Act".

Anything less tangible or less capable of being tied down than that would be hard to draft. It is so vague as to be more an effort in propaganda than in legislation. As an effort in propaganda, it reflects the lack of candour that has characterised too much of the debate about Europe.

The hon. Member for Billericay and her colleagues have registered their disagreements about how we may go in Europe in the forthcoming intergovernmental conferences and about where we are. In practice, they want to wipe out history. They do not want to make the EU work better. They would like to hold it at arm's length. I would like to hear the hon. Lady and those who support her say that they would prefer Britain to stand alone, or England to stand alone. The hon. Lady spoke of being English. That would be refreshing candour. I think that the Bill is designed to promote English nationalism.

Mr. Baldry: Surely it is a bit rich to talk about candour and accuse my hon. Friends of lack of candour when the hon. Gentleman's party sought the other week to cobble together a deal with the Labour party to embarrass the Government on a referendum. The word "candour" comes badly from his lips, does it not?

Mr. Maclennan: There was no reason why the Government should not have supported my party's motion, never mind the Labour party. The so-called negotiations were merely a matter of informing the Labour party of what we intended to do. It chose not to support us, and that was a matter for the Labour party. The House carried the motion with the support of a number of Members who take different views on Europe. It was a straightforward and honourable course of action. The Minister has made just about the most foolish intervention in the debate. "Fatuous" is the word that can be used to describe it in a language that I understand and is, unlike the German that we heard earlier, permitted in the House.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: It was only last week that the hon. Gentleman's leader, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), was identifying the great problem of European development—the failure to secure consent. Yet the hon. Gentleman says that everything that has gone before is secured. He seems to be saying that we can talk about developments in the future, and that consent may be required for them.

In truth, the Maastricht treaty was never bedded down. Part of the anguish that we see on both sides of the House and wider, across Europe, is the failure so far to have secured consent. The importance of the Bill is that it is signifying yet again—there is no other way in which it can be done—that the holding of a referendum requires proper debate and analysis, and that the institutional arrangements secured for Brussels so far are not acceptable because they confound the most important principle of the House, which is the democratic imperative.

Mr. Maclennan: I agree with quite a lot that the hon. Gentleman has said. That is not surprising, because I quite often agree with him on several issues, and especially on civil libertarian matters, of which he is a notable supporter.

The hon. Gentleman seems to have an underlying belief that developments in Europe are all going in the same direction. There, I think, he is unduly pessimistic. It is my firm belief that the IGCs should be proceeding in two directions, and the first is in strengthening the role of the EU to take action in a democratic way, being accountable to its democratically elected institutions, in areas of policy where national Governments are not capable of being effective.

Secondly, and at the same time, I would look to the IGCs to transfer power back from Brussels, or from wherever the Council of Ministers may be meeting, to national Governments in areas where it is unnecessary for it to legislate. Regulations on the decibel levels of lawnmowers is one of the famous examples.

Mr. Dykes: Fatally, the hon. Gentleman has put his finger on the one example which is totally at variance with the truth. British lawnmower manufacturers asked the politicians here in Westminster to keep quiet and to stop interfering with the directive, which was helping our exports to the rest of the Community.

Mr. Maclennan: I bow to the hon. Gentleman's knowledge. He is more constantly involved in these detailed matters than I am.

There are a number of examples, however, where it is up to member states to decide what standards of safety, health and consumer protection are appropriate for them. There has been a degree of meddlesomeness in some areas which has simply been not necessary. The principle is clear, and it is becoming increasingly accepted by the European Commission. The principle should be accepted also by the Council of Ministers and fortified in the discussions.

Mr. Dykes: Legislation is now falling off because the single market has been put in place, and that is welcome for all sorts of reason, including those enunciated by the hon. Gentleman. The Commission has not suddenly surrendered its activities, and more Commission proposals have been put forward at the request of member Governments in the past 10 years.

Mr. Maclennan: There is scope for considering the appropriateness of harmonising provisions, and there are questions about whether matters of standards of health, for example, should be considered under the social chapter, or are better handled at a national level. Some matters should be handled at a European level, because if there is not a harmonised provision there will be a distortion of trade. On other matters, it demonstrably makes sense to allow provisions to be settled by national parliaments, or by local authorities.

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) is too fearful of the way in which the European Union is moving, and he is not recognising the extent to which power can be transferred down as well as up. Although I may not have chosen apt examples of the principle—the hon. Member for Harrow (Mr. Dykes) was entitled to draw attention to that—the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills should accept that it is unreasonable to assume that the EU will become a monolithic and more undemocratic organisation.

I hope that the IGC will make the EU a more democratic institution, and that it will strengthen the powers of the European Parliament. It could also strengthen the control of the peoples of Europe over the election of the European Commission to make it seem less like a bureaucracy and more like a representative institution. We would like the Government to push for those developments during the European IGCs, and that would be the time decide whether we have gone far enough.

I have gone on rather too long, and I shall draw my remarks to a conclusion. We must ask whether we have gone far enough in democratising the European Union. We should ask the British people if they are satisfied with what has been done, and then would be the time to have a referendum.

11.32 am

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I liked the hon. Gentleman's point about "grandmother's footsteps". Nothing happens, and then suddenly one finds that something has happened. We discovered that a fortnight ago on immigration. We were told at the time of the Single European Act that we could keep our frontier controls, but now we are told that we cannot keep them. Grandmother is alive and well and living in Europe.

It is an understatement to say that the British people are out of sympathy with our current arrangements with Europe. The evidence is growing every day that the people are increasingly out of sympathy with more and more aspects of European policy, and that those aspects are becoming increasingly unacceptable to the people of this country.

We have arrived where we are today without consent. The British people were consulted once, and were asked whether they wanted to be a part of a European single market. They agreed that they did want to be a part of it. But since that time, we have been led unknowingly by a series of measures and devices almost to the point of no return where, if we do not say stop, we will become a part of a single unified federal European state. I believe that that is the last thing that our people want.

What can we do about it? The Government have a two-pronged policy. One aspect of the policy is silence. We must not say anything which is divisive or damaging to the Government. A fortnight ago, various members of the Cabinet and senior members of the Conservative party did have things to say about Europe. But now they have been told to be quiet, not to speak in front of the children and not to say things which could upset the stability of the Government. We will find that, through the policy of silence, we will not talk about it now. When the change

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comes, we will be told as night follows day—it has happened in the past—that it is too late, and we should have discussed and debated the matter earlier. A referendum would help to solve that problem.

The other prong of the Government's policy is reassurance. We are told that the Government know about the arguments, but we are not to worry because they are winning the argument. Everything in Europe is coming our way, we are told. There are four big lies: "Darling, I promise I will love you in the morning."

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): So that is what the hon. Gentleman used to say.

Mr. Marlow: It takes one to know one.

"I am from the Government—I am here to help." "Don't worry, the cheque is in the post." But the biggest lie of all is, "Don't worry, the European argument is coming our way." The people know this. There has been a debate in the country during the past few months, and they are increasingly concerned about what is happening to our country. They feel misguided, and that we are in a position which we do not want to be in.

What can we do about it? There are two ways of dealing with the issue. The Government can go forward to the IGC with a radical new policy direction with regard to Europe to retrieve power. About 40 or 50 years ago, this country ran—more or less satisfactorily—the affairs of one third of the world. Now we are not even allowed to govern ourselves. The Government could go to Europe and say that they know what the people of Britain want. We do not want to leave Europe. We like the single market and co-operating with other countries, but we do not want to be dominated by the Commission, or by the European Court or by the common agricultural policy.

When the Government set about such activity, they do it by and large on a diplomatic basis. They win a bit here, and give a bit there. They are all colleagues and Ministers together. They are friends who will co-operate instead of making the major changes needed to make our relationship with Europe acceptable to the British people. The diplomatic approach will not achieve enough. I believe that a referendum would give a clear statement from the British people that we have gone too far, and would encourage the Government to be much more adamant and determined and adopt a radical approach at the IGC.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am one of those people who is relaxed about the idea of a referendum. An advantage of it is that it would force politicians to come out and discuss the issues with the public. The hon. Gentleman has described what he believes members of the public are saying. I have no great evidence that they are thinking or saying a great deal about the matter. The whole debate about Europe seems to be confined to the politicians and the chattering classes. Would not a referendum extend the area of debate?

Mr. Marlow: The hon. Gentleman and I probably have different views of what public opinion might be, but I think he would agree that a referendum would make sure that there was a debate, as there has not been one yet. It would also give the public an opportunity to participate in the debate, not just with their voices but with their votes. That would be wholly beneficial to the democratic process.

I had wished to mention various aspects which could in part be resolved by a referendum, but as time is moving on and some colleagues want to speak I shall restrict myself. Let us have a look at the European budget. I am told that in the near future, our net contribution, which is important—the gross contribution is also important, but I will restrict myself to the net contribution—of the United Kingdom to the European Union will be about £3,000 million a year. That is £60 per head; it is about £5 a week for every family of four in the country. That has happened. It has arisen. No one has been asked about it. No one has been consulted on it, but it is the situation with which were are confronted at the moment.

So Europe is awash with money. It is largely awash with our money. There is more German money, but after that it is awash with our money. The problem with European money is that there is no such thing as honest money in Europe. The whole of the £3,000 million that we put into Europe is one gigantic slush fund. As I said in an intervention earlier, the French said that they would not allow the European elections to go ahead unless and until we gave them an undertaking that we would build, at massive expense, a third European Parliament building in Strasbourg. That is bribery and corruption.

The Spaniards said that they would not let enlargement go ahead unless and until we agreed to give them more of our money. That is bribery and corruption. The Italians made various remarks about milk quotas. They had cheated on milk quotas. Unless a large proportion of their cheating was permitted to go ahead and unless the fine imposed on them for cheating was reduced, they would not allow Europe to proceed in the direction that everyone and even they wanted it to go. That is bribery and corruption.

There is a chap in British history called Robin Hood. Apparently, he used to take from the rich and give to the poor. The problem with the European budget is that it takes from the poor and gives to the mafia. There is no reason why we should participate in this. It is corrupt. By its corruption, the whole process of political debate and the whole process of public finance is infected and poisoned. While a lot of the corruption has been based in southern Europe, the danger is that if the European budget continues as it is, corruption will cross the channel and public standards in Britain which, while not perfect, are much higher than those in most of Europe, will be contaminated by that very level of corruption.

If we have a referendum, one of the issues that will be discussed will be what we are going to do about the European budget. I believe that our contribution should be massively slashed. It is unfair and unreasonable and the money is abused.

The second point that my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) puts down as part of her referendum consideration is the single currency. There are economic arguments about a single currency and political arguments. The political arguments are infinitely more important, but let us look for a second at the economic arguments.

The Governor of the Bank of England made a very important speech recently. In that speech, he said that if we had a single currency and if the participants in it were not in stable equilibrium with each other, one of two

things would happen. Either there would have to be a massive transfer of funds from one part of the region to another, or we would have relatively high unemployment in one part of the entity and relatively low unemployment in the other. So there would be massive migration from one part to the other.

The impetus and the political will for a single currency and for carrying this great European adventure forward, which is much greater in other parts of Europe than it is here, will bring about a single currency in an inflexible situation. So we in Britain will be faced with two alternatives. Either, with a Conservative Government with responsible economic policies, we will have prosperous industry, we will be effective and we will have a balance of payments surplus. Therefore, we will be required to spend even more of our money in subventions to the less successful parts of Europe.

Alternatively, we will have a Labour Government, with the social chapter, Red Robbo and all that nonsense back again. We will be the poor man of Europe. In that case, all our people will flood out of the country to seek jobs elsewhere in the European Union. Neither of those scenarios is satisfactory. So it is most unlikely that Britain would wish to enter a single currency for economic reasons.

Far more important than the economic reasons are the political aspects of a single currency. If we have a single currency, we have a single bank, single interest rates and a single economy. We lose control over our national economy to a far greater extent than now. We have lost control over agricultural policy and trade policy. We are told what to do about ex-service women when they get pregnant. We have to pay them massive amounts of compensation.

Every little avenue of national life will be controlled by the European Union. We will cease to be a nation state. We will become a province with Brussels as our capital. That will be the end of Britain. Europe will be the nation. Britain will be some minor entity—a region of Europe. Scotland will be a different region of Europe. Perhaps they will take Cornwall off. They will try to put Ireland together. Europe will be all-powerful. Britain finally will have succumbed. That will be the end of it. Why?

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) may disagree with me, but I believe that the mass of people outside know that the economic arguments are important, but that the big argument on a single currency is the political argument. A single currency will be the end of the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister knows that. The Government know that.

We will probably have an election in April 1997. In June or July of 1998, we will have to decide whether we will go for a single currency in 1999. It will be impossible, during an election campaign in April 1997, for the Government not to be required to say whether they are in favour of the political union that will come with a single currency.

The Conservative party is bleeding at the moment. Yes, there is strife and conflict in the Conservative party. There is argument and debate. That conflict and debate will continue until the issue is made clear to the people. Never mind the economic arguments: a single currency means political union and a European state. Why cannot the Government say today or on Wednesday at the latest that that is something up with which they will not put? The people do not want it. They do not want to be part of a European united state. They want to be part of their own country, their own state. That is where their identity is. Why cannot the Government understand it? Why cannot the Government be square and frank with the people? Why do we have to continue the delay and argument?

The overwhelming majority of the Conservative party in Parliament knows that a single currency is wrong. The overwhelming majority of the Conservative party in the country is against a single currency. The people are against it. In the name of reason, good sense and survival, right hon. Friend, Prime Minister, make yourself clear and do so now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay has done the House a great service by introducing this Bill for a referendum. There are three basic reasons why we need a referendum. I have to admit that I am against referendums in general. If the House used its powers, there would be an election. If the people did not like the way in which we had used those powers, they could return a different Government and those powers would be there for the new Government to reverse the decisions that people did not like that had been taken earlier by a previous Government. That is democracy.

If we transfer powers and move them to other institutions, that is different. We have an election. The people's will may be to change something. For example, the people are deeply concerned about the export of live animals. There is nothing they can do about it, because that power has been transferred. This House is powerless on that issue, as on so many others. Therefore, on Europe and the transfer of powers, there has to be an exception and we have to have a referendum.

In her Bill, my hon. Friend puts down two questions, two simple and straightforward alternatives. There are people who wish to have a united states of Europe. They are entitled to argue for it. May the best man win. They might win a referendum. I doubt it. They think that that is the inevitable tide of history. Others of us take a different view.

Yes, we are in favour of Europe. We are friendly with Europe. We want to trade with Europe. We want to co-operate with Europe in matters on which we should co-operate. But we are over-governed by Europe now. We have to repatriate sovereignty and bring more competence back to the United Kingdom.

Those are the two alternatives. Why cannot they be put before the people? Why cannot we put them before the people before the Prime Minister goes to the IGC?

As I said, all these matters are decided by diplomacy and diplomats do not like radical solutions—it is a bit of give and take here, there and everywhere else. To be at peace with Europe, which is what the Prime Minister wants I am sure, we have to have some radical changes. I do not see how the Government and the Prime Minister can achieve them, unless armed with the will of the people and the knowledge that they want to go for that alternative whereby we would regain our sovereignty and independence within a Europe with which we can be at peace.

11.49 am

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I congratulate the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on bringing the Bill before the House. She is a neighbour of mine and,

[Mr. Andrew Mackinlay]

while I disagree with her on most things, I acknowledge her political courage, which is considerable. That should be stated.

Those are all the nice and conciliatory things that I can say. I cannot bring myself to contemplate supporting the Bill, for the primary reasons that it is tendentious, ill-conceived and badly drafted. The Bill is designed for maximum spite against the existing arrangements from which, on balance, the British people are net beneficiaries.

The hon. Member for Billericay and her hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) produced the Bill for a referendum solely on Europe, about which they feel so strongly. I do not want to retread old ground, but the Liberals tabled a motion a week ago, which got me into considerable trouble. My line is consistent, however, and for that reason I hope to introduce my own referendum Bill, which will not relate exclusively to Europe. It will extend democracy in this country and provide for referendums whenever Parliament passes any constitutional measure.

I would probably incorporate treaties in such a Bill. One of the great deficiencies of our democracy is that treaties are ratified under the royal prerogative and never by Parliament, which is a mistake. I want us to follow the example of most other legislatures, especially the United States, where Governments or the Executive may approve treaties, but they must subsequently be approved by Parliament. That is what should happen with our relationships with Europe and any later treaties. They should be approved here.

If, in addition, a treaty fundamentally altered our constitutional status or, to a lesser or greater extent, a measure of sovereignty was to be surrendered, it should be put to the British people and decided by a referendum after the treaty had been endorsed by an Act of Parliament. That is the correct way round. Clearly, the people could then make a clear-cut and reasoned decision. That is what I want on Europe and other constitutional issues.

If and when devolution, fixed-term Parliaments, a democratic election for a reformed upper House and the reform of our electoral system are ever approved by Parliament—I hope that they will be—they should subsequently be endorsed by referendum. That would be a major extension of our democracy—one that should be welcome. That is not what lies behind the Bill, however.

Mr. Heald: As I understand it, one Labour party idea is that there should be a regional assembly for the east of England, which would no doubt mean my constituents being governed from Norwich.

Mr. Marlow: What is wrong with that?

Mr. Heald: There is nothing wrong with Norwich, but we in Hertfordshire do not want to be governed from there, thank you very much. Is the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) thinking of a national referendum or a referendum in the east of England, so that those of us in Hertfordshire who do not want to be run from Norwich can say what we want?

Mr. Mackinlay: If the hon. Gentleman will pay attention after asking a daft question, I shall tell him that, regrettably, he is wrong in his premise. There is no Labour party policy for a regional assembly for eastern England. I believe in substantial devolution throughout the United Kingdom. If that measure came before the House and subsequently received Royal Assent, I would want it to be endorsed by a referendum.

I do not want to be like a long-playing record on that point, but I must repeat that, when we have constitutional change, and after the appropriate Act has received Royal Assent, it should then be put to the people in a referendum.

Mr. Streeter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: For the last time.

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is making an interesting point on referendums. Does he believe that, if a future Labour Government tried to devolve more powers to a Scottish Parliament, there should be a referendum? If so, who would decide—just the Scottish people, or the United Kingdom population? Would Scottish Members of Parliament be able to come to an English Parliament and have powers over English domain?

Mr. Mackinlay: I think that we are digressing, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It may be as well for me to point out again that we are discussing a referendum on the European Union. That is what the Bill is about, and what the debate must be about.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am much obliged, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall sort out the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Streeter) afterwards on that matter.

The propositions that the hon. Member for Billericay suggests should be put to the British people are ill conceived. The Bill refers to pursuing

"full integration with the European Union under a constitution which is federal in character",

but who decides what is "federal"? Surely, one of the things that we have discovered during past months and years is that one man's "federal" is not another's. It is an ill-defined word, full of misconstruction, and it leaves great potential for mischief and for misleading the people.

We should put to the British people the option of endorsing any decisions that flow from the IGC, following an Act of Parliament in this place. That is what I want. If I had been in this place earlier and been able to persuade the House that my thesis—which is being rubbished by implication by Conservative Members—that we should have a referendum on major constitutional issues was correct, we could then have had a referendum after the Single European Act and Maastricht, but the foolish and feckless electorate did not send me here in time. Now that I am here, I am saying that we should have referendums after Acts of Parliament have endorsed any treaty changes.

Mr. Streeter: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to call his constituents fools?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am not aware of anything in the Standing Orders or in past practice on that subject. Nevertheless, I must repeat that the courtesies that certainly used to take place in my early days in the House

do not tend to be in evidence these days, which is not a good thing for the House. I hope that we can get back to those old ways. I am not saying that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) has been discourteous, but the practice of insulting one another does no service to this House.

Mr. Mackinlay: I certainly have not insulted anyone. My constituents were very prudent to send me here; it was other electors in other constituencies who did not do so. That was the point that I was making. The good people of Thurrock were prudent to give me their trust, and I shall try to exercise that without further interruption.

The second option in the Bill is that we should

"remain in the European Union, but only as a member of an association of states trading freely with one another".

That is complete nonsense. One cannot be part of the European Union, but opt out of everything else. Moreover, it would be retrograde. The vast majority of people would find it inconceivable that we should give up our present relationship with the European Union lock, stock and barrel.

A third option is the most likely to emerge after the forthcoming IGC. We may find that, broadly, our relationship with the European Union will not change. I sense that both the electorate in this country and the electorates of other countries in the European Union will need, for some time to come, time to digest the changes brought about by the Single European Act and the Maastricht treaty. I suspect that the IGC will tidy up the edges of those matters without further substantially integrating European Union member states. If I am wrong, once subsequent legislation has been put before the British people, that matter could be put before the British people, but we cannot do that in advance.

Monetary union has been mentioned. I have an open mind on that and acknowledge that, if we enter a single currency, we shall inevitably surrender some sovereignty. I do not particularly like surrendering sovereignty, but we have done so in the past, and that must be balanced against possible disadvantages of not proceeding in that way. I cannot see how we can make that intelligent decision this side of the IGC without knowing the ground rules for controlling a single currency and whether all member states will participate in it.

At the back of my mind is the thought that it would be extremely difficult for us to maintain and promote our economic interests if all other members of the European Union signed up to a single currency. But, as an elector, I do not want to make that decision until I have seen the ground rules that emerge from the IGC. The whole issue may be fraught with such difficulties that there will be no monetary union or single currency after the IGC.

The current scaremongering is therefore inappropriate. It does not allow for intelligent and informed debate either on the concept of referendums as part of our democratic machinery or on our relationship with other members of the European Union.

After the IGC, the British people should be asked to ratify an Act of Parliament on the matter. The beauty of that would be that those who supported what emerged from the IGC would have to go out and sell it and there would be a proper and informed debate, rather than the one-sided debate currently coming from a minority, primarily from Conservative Members. Understandably, the Government and the Opposition Front Bench are trying to kick the issue into touch. I have some sympathy with that, because we are some time away from the IGC and now is not the time to pursue the matter. Once we reach 1996 and have had the conclusions of the IGC, it will then be appropriate for Parliament and the people to consider the matter.

12.2 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I have great pleasure in participating in the debate, and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on introducing the Bill and thereby raising the issue. Although I cannot support the Bill, this is a timely and useful opportunity to run through the arguments for and against referendums, particularly a referendum on this issue.

For many years, I was firmly set against the notion of referendums, even on restoring the death penalty, which I happen to favour. All hon. Members will recognise, even if they do not condone or agree with it, that the overwhelming majority of the population would favour restoration of the death penalty, whereas a significant majority in the House is consistently against it. As a matter of principle, I do not believe that referendums have a place in our constitution except in exceptional circumstances. Even on an issue on which a referendum would support my position, like the death penalty, I would not argue for one.

I am against referendums for three common reasons, to which hon. Members have already referred. First, we are a representative parliamentary democracy. What are hon. Members doing in coming to this place—even the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), who seemed to take issue with the electorates of several constituencies who did not have the good judgment to send him here earlier—I am sure that we all missed his contributions to debates until the last election—

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) is president of the Thurrock Conservatives and I am vice-president, so we shall ensure that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) does not make those speeches for much longer.

Mr. Waterson: I am delighted to hear that Thurrock Conservatives have the benefit of such a wide range of experience and views on this issue at their disposal. Although I have a great personal affection for the hon. Member for Thurrock, I hope that he will not take it unkindly when I say that I hope that he will be doing something equally productive but different after the next election.

Mr. Tony Banks: He will be a Minister.

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Member for Thurrock knows that I wish him no ill will, and look forward to his rapid promotion to the Opposition Front Bench.

No hon. Member can convincingly argue that referendums do not, to an extent, undermine Parliament's sovereignty. That must be part of the trade-off if we are to have a referendum, which is why they should be only extraordinarily rare events.

The second reason why I do not believe in referendums is that it is so difficult to ask the right question. With all

[Mr. Waterson]

due respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay, I am not sure that she asks the right question, or that it will be clear what the right question will be until much further down the line, up to and including the IGC. This is a trite point, but I do not apologise for repeating it, because it is the fundamental issue in considering any referendum. One needs to ask a question that is sufficiently complex to deal with the issue but sufficiently simple to evince a straight yes or no answer from the electorate and be easily comprehensible.'

I have talked about asking the right question; the next argument is about getting the wrong answer, or rather the answer to a different question. I have the honour and pleasure to represent Eastbourne—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] It does not get quite as big a cheer as Basildon, but I do what I can. One thing that we in Eastbourne know about is the phenomenon of the protest vote. By-elections are a perfect example of the protest vote, when the electorate tries to send the Government a message. Deciphering that message is not always straightforward, particularly when the electorate in Eastbourne had the good sense to return to the Conservative fold at the subsequent general election.

That argument operates in spades when applied to referendums. We need look no further than the French referendum to see how a referendum campaign can become hopelessly entangled with other current issues or with the temporary unpopularity of the Government of the day. The people who turned out to vote did not answer the question on the referendum paper, but answered a different question or set of questions. It would be wrong if I did not say that I still have some reservations about the wisdom of holding a referendum.

I intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay to ask about the timing of a referendum and the attitude of Her Majesty's Government. It would be inherent in such a referendum campaign for Members of the House, of whatever party, to be free to go out and campaign for a yes or no result. There is nothing wrong with that, but to pose the question in the run-up to the IGC—by 31 December—even before the IGC has got started, would severely undermine the ability of Ministers and the Government to present a united and resolute face to our partners in the IGC negotiations. It might happen that Ministers campaigned for a different result, so it would be difficult for the Government to present a united front at the IGC negotiations.

After a great deal of thought, I have come round to the view that there is a role—albeit a rare one—for a referendum on this issue. If a proposal were made further to reduce significantly our sovereignty, it would be appropriate to have a referendum, with all its imperfections. In January 1975, when Lord Wilson was Prime Minister, he recognised the seriousness of proposing a referendum. A White Paper published then stated:

"The referendum is to be held because of the unique nature of the issue, which has fundamental implications for the future of this country, for the political relationship between the United Kingdom and the other Member Governments of the Community, and for the constitutional position of Parliament."

There may have been other reasons why the then Mr. Wilson wanted a referendum at that time, most notably the divisions within his party, which are just as serious, but rather less apparent, today than they were then. He set out clearly the sort of circumstances in which a referendum might be appropriate.

We cannot know for some time whether a referendum will be necessary or appropriate. As has already been said today, the Prime Minister has made his position clear, particularly in recent weeks. For example, during an interview with David Frost on 8 January, he said:

"I do not believe anything is going to happen in that conference that would remotely justify a referendum, I do not think it is going to deal with constitutional matters . . . if anything that involves significant constitutional change were raised in the 1996 Inter-Governmental Conference, we the British would not accept it, so the question of a referendum would not arise."

Mr. Streeter: Does my hon. Friend agree that, were we to have a referendum this year on what might come out of the IGC next year, that might imply to our European partners that we would be prepared to accept constitutional change, whereas my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that we would veto any significant constitutional change that came out of the IGC?

Mr. Waterson: As usual, my hon. Friend has made the point better than I could. Although I do not blame my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay and her sponsors, there is a danger that by calling a premature referendum—premature in terms of the IGC—one would encourage the notion among our European partners that our negotiating position was somehow weak.

The Prime Minister has made it clear that he would not expect such constitutional issues to come up at the IGC in 1996. Opinions about that vary, quite reasonably so, and some people describe the IGC of 1996 as a tidying-up operation. Others have far more sinister notions as to what might be proposed. Although work has already begun in the foothills of the summit by the sherpas, we have a long way to go until a proper agenda for the IGC is hammered out and agreed.

Mr. Heald: If a referendum was held and the option in clause 1(2)(a), which I believe reflects the Labour party's view, to pursue

"full integration with the European Union under a constitution which is federal in character, with a single currency and a common sovereignty",

was put to the people, is there not a danger that in mid-term, with the Labour party enjoying a certain popularity at the moment, which we know will end by the time of the next general election, it would put its weight behind that option? We might get a result that embarrassed the Prime Minister as he fought for British interests in those negotiations.

Mr. Waterson: That is a danger, and my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to it. Heaven alone knows how the Labour party might approach a referendum. We shall hear about that from the Opposition Front-Bench spokeswoman. It would not go into a referendum campaign united, in stark contrast with the Liberal Democrats. Although that party has had differences of emphasis about the appropriateness of a referendum and on some aspects of the European question, it is pretty well sold hook, line and sinker on the notion of a federal

super-state in Europe and on giving up the right of veto on some important matters of policy. It will not surprise hon. Members to learn that I shall examine the policy of that party later in my speech.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the hon. Gentleman knows so much more about these things than we all do, could he tell us what the danger is? I keep on hearing Conservatives saying that they want to fight the federal state. What is so bad about such a state? Would it not be better than what we have got, because at least with a federal state some things belong to Britain, just as some things belong to France? I should have thought that a federal Europe was a huge advance on the current position, where effectively nothing belongs to us.

Mr. Waterson: That is a surprising intervention, and it may take me the rest of my speech to take in its full implications. I am sure that, if my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) has an application form on his person for the European Movement, he might want to pass it back to my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor).

Mr. Duncan *rose—*

Mr. Waterson: I want to make some progress.

We do not know what will be on the IGC agenda. We have had some clear assurances from the Prime Minister, which I hope have reassured at least most of the sponsors of the Bill, that if any constitutional changes were proposed, which he doubts, they would be vetoed by Britain.

In the same Frost interview, the Prime Minister said:

"If in some fashion I cannot fathom something emerges from that conference that I was not able to block, I do not believe that can be the case, but if that were to be the case then I certainly would keep open the option of a referendum".

We have the prospect of a triple lock—

Mr. Carttiss: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Waterson: No.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Why will the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) not answer my question?

Mr. Carttiss: As he did not answer the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), my hon. Friend probably could not answer mine.

Mr. Waterson: We have the safety of a triple lock, to coin a phrase. First, we must agree what is to be on the agenda. That is far from being cut and dried. Secondly, we have had assurances from the Prime Minister that he would use our veto—some Opposition Members would like to dispose of it—to ensure that anything that we found objectionable would not end up in the IGC agreement. Thirdly, if by some mischance anything got through those safety nets, we still have the possibility of holding a referendum. Those things that the Prime Minister has said are important, and we must bear them in mind as we discuss the issue today.

The issue of a single currency has arisen more than once today. It is a feature of the second Bill on the Order Paper and it is one of the issues surrounding this Bill. It is now clearly accepted by everyone on the Conservative side of the House that a single currency would be a constitutional issue, every bit as much as a political one.

Mr. Budgen: I know that my hon. Friend speaks with the authority and encouragement of the Government, so perhaps he can explain to the House how the Chancellor of the Exchequer puts that point.

Mr. Waterson: No; I am not sure that I accept that piece of, if I may say so, characteristic snidery about my reasons for participating in the debate. *[Interruption.]* I really do think that hon. Members should take a leaf out of the book of the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), who spoke so eloquently about the right of all Members of the House to express their point of view. The continual barracking from other Members here is really not designed to ensure a proper debate on the issue, which is a serious one.

On the nub of my hon. Friend's question, although I would accept that at one time there appeared to be a certain amount of confusion about the position, I think that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has made his position absolutely clear. He does now accept that it is not simply an economic issue, but that there is a constitutional and legal dimension. That, of course, is the position of all Members on the Conservative side of the House.

I do not want to dwell too long on the single currency. I shall move on to the issue of further political union.

There needs to be gradual recognition of the fact that different members of the European Union have joined for different reasons, and that the one reason why this country did not join the European Community, now the European Union, was in some way to bolster or enhance our parliamentary democracy. We have had centuries of parliamentary representation.

We joined principally, in my opinion—it has always been my opinion—for reasons of free trade and an open and single market. Other countries, legitimately—I make no complaint about it—have joined for different reasons, such as to bolster democracy, to ensure economic improvements and so on, and perhaps because one or two have less of a sense of nationhood, of tradition, than we have. That is fine if it works for them, but I return to my argument that the main reason why we joined was economic and to do with trade.

It is important that we do not debate the subject of a referendum in a vacuum. We need at the same time to lay out a much more positive agenda for the IGC, which is part and parcel of the Bill that we are debating. We need to ensure that several issues appear on that agenda.

First, it must include border controls, which has become more topical in recent weeks. Secondly, it must include the powers of the European Commission. Even Mr. Santer has said that the Commission should do less but that what it does it should do better. Thirdly, it must include the powers of the European Court. Many of us—the lawyers in the House, at least—find some of the decisions that it takes worrying.

Fourthly, it must include subsidiarity, and the continuation of that process. We heard something about subsidiarity earlier. Fifthly, it must include the reversal of the drive towards political integration, and that is

[Mr. Waterson]

connected with the argument that I made earlier about the different reasons why countries may have joined in the first place.

Mr. Tony Banks: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his percipience, because a little while ago he said that he hoped that my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) would receive promotion to the Labour Front Bench and, lo and behold, he has.

Mr. Waterson: I fear that it is more of an occupation than a promotion. "Squatting" might be the appropriate word.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on a more serious note? How would he, as a lawyer, seek to constrain the formidable powers of that supreme court, the European Court of Justice?

Mr. Waterson: I am willing to be corrected by other hon. Members, but my understanding is that that court's authority derives from the consent of the nations that are part of the European Union. There are concerns about that court having an overweening amount of power in some of the decisions that it makes. I mean no disrespect to the European Court, but some of its decisions and the reasons behind them are unfamiliar to those of us brought up in the common law tradition. There is a political dimension to some of its decisions with which we in this country are unfamiliar.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting speech. Does he not agree that the powers of the court do not derive from an abstraction called popular consent, but from documents drafted by, among others, the British Governments? Those are the constituent rules being applied by the courts. Even in this country, with the common law with which the hon. Gentleman is familiar, our judges, in their use of judicial review—which has been greatly developed in the past decade—exercise a decision-making power which, although not set out in constitutions such as the European Court applies, is a proper exercise of their role. It is becoming much more familiar, even for common lawyers, to hear judges pronouncing on so-called political matters.

Mr. Waterson: To an extent, the hon. Gentleman is right. There has been a change—whether it would have happened anyway, independently of the European Union and the European Court, is a debate for another occasion. I think that it was Lord Denning who talked about European law as an incoming tide, washing up the rivers and tributaries in this country, and there was nothing that the judges could do to resist it. I think that there is something that we can do.

Uncharacteristically, the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) misunderstood the point. I hope that I said that the court had been set up with the consent of the nations, not necessarily the peoples of those nations. It seems that documents that can be negotiated, drafted and agreed by nations and should in theory be open to redrafting and improvement.

Sixthly, the reform of the common agricultural policy is bound to happen as a result of further enlargement. There is no way that the CAP can carry on its present economically suicidal course if we enlarge the Community further to the east. Bringing in massive agrarian economies will make the rickety structure collapse unless it is thoroughly reformed.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Waterson: No.

Part of the same issue is rooting out waste and corruption in the European Union.

Mr. Mackinlay *rose—*

Mr. Waterson: I must make progress, because I know that many hon. Members want to speak, and I do not wish to be accused of taking too long.

Seventhly, the subject of further enlargement has to be coupled with an enhancement of the power of the larger states, in which I include ourselves.

Finally, I return to the practical question of running a referendum. In my intervention during the speech of the hon. Member for Billericay, I referred to the problem of timing. The timing is crucial, and I think that the referendum which the hon. Lady proposes will be premature for the reasons that I have mentioned already.

There are other practical problems relating to how the referendum would be organised and to how the question would be framed. The House of Commons Library background briefing on the issue is particularly useful in that respect. It makes the good point that, if a referendum is to have any meaning, it must be

"acceptable, in the sense of being 'democratic' and 'constitutional'".

Everyone must accept that it is a valid and legitimate way of reaching a decision. The briefing document states:

"A referendum can be said to be acceptable if it is genuinely recognised by the winners and the losers alike as being decisive of the particular issue at stake, at least in the medium term".

That brings us naturally to the issue of what question or questions to put in the referendum. The briefing paper says that there must be

"a balance between brevity, clarity and simplicity on the one hand, and full and accurate descriptions of the issue(s)".

I have already said—it bears repeating—that we do not know what the issues will be. My hon. Friend makes the massive assumption that the wording in clause 2(a) of her Bill represents the choice that will face us following the intergovernmental conference. The briefing document wisely makes the point that

"a referendum should (a) allow individual choice to be reflected accurately—'micro fairness', and (b) produce a final result which translates . . . the aggregation of individual choices or 'macro fairness'".

There will be continuing debate about the sorts of questions that the proposed referendum should ask. The document makes a distinction between what it calls a "static" question—for example, to remain within the European Union or to unite the two parts of Ireland, or whatever it may be—and what it calls a "dynamic" or "process" question which reflects the stages of the process towards more integrated political union. There may be valid arguments for a multi-option referendum, a preference vote system or whatever.

The hon. Lady did not dwell in her speech—perhaps she may wish to reflect upon it later—upon whether a minimum voter turnout is essential for the success of the referendum. Should we specify a necessary voter majority, as occurred on a previous occasion involving

Scotland? I think that the figure of 40 per cent. was put forward on that occasion. We must address that practical issue. I am trying to be helpful and to improve the Bill. It is an important issue, and the debate will not go away.

I share the dismay that has been expressed today about the limited way in which we can tackle the question of fisheries, live animal exports or border controls in the Union. Like the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), I did not seek election to the House wanting to see it reduced to the position of a glorified county council. I do not want to see its substantial powers slip away, wittingly or unwittingly, to Europe.

I am sure that you will agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that, despite all the flak that the Government have received from Opposition Members in the recent discussions about live animals, fisheries or whatever, the supreme irony is that the Opposition would hand over even more power and control to Europe. The Liberal Democrats would abolish the right of veto in almost every area of competence in the European Union, leaving us with qualified majority voting.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Waterson: No.

Right hon. and hon. Members in both Opposition parties should be pressed as to what they would do over the European question. Sooner or later the Opposition parties must reveal their policies. They cannot simply say, "Well, I wouldn't start from here."

Mr. Mackinlay *rose—*

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman is extremely persistent and I will give way to him in a moment.

The Opposition parties must come up with alternative policies. Opposition Members must come clean on where they stand on the extension of qualified majority voting, from which so many of our problems flow.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Government Members are dishing out the nonsense that somehow the Labour party would not be more robust in Europe than the Government. It would be extraordinarily easy to be more robust in Europe than the Government, because they are pathetic. Yesterday, I asked why our contributions to the common agricultural policy have increased by 56 per cent. since the last Labour Government was in office. The Labour party is calling for a major and fundamental reform of the CAP, and the Minister of Agriculture is pathetic in his attempts to pursue that matter in Brussels.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene in his intervention. If only his party were as robust as its present leader in 1983, when he said that Labour would negotiate a withdrawal from the EEC, which had drained the country's natural resources and destroyed jobs. There is no evidence that Labour would be any more rigorous than the Liberal Democrats.

I am sorry for speaking for longer than I had intended, but I did take many interventions. I will conclude by emphasising that, under this Government, the UK still has the veto—and we proved at Corfu that we are not afraid to use it when this country's interests demand its use.

12.35 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) took many interventions, including two from his own side that completely holed him below the water line. I do not want to intrude into the enjoyable civil war that we are able to observe on the Government Benches. It has become the best political show in town, and I would certainly like my full ecu's worth.

There has been much talk in this debate and elsewhere about the single currency, but it is not the real issue for the Tory party. The real issue is in part addressed by the Bill—this country's future in the European Union. That matter is dividing today's Tory party like the corn laws did in the 19th century. It is fascinating to watch.

There should be debate, but in this day and age, such a debate within a party is seen as internecine strife. It is held that political parties must be monolithic in their views, but that would destroy parliamentary and any other form of representative democracy. I welcome the debate, but I welcome even more the fact that it is sorely dividing the Conservative party.

The other struggle in the Tory party is between left and right—between the monetarists, who see themselves as the custodians of the shrine of the blessed St. Margaret, and the supporters of the "One Nation" philosophy. The struggle is manifested as debates on the European Union and the single currency.

The Prime Minister is placed in an almost impossible position. He is continually looking over his shoulder at his own right wing—at his Euro-bastards, or however he describes them in unflattering terms. The Prime Minister is a total prisoner. He knows that, and so does any objective observer. The right hon. Gentleman cannot say what he really believes about Britain's future in the European Union. I would like to hear him in relaxed mode one day, saying precisely what he really believes as opposed to what he must say to keep his warring party together.

I am relaxed, in the context of the Bill, about the notion of a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union and a single currency. No politician should be frightened of public debate. I take a completely different position from the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), but am happy to debate with him throughout the country and to let the people decide. I claim no originality for that phrase, but it should guide us in the governance of this country. This is the sort of issue on which the people should decide. It should not be confined to debate among political parties or so-called opinion formers.

I do not believe that our country has a realistic future outside the European Union. Nor, if a single currency was presented as credible, would it be realistic for Britain not to adopt it. That possibility does not even exist. It may be all right to rule that out for 1996 or 1997, but when a single currency is a reality at the end of the century, it would be absurd for this country to remain outside it.

All economic interests would think it impossible, so we would be required to join a single currency to safeguard our economic position. The Prime Minister's so-called opt-out was nothing more than an economic and political

[Mr. Tony Banks]

figleaf, with which he covered himself to keep his party together. Too much current debate on economic union is esoteric and confined to politicians.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: In speaking for a single currency, is the hon. Gentleman content with the mandates and statutes of the European central bank? Are not those unacceptable arrangements the real difficulty, the terms of which could themselves rule out our membership of a single currency?

Mr. Banks: The terms are not set in concrete. I can see many objections to an independent central bank having no popular or democratic accountability. I have never worried about political involvement in economic decision-making. I do not necessarily believe that bankers should decide exactly what should happen.

There are political consequences of economic decisions. We saw the way in which Helmut Kohl interfered, as it were, over the amalgamation of east and west Germany, in saying that the ostmark would have parity with the deutschmark. One could argue that was not a sensible economic decision, but it was a necessary political decision. There is no reason not to continue debating a central bank and its accountability to a European Parliament, or whatever other trans-European body takes its place.

All institutions, whether pan-European or national, should be accountable to elected representatives. The highest authority is that derived from the ballot box. Appointed business men or bankers do not have the authority that even we have as Members of Parliament.

Unfortunately, I cannot support the hon. Lady's Bill, much as I support much of the drive behind it. I apologise to my feisty opponent, the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). We go from television studio to television studio together, causing mayhem—often much to the discomfort of members of our respective Front Benches. However, I cannot support the hon. Lady's Bill, which is not well drawn.

I cannot, for example, support clauses 1 and 3, which would leave Her Majesty the Queen to decide the terms of a referendum. Such matters are for the Government of the day or for Parliament to decide. We might want a referendum one day on the future of the monarchy. Are we to allow Her Majesty the Queen to determine its terms? She might choose wording such as, "Do you want to keep the Crown and all its majesty, or do you want to hand the country over to a bunch of swivel-eyed Trots?" If that were the question that HM the Queen decided was to be put to a referendum, I would not stand much chance of having the republic that I should like.

Mr. Heald: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but he has perhaps not fully appreciated the fact that an Order in Council would have to be made and laid before the House to deal with such matters. Therefore, it would not be the Queen alone who took the decision but the House of Commons.

Mr. Banks: Clause 1(3) states:

"The questions need not be in the exact words preceding the subsection, so long as Her Majesty is satisfied that their wording reflects the true intent and spirit of the Act"

That is putting too much discretion in the hands of an unelected and unaccountable individual. What on earth is such a provision doing in the Bill, as it takes power from the people and hands it to someone who has inherited her position rather than earned it through the ballot box?

Mr. Donald Anderson: And someone who is of German origin.

Mr. Banks: And someone of German origin, as has just been pointed out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. The hon. Gentleman might like to withdraw that remark.

Mr. Banks: I am sorry if it causes offence. I thought that it was a factual statement; I did not mean it to be disparaging. I was merely stating the position.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman does not need to explain what he was saying. In my judgment, the remark was made in a disparaging manner, and I should be grateful if he would withdraw it.

Mr. Banks: I was led into it, but of course I withdraw it at your request, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and move on rapidly to safer ground.

We are moving to closer economic and political union in Europe. That is inevitable, and I welcome it unreservedly. That does not mean that I want us to hand over, lie down, roll over and wait for people to walk all over us, but closer economic and political union is, inevitable and should be welcomed.

My view is shared by some colleagues, but is not necessarily my party's official view. Personally I look forward to a united federal Europe with a European Government elected through a European Parliament. It is a perfectly reasonable position that I am prepared to defend, especially in the context of a referendum, because we are debating significant constitutional matters.

With reference to the speech of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), there is a big difference between a referendum on capital punishment, which is a matter of conscience, and a referendum on an issue of prime constitutional significance. No one can force me to vote to restore capital punishment, because it is a matter of conscience, but someone could certainly lead me down the path of constitutional change, because I represent the interests of the majority of the people.

Mr. Waterson: That is precisely the point that I was trying to make. I feel no less passionately than the hon. Gentleman about capital punishment, although we hold different views. Even though I know that my argument would win in a referendum, I would still not wish to hold one, because it would not be appropriate in that context.

Mr. Banks: I join hands with the hon. Gentleman. When one has talked about supporting a referendum on Europe, one often gets letters asking why one does not support a referendum on capital punishment. It is worth putting the record straight, because there is some confusion among a certain element of the electorate.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: The critical distinction is not that which the hon. Gentleman is seeking to make, but has to do with the irrevocability of the issue at hand. Any Parliament may reintroduce or do away with capital punishment, but the issues that we are debating are for

ever—that is the intention. When something so fundamental is at stake, the people must be able to express their view.

Mr. Banks: That may be the case. Also, constitutional matters affect all of us individually and collectively. Capital punishment does not affect all of us as directly as constitutional change, whether it is irrevocable or not—unless one happens to be the person murdered, but that is another issue.

I shall conclude my remarks as many other hon. Members wish to speak. I want a broader and deeper European Union. I see no reason why we should say that history stops at the nation state. What is it about the nation state that is so holy that we cannot move on? Nation states are merely the result of wars or principalities coming together through unions and treaties, usually in the aftermath of war.

The big difference is that what is happening now in Europe is not taking place in the aftermath of war; this is not something being imposed on the people. It is not a question of the strong imposing something on the weak. Conservative Members may believe that it is an imposition, but it is certainly not an imposition on the weak by the strong in the aftermath of war. People are not being forced to do this; they are doing it because they believe in it. There may be faults in how it is done, but it cannot be compared with how Europe has been redesigned and reshaped in the past.

This is our great opportunity: a united states of Europe certainly does not frighten me. Indeed, it excites me. I look forward to its advent, and I welcome any step that takes us closer to a united, federal Europe.

12.49 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): It is a privilege to be allowed to take part in the debate after the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), because he dramatically illustrates so much of modern Labour thinking. The exterior is all chirpiness, vigour and originality, but the substance of the argument is all political correctness.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West believes in a federal Europe—as quickly as possible—and in animal rights. He is as much a child of political correctness in this decade as was Lord Jenkins in the 1950s and 1960s. There is no difference in the substance of what the two of them had and have to say. Lord Jenkins advanced his ideas with monumental gravitas; the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, in this modern, classless, politically correct age, advances his ideas with the cheeky chirpiness of a London cockney. Both of them believe in political correctness—a fact that is useful to my argument.

I shall be brief, because I cannot be otherwise. I realised the sense of isolation and alienation that people in my position feel when I saw my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson)—I do not mean to offend him—deriving support and help from his central office notes. Sad to say, I am not allowed central office notes, although I am allowed the Library notes. My hon. Friend thus has the advantage of me.

Even without the assistance of central office notes, I can say that I have always had an objection to referendums. I regard a referendum as a last resort which, when it is resorted to, brings with it considerable disadvantages. It is true that a referendum is inconsistent with parliamentary sovereignty. It is also true of a referendum that the public at large are likely to be uncertain as to whether its result will be mandatory or merely consultative. A referendum is certainly capable of creating conflicts between Parliament and people, and between a Member of Parliament and his constituency.

A referendum, in short, is a highly divisive mechanism to be resorted to only in the very last moments of a very difficult situation.

I seriously believe in united parties. To be sure, there is a need for vigorous debate within a party, but not to divide it. I cannot think of a better way of making the Tory party more seriously divided over Europe than to hold a referendum, with two camps fighting on different sides and then attempting to form a Government thereafter.

It seems to me that the principal proponents of the two views on Europe in the Cabinet are both right in wanting to avoid a referendum. We know from a recent speech that the Chancellor of the Exchequer does not want a referendum; and we know from the way in which the press is briefed that the Secretary of State for Employment does not want one either. They are right. If it possibly can be avoided, it should be avoided.

We have only to think of the position of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer if we had a referendum now on the single currency. What would happen if he were passionately advocating in the referendum campaign that we should have a single currency as soon as possible and that we should be a member of it, only to find that the admittedly consultative referendum took a different view, as it were, and he found himself as Chancellor, without the authority of public support, moving forward to a single currency and continuing the process of preparing for it? Would he have to resign?

The ways in which those processes would work are difficult to ascertain. It is so much better if a decision can be reached by discussions within the parties, by a process of assessing public opinion and compromising, as public men so often have to do, to decide not what is desirable in their private and personal opinion, but what is politically possible.

My tentative proposal for a referendum on the single currency is based on the proposition that if we cannot have a proper divide between the two great parties, in the last resort a referendum may be a necessary but extremely undesirable way of resolving the public's demand for some say on the issue. Here I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne that the subject will not go away. In particular, the issue whether we should go into a single currency will not go away.

There are many in my constituency who argue that not many people discuss with them on the doorstep the pros and cons of a single currency. They say, "It is a Westminster argument, and is of no interest to people in Wolverhampton." The people in Wolverhampton, Warrington or wherever are extremely interested in the results of good or bad government. We are interested in the results of good or bad government, but we are interested also in the systems and theories of government. It is those systems and theories that produce the results. When a dreadful mistake has been made, it is our duty to examine whether we can improve the system of government to prevent a repetition of the mistake.

[Mr. Nicholas Budgen]

We are right to say, for instance, after the experiment of following the deutschmark, under the Chancellorship of Lord Lawson, as he now is, or after the experiment of being in the exchange rate mechanism for two years, between 1990 and 1992, that we have already seen enough of the single currency in its early stages to know that it raises considerable economic and constitutional problems. We are right to say also that the matter should be discussed, even at the price of some unpleasantness and disagreement within the Tory party. It will be so much better if the issue can be decided not by a perilous referendum but by a clear divide between the two parties.

I thank the hon. Member for Newham, North-West for his apparently unconventional comments but expressions of a highly conventional view. The Labour party is becoming the party of politically correct federalism.

I am not accusing the Labour party of believing in much, except in the desire for office and in opportunism. I thought that the Labour party political broadcast that went out just before the 6 o'clock news yesterday was remarkable. It contained a most reassuring message to middle England, and particularly to middle-class people caught in negative equity. It was explained that the Labour party would suddenly be able to wash away all their problems.

There was not a word about how the Labour party had supported Mr. Lawson—as he then was—in his disastrous attempt to fix the pound to the deutschmark, which led to interest rates becoming too low, a massive increase in the money supply and the housing boom, which was the first step towards negative equity. There was not a word about how the politically correct Labour party had not raised a single word of criticism about our entry to, and continued membership of, the ERM. Indeed, it wanted to go further.

Yet the Labour party was able to say that it would be able to put right—in some miraculous and unspecified way—the problems of those with negative equity. It is becoming the party of federalism and of the new political correctness, and all those who believe in that sort of thing will have a real choice.

On the other hand, it is becoming plain that the Tory party—in all its manifestations—has learnt from the disaster of shadowing the deutschmark and from the disaster of the ERM. It has learnt from the unexpected consequences of the disgraceful guillotine of the Single European Act by Lady Thatcher and my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), which was smashed through this House so that the nation did not understand the full consequences. The nation was appalled at the aggressive and authoritarian way in which the Maastricht treaty was imposed upon this House and the nation.

Every time we see a new manifestation of our loss of sovereignty, the Tory party moves back a step and says, "Not me, guv." As we become more assertive in the national interest, so we shall find that no member of the Tory party ever supported the Single European Act or the Maastricht treaty. *[Interruption.]* Except for my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). The great body of the Tory party will never have supported any of those measures in a couple of years.

There is cause, I am pleased to say, for rejoicing. We shall see an increasing divide between the two great parties, particularly on the single currency. I took particular pleasure and encouragement from the way in which the Prime Minister put his argument on 8 January on the Frost programme.

Mr. Mackinlay: The Prime Minister voted for the Single European Act and for the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Budgen: Indeed he did.

Although I am sadly not a member of the Tory party at present, when I applied to 10 Downing street for a transcript of the Prime Minister's interview with Sir David Frost, the people there were good enough to send me a copy. I dare say that those at present in the party may find it even easier to get a transcript.

I hope that hon. Members will read that interview. On page 5 of the transcript, the Prime Minister deals with his arguments against entering a single currency in 1996 and 1997. First he says that we would have to be in the exchange rate mechanism for two years. I am sure that on Wednesday he will explain the disadvantages of being in the ERM. Of course, that argument will apply long after 1997.

The Prime Minister's second argument was that the Bank of England would need to be independent. Again, he will have to explain the objections to the Bank of England being independent. Even more, I am sure that on Wednesday he will explain the disadvantages of monetary policy being managed not merely by an independent Bank of England but by an independent European bank.

Mr. Marlow: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. He said that one would have to be in the exchange rate mechanism for two years before one joined a single currency. The Government have said that they will not join until 1996-97, but they have not ruled out 1999. Does that mean that, if we join the single currency in 1999, we shall have to join the ERM by 1 January 1997? If the election does not take place until April 1997, does not that mean that the die will be cast before the election? If the die will be cast before the election, why not make the decision now?

Mr. Budgen: That is one of the points that will be made clear on Wednesday by the Prime Minister. We are glad that he is exercising political leadership and authority to explain further his important remarks on the Frost programme. I agree with my hon. Friend. The argument about being in the ERM for two years applies not only to 1996 and 1997 but, as far as I can see, into the foreseeable future. The Prime Minister's argument about the undesirability of an independent Bank of England also applies not only for 1996 and 1997 but for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Donald Anderson: The hon. Gentleman appears eagerly to await the time when the Prime Minister and the rest of the Conservative party will join his party, but before he takes too much comfort from what the Prime Minister said on "The Frost Programme", will he at least recognise that what the Prime Minister says depends on when and to whom he is speaking? Will he also consider that the Chancellor of the Exchequer very recently said that the Prime Minister agreed with him? Who is telling the truth?

Mr. Budgen: The Prime Minister is primus inter pares. I have no doubt that on Wednesday he will exercise the full authority of his office and give a definitive statement of his attitude to a single currency.

Whatever snide remarks—I use the word carefully—are made about the Prime Minister, the statement on 8 January was made for public consumption. Whatever may be said by unkind and untruthful people who wish to imply that one impression is given to one audience and another impression is given to another, the Prime Minister's remarks are on the record.

I have the record. I have no doubt that the Prime Minister will wish to expand those arguments in a more formal way. An appearance on a programme such as "The Frost Programme" is necessarily conversational in style. He does not fully expand all the arguments.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Budgen: May I conclude? I shall then give way.

The third argument that was given on the Frost programme was the need for proper convergence. I have no doubt that on Wednesday the Prime Minister will expand on that. There can be temporary convergence, but there is not only the problem of creating temporary convergence, but the problem that once an economy has become converged with another, it does not necessarily remain converged. It can diverge. How does one accommodate those forces of divergence within a single currency?

We look forward with tremendous excitement and anticipation to what will be, I am sure, an extremely important and authoritative speech on Wednesday. We know that, when we have heard the Prime Minister expand those three arguments, we shall be clear in our minds that they do not last only for 1996 and 1997, but are arguments of principle against the single currency for all time. When that happens, the Tory party—

Mr. Richard Shepherd: My hon. Friend said that he was going to give way.

Mr. Budgen: Yes, I will.

Mr. Shepherd: I am grateful, and I appreciate that my hon. Friend invests a great deal of authority in the Prime Minister's remarks on "The Frost Programme", but our right hon. Friend's caution on the matter goes back a long way. I am sure that my hon. Friend would not want to forget the important speech to the Confederation of British Industry in north Wales in 1990, in which he referred to a single currency as a "leap in the dark".

Mr. Budgen: I do not want to widen the gap between my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne and myself, and lead to a further period of sadness, isolation and deprivation, but none the less I am sure that I shall be forgiven for saying that vague terms such as a "leap in the dark" are easily used. Although the arguments in the transcript of "The Frost Programme" are in shorthand and in conversational form, they are very important. We know that we can trust the Prime Minister to explain them with clarity and distinction.

We are grateful to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West for explaining the position of his party—a party of chirpily described, but fundamentally conventional, federalism and political correctness—but we are emerging as a party that does not need a referendum and a party that can be united in honourable patriotism and an earnest desire to enhance the role of the nation state.

1.12 pm

Ms Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate, but I do not know whether what I have to say accords with the definition of political correctness enunciated by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen).

I congratulate the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on winning a high place in the ballot and being able to introduce her Bill. I also congratulate her on presenting her case with her usual verve and panache. I am sure that she will not be surprised to hear me say, however, that I do not support her Bill and take issue with her on many of the aspects of the case that she put forward today.

The hon. Member for Billericay said that what has been happening in the past few years in the European Union amounted to a constitutional revolution, but she and her hon. Friends are also trying to enact considerable constitutional changes in the way in which we do political business in this country, by advocating a series of referendums. If we accepted the need for all those referendums, we would be moving toward a referendum-type democracy—something that my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) would welcome, but that we need to consider in the abstract and on its own merits, rather than merely adopting the hon. Lady's Bill or the other that is proposed today.

Mr. Duncan: The hon. Lady says that she objects to referendums because they introduce a great measure of constitutional change. How does she reconcile that with the Labour party's policy of introducing dramatic constitutional change within the United Kingdom by devolution? To be consistent, should she not favour both or neither?

Ms Quin: This morning we have heard demands for a series of referendums on European issues. That is the subject of this debate. If the hon. Gentleman asks whether I favour constitutional change within the United Kingdom, I certainly do and I am a longstanding supporter of a variety of constitutional changes, including a large measure of decentralisation.

This Bill and the subsequent Referendum (Single Currency) Bill to be introduced by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West, and other motions considered by the House in recent days, concern a series of referendums on various aspects of the European dimension.

Mr. Heald: Does the hon. Lady think that it is right, as the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) conceded to me earlier, that, if Hertfordshire is to be governed from Norwich, we should have a referendum on that?

Ms Quin: I do not argue against the idea of people in different parts of the United Kingdom, who may be affected by constitutional change which a Labour Government would want to introduce, voting on that issue. However, if we are to move towards a system in which we increasingly use referendums, that must be considered on its merits rather than, as Conservative Members are doing, by launching ourselves into a series of referendums specifically on Europe. We are not against

[Ms Quin]

referendums per se, but issues that constitute a change in the way that we operate should be considered on their merits.

Dr. Godman: Does my hon. Friend agree that the creation of a Northern Ireland Assembly would be the beginning of restructuring the multinational state of the United Kingdom?

Ms Quin: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, which has been made by many people in the past two or three days. What is happening in Northern Ireland has interesting implications for developments within the United Kingdom. In terms of giving the various parts of the United Kingdom a greater say over their political and economic development, it sets an interesting precedent. It involves not just the national dimensions of Scotland and Wales but also, hopefully, the regional dimensions within England. I agree with my hon. Friend on that matter.

On the European dimension and the intergovernmental conferences that will begin next year, the Opposition's position is that, if substantial changes result from the 1996 IGC, including moves towards a single currency, the consent of the people will be important for those developments to take place. The people may express their views either via a referendum, which is a likely possibility, or via a general election. Much would depend on the timing of the next general election and how it fits in with developments taking place within the IGCs.

Some people say that the IGCs will begin towards the beginning of next year; others think that they will not get under way until much later; some think that they may be swiftly concluded with fairly minor changes, in which case it may not be deemed necessary to hold a referendum; others think that the conferences will be protracted, last for 18 months or so, and lead to considerable constitutional changes. All those uncertainties make it extremely difficult at this time to say definitely whether a referendum on Europe should be held.

Mr. Maclennan: I am glad to hear that the hon. Lady speaks for the Labour party in recognising that the British people should have an opportunity to express their view clearly about the outcome of the IGCs if they affect significant constitutional change. How can she argue that a general election would give British people that effective right when she knows that the Conservative party is divided and that it is impossible to see how those divisions could be healed within the time scale of the discussions? The last time we discussed European matters during the debates on Maastricht, it was clear that the Labour party was also divided. What is the argument of principle against a referendum on the outcome of the IGCs?

Ms Quin: In the debate initiated by the Liberal Democrats a week ago I was asked that question by one of my right hon. Friends. As I said then, supposing that, as a result of the IGCs, the only important change was that the United Kingdom decided to sign the social chapter and that that had been part of the discussions in the previous general election—where there was a clear difference between the two major parties—I do not think that people would argue that there needed to be a referendum on that particular issue even though it changed our relationship with the European Union.

I must respectfully say to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) that I am aware that not everyone in his party is entirely enthusiastic about referendums. Indeed, all the members of his party were not in the House to support the vote for a referendum that took place about 10 days ago. It is clear that differences of opinion exist even in the hon. Gentleman's party. We must accept that. In return, I accept that, if people feel strongly that, because of the forces within political parties, their voice has been denied, that strengthens the case for a referendum. In the example I gave, however, I do not think that a referendum would be essential.

We support the idea that people should have the chance to express their view. In the light of some of the comments made this morning, I am bound to say that I do not think that a referendum is necessarily an easy or straightforward option. We must bear in mind that there are pitfalls in the referendum process.

A number of hon. Members have spoken, quite rightly, about the imprecise form of questions referred to in the Bill. According to the Bill, those questions would be framed

"to invite an opinion as to whether the United Kingdom should—

pursue full integration with the European Union under a constitution which is federal in character".

There has, understandably, been a lot of discussion this morning about the nature of the word "federal". Many Conservatives seem to think that it means something that is highly centralised, yet in Europe it is often understood to mean something decentralised, as in the Federal Republic of Germany, which represents a decentralised system. It is ironic that we helped to set it up after the second world war. It has proved to be an enlightened political system. There is plenty of scope for dispute about the meaning of that word.

Clause 1(2)(a) continues by referring to

"a single currency and a common sovereignty".

There is also a great deal of discussion about that. The second option is that the United Kingdom should

"remain in the European Community, but only as a member of an association of states trading freely with one another, with substantial repatriation of sovereignty."

Mr. Donald Anderson: Does my hon. Friend agree that the odd thing about the questions is that the real motive of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman)—to get out of Europe—is not posed as one of them? Does she also agree that the other question about a loose association of states may not be on offer?

Ms Quin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there is a hidden agenda to the Bill, which dares not find expression openly in the House. None the less, we know that among those who are described as Euro-sceptics there are some who want us to withdraw Britain from the European Union altogether, whereas others in that peculiar alliance simply want a "substantial repatriation of sovereignty"—whatever that is and how ever far it goes—which the hon. Member for Billericay has proposed in her Bill.

If paragraphs 1(2)(a) and 1(2)(b) of the Bill were not bad enough, we then have the killer subsection, 1(3), which says:

"The questions need not be in the exact words of the preceding subsection, so long as Her Majesty is satisfied that their wording reflects the true intent and spirit of this Act."

If the hon. Member for Billericay is fortunate enough for her Bill to proceed this morning and to be considered in Committee, I almost wonder whether the Committee may be continuing its consideration when the intergovernmental conferences have come to an end, because there is so much scope for debate on all the issues that are raised by the Bill.

Some hon. Members have referred to the difficulties that took place in referendums in other countries during the passage of the European Communities (Amendment) Bill, and I believe that some hon. Members lament the fact that we did not hold a referendum on the Maastricht treaty.

There was an argument to be made for holding a referendum on the Maastricht treaty, because the changes in it were considerable, but I think that there would have been a practical difficulty in finding the appropriate question to ask the British people in respect of that treaty.

Mr. Carttiss: Why should this country, which has had a Parliament for 700 years and is supposed to have brought democracy, culture and everything throughout the world during our days of empire, have more difficulty in framing a question about the Maastricht treaty than the French found in framing their question in the referendum that President Mitterrand held, which he was not obliged to hold, and the result of which he was very surprised about?

How come that the Danes, whose language is more complicated than ours anyway, can organise a referendum and put a form of words that people can vote on and then, three or four months later, having not obtained a single significant change in what they voted on before, can come up with another form of words that makes sense to the Danish people? The same of course applies, and I have great admiration for them.

If a bunch of Irishmen can get together and produce a form of words—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order. Order. Is the hon. Gentleman deaf?

Mr. Carttiss: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not the sort of remark or the due deference that is due to the Chair, if I may respectfully say so to the hon. Member. *[Interruption.]* Well, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to be especially difficult with the Chair, the hon. Gentleman knows what he may do.

Mr. Carttiss: What is wrong with the word "bunch"?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am not referring to "bunch". The hon. Gentleman knows the tradition of the House that an intervention should be short and succinct. To my counting, the hon. Gentleman asked seven questions, and by then my patience was beginning to get exhausted. The hon. Gentleman is being unfair to other hon. Members.

Ms Quin: In spite of his lengthy intervention, the hon. Gentleman missed a fairly obvious argument that I was about to reach in my speech, which was that the version of the Maastricht treaty that was on offer in Denmark and in France was somewhat different from the version that was on offer in this country because of the opt-outs that had been negotiated by the Prime Minister. The consequence of those opt-outs would have been to complicate the question in a referendum.

It would not have been impossible to solve the problem, but people in this country would have needed to be presented with the choice of Maastricht with both opt-outs or Maastricht with one opt-out or Maastricht with neither opt-out. Those choices would have had to be given to the British people and I think that the opt-out position that was foolishly negotiated by the Prime Minister none the less complicated the position quite significantly.

Mr. Duncan: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Quin: I shall not give way. I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman and I am anxious to make some progress, because I know that many hon. Members wish to speak.

In France, when the referendum took place, many issues became involved in the referendum campaign that were not strictly concerned with the Maastricht treaty. A great deal of debate was devoted to agriculture and the position of French farmers, although agricultural policy was not part of the Maastricht treaty. Although I do not object to it—it seems a usual part of politics—the referendum also tended to become very entangled with the domestic French political scene at that time. That happens in referendums. Many factors are at stake when referendums are held. The issue is not quite as straightforward as some Conservative Members have stated this morning.

If referendums solve problems—sometimes they do—they only solve them for a while, and are usually followed by other referendums on the same subject. Some 20 years ago we had a referendum on European Union membership. It has not caused the argument on European Union membership to disappear—indeed, it should not. Referendums are just one stage in the political process. But it is unrealistic for people start to think that referendums are a way of solving problems of all time.

The hon. Member for Billericay mentioned the great public support that she and her colleagues had received for their case. It seems that her views and those of some of her colleagues have resonance among Conservative party supporters. It is perhaps as a result that we have the spectacle of Conservative Euro-rebels delighting in their disgrace and flaunting their Whipless condition, rather than being sad and ashamed of what has happened, as we might have thought.

The hon. Lady and her colleagues overstate the public—as opposed to the narrow Conservative—support on the issues. When the hon. Lady and many people were calling for a referendum on Maastricht, my postbag was not full of letters asking for such a referendum. It was full of letters from people worried about issues such as the Child Support Agency, or the problems of getting a job or living on benefit. Those issues exercise the minds of the British people much more than some of the arguments on Europe advanced by Conservative Members.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): Will the hon. Lady accept my assurance that my constituents sent me many letters, either calling for a referendum on Maastricht or giving similar views—far more than on the Child Support Agency?

Ms Quin: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman's experience is so different from mine, but I accept what he says about his postbag. I certainly do not want to challenge him on its contents.

[Ms Quin]

Most people here are more concerned about other issues. There is a feeling among many people—a feeling that I share—that the Government have let down British interests in Europe, not for the reason given by the hon. Lady, but because the Government have isolated and weakened us in Europe. They seem to be more concerned to give us lower social and environmental standards than anyone else. There is a strong feeling, which the Opposition share and hope to highlight next week, that the Government have weakened us through their own internal divisions on the issues.

In support of the Bill, the hon. Lady also spoke of her feelings of national identity. Many people, like me, are proud of, and attached to, their identity. But people on both sides of the European argument can be equally proud of their identity. Many of us feel that a positive role in the European Union is very much in our national interest. We have different levels of loyalty and identity. I feel strongly regionalist; I am a Geordie and would like to see that identity promoted in future, just as my hon. Friends from other parts of the United Kingdom feel equally strongly about their national or regional identities.

The hon. Lady mentioned, and her Bill refers to, the idea that Europe should be a free trade area—

"an association of states trading freely".

There seems to be a feeling among Conservatives that that is what we opted for in the 1975 referendum. If the hon. Lady thinks back to that time, she will realise that what was being discussed was the contrast between the European free trade area and the deeper form of co-operation involved in the treaty of Rome.

That is why it is absurd for the Conservatives to think that we can somehow have a free trading area which ignores the social dimension, which has been an important part of the European process from the beginning. It is unrealistic for the hon. Member for Billericay and her hon. Friends on the Front Bench to claim in the 1990s that the European social dimension—which some of us are very keen on—is an add-on or an extra. In fact, it has been in all European treaties since 1951.

Mrs. Gorman: Does the hon. Lady agree that it is perfectly possible to have an open trading arrangement, such as the North American free trade agreement, that does not include all of the regulatory parts of the European relationship which are so detrimental to our business development?

Ms Quin: I was sympathetic to the hon. Lady's comments about regulation. We do not want over-regulation or unnecessary regulation. There was an interesting exchange later in the debate between the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland and the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) which highlighted the fact that sometimes regulation is about promoting trade, which presumably the hon. Lady welcomes.

Reference was made to the infamous attempt to introduce a directive on lawn mower noise. When I first heard about that I thought that the European Commission was off its rocker in advancing such a proposal. However, the hon. Member for Harrow, East was quite correct when he said that the European Commission brought forward that proposal to allow British producers to export lawn mowers to Germany. They had been prevented from doing that previously because of the way in which the German Government had written rules about noise.

We must examine each case properly. Sometimes regulations may be about promoting free trade—the very thing that the hon. Lady says that she wants to see. Regulation in the name of consumer protection or health and safety standards at work is very important to the interests of the people who live within the single European market. I think that we must take those points on board.

I have given reasons why the Labour party will not support the hon. Lady's Bill. However, once again the sharpest divisions have been on the Government side, and no doubt those divisions will be highlighted again in the debate on Wednesday. My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) said that Conservative Members seem to be yearning for opposition. I, too, am yearning for them to be in opposition. Their division on the European issue and on many other matters means that that day cannot come a moment too soon for the people of this country.

1.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): The Referendum Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) seeks to give the people of Britain a choice in a referendum between a federalist European super-state and Britain's effective disengagement and withdrawal from Europe. That is an absurd choice. It reduces to the ridiculous the debate on our future role in Europe.

The hon. Lady's subtext is clear: by suggesting that there is a prospect of some federalist European super-state into which we will unwillingly but inevitably become absorbed, she seeks to persuade people that the other option is preferable and that they should be given the opportunity to express that choice in a referendum. That is fairly primitive politics.

What do the leaders of Europe say about a federalist Europe or a European super-state? They quite rightly rubbish the idea because they know that it is not in prospect, it is not an option and it will not happen. Chancellor Kohl said:

"We do not want a European 'super state' . . . we will remain Germans, Britons, Italians or Frenchmen."

Edouard Balladur said:

"There are nothing but disadvantages in reopening the federalist debate. It's an anachronism: an enlarged Europe comprising more states could not be federal."

Alain Juppé said:

"Europe will never be a super state, federal or otherwise."

The idea that there is a conspiracy of conniving continentals seeking to rob us of our birthright is a bogey. Equally bogus is the suggestion that Britain could turn her back on Europe and abandon it, disengage from her history and become divorced from her geography. I want my children to be able to continue to write history, not just read it. I know that they can do that only if Britain remains at the heart of Europe.

If we are involved in and influencing Europe, with the courage to say yes when we believe that is in our best interests and those of Europe, and the self-confidence to say no and to stick to it when we do not, we can have every confidence in our own abilities and strengths.

Britain brings considerable assets to Europe. Ours is the world's sixth largest economy. London is the financial capital of the world. Our trading links and connections around the globe are considerable. Britain is one of the few countries in Europe still to have a global reach with her foreign policies. The United Kingdom alone in Europe is a member simultaneously of the UN Security Council, the economic summit and the Commonwealth—which comprises one third of the world's nations.

Our contribution to Europe's defence is second to none among European Union member states. We have made a more significant contribution to NATO, and hence to the security of all Europe, than any other European nation. No one can question our right to make clear our views on the future of Europe or doubt our ability to influence it. Many key developments of the past few years were advanced in Europe by us—the single market, enlargement, budgetary discipline, common agricultural policy reform, a greater drive on deregulation and trade liberalisation, the whole thrust for subsidiarity.

Our opposition to the social chapter is driven by a positive determination to see Europe improve its competitiveness. With more than 18 million unemployed, that is essential. That is why it is imperative to keep down social costs. If we do not, we shall lose competitiveness, prosperity and jobs. We can, and do, influence and help mould Europe's present. We can, and will, help to determine its future.

Mr. Marlow: It would be helpful if my hon. Friend could give several examples of subsidiarity in effect and of measures that have been repatriated to sovereign national Governments, so that they, rather than the European Community, have competence.

Mr. Baldry: There are frequent and many examples of decisions taken in this country at ministerial and local level that hitherto may have been taken in Brussels. We and all good democrats want to ensure that decisions are taken at the level at which they are best applicable.

The hon. Member for Billericay offers a referendum—always a seductive proposition. We are democrats, and democracy is about choice—and people should be given choices. Referendums are about making choices, so it is argued that those who refuse referendums are denying the public the opportunity to make a choice and that, therefore, they cannot properly be democrats. That is all heady stuff. However, we and the people of this country know that offering a choice between two equally far-fetched propositions does not enhance democracy.

Of course there are times when it is right to hold a referendum, when real and substantive issues should properly be put to the people. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that he has not ruled out a referendum, and that there may be circumstances in future when one might be appropriate. If there are, we will hold one. As to the 1996 intergovernmental conference, my right hon. Friend made it clear also that he does

"not believe that anything is going to happen in that conference that would remotely justify a referendum".

The question of holding one would arise only if decisions taken at the IGC had serious implications for Britain's constitutional position.

Mr. Duncan: My hon. Friend has been talking about choice. Does he admit that one choice we have is whether to participate in a single currency? Did he, like me, hear the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin) say that the opt-out had been foolishly negotiated by the Prime Minister? If she thinks that we should not have secured that opt-out, does that not mean that the inevitability of a single currency would be Labour policy? In other words, has she not said that Labour favours a single currency?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The whole House will have heard the hon. Lady make that point. I suspect that many hon. Members will also have heard the shadow Foreign Secretary on the radio this morning. It is clear from the Labour Front-Bench team's comments that Labour would simply sign up to everything and anything offered by Europe.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): My hon. Friend knows that I have the pleasure—indeed, the privilege—of addressing his Conservative association this evening on this very issue. So that I can relay his response to his local association, will he, at my invitation or, at any rate, by acquiescence, say why there was no free vote before the Maastricht treaty was accepted, why there was no White Paper, why we are not being promised a White Paper now and why we did not veto monetary union and renegotiate the fisheries policy and the borders policy, all of which could have been done in advance of the Maastricht treaty?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend will be very welcome in my constituency this evening. He has asked about seven questions but, as he was not here for the whole debate but only for the winding-up, it is somewhat unreasonable of him to expect to make a speech by way of an intervention. My Conservative association will tell him that the people did have a free vote on the Maastricht treaty—there was a general election, and the electors of north Oxfordshire understood perfectly the policies that the Conservative party outlined to them. My hon. Friend belittles my electors and those in the rest of the country if he does not accept that.

I was delighted to hear what my hon. Friend said on the radio, as there is now considerable agreement on the issue of a single currency. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated clearly:

"We cannot accept that Sterling should be part of a Single Currency in 1996 or 97. We don't believe anyone could sensibly want to go ahead then but, if they do, we wouldn't be with them . . . To say 'yes' now or 'no' now is to operate on hunch not facts. No one knows what future economic circumstances will be."

I am sure that the House will have noted that, the other day, the Governor of the Bank of England said of the decision on a single currency:

"It is not a decision that can or should be taken now."

Ms Quin *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I am already dealing with an intervention; I shall come to the hon. Lady in a second.

On the radio the other evening, my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) sensibly said that the Governor of the Bank of England had demonstrated

"a very serious and very realistic bottom line on the question of monetary union . . . it's not a matter of ideology or theology; it's a matter of straightforward common sense".

[Mr. Baldry]

Everyone would agree with my hon. Friend and the Governor of the Bank of England that it is not a decision that can or should be taken now, and we are not going to do so.

Ms Quin: If the Minister is going to refer to our views, I am anxious that he should at least represent them fairly. Our position on a single currency has been made clear not only by the shadow Foreign Secretary but in the Labour party's policy statement on this issue. Although we support the principle of a single currency, we shall make a decision in the light of the economic circumstances at the time. We have said that, before we agreed to a single currency, we would want the move to be accompanied by measures to tackle unemployment and promote economic growth in Europe.

Our position is perfectly clear, and our criticising the Government for its opt-out does not render it any less clear. If Labour were in power, we would be in a position to make a decision about whether to join a single currency. As I also said today, we would also have the consent of the British people in that undertaking.

Mr. Baldry: That all sounds rather like embarrassed special pleading. I do not need to explain the Labour party's position on the single currency. The hon. Lady and the shadow Foreign Secretary have been taking great pains to ensure that the whole country knows and understands that the Labour party would sign up to absolutely anything. It would have abandoned all the opt-outs that the Prime Minister successfully secured at Maastricht—so much has been clear again from today's debate.

Mr. Budgen: I apologise for not having been here to hear the beginning of my hon. Friend's speech. Can he explain the consequences for employment of a single currency? We hear a great deal of talk about measures that would prevent unemployment, but most people realise that, with a single currency, either there must be a free movement of peoples—which means goodbye to immigration controls in the European Union—or there must be large subsidies to keep people in uneconomic areas.

Will my hon. Friend explain the Government's attitude? We may then even find out the Opposition's attitude.

Mr. Baldry: The Government's position is clear, and has been set out on numerous occasions. It is that a single currency—there is no disagreement about this—does and

"would raise significant economic, political and constitutional issues"

of the kind that my hon. Friend has just described. No one dissents from that. Such issues would have to be decided in the circumstances of the time, which is why we shall decide them in the circumstances of the time, and why we are not prepared to prejudge them now. That would be totally unnecessary and hypothetical.

Mr. Budgen: Surely, if the Government agree about the consequences of a single currency, they can decide now. In the United States, with the dollar, the only way to overcome the economic disadvantages of the regions in which people live is to allow them free movement or to keep them in place by subsidy. Surely, therefore, the Government can say in principle whether they favour the free movement of all peoples in Europe or, if they do not, whether they favour massive subsidies to ensure that people remain where they are. The Government do not have to wait until the time arises to say whether they are in favour of one or the other.

Mr. Baldry: With respect, my hon. Friend, just like the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms Quin), is seeking to decide on a question now which we do not have to answer now. We can answer it in our own time when the question needs to be asked.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I must make progress.

We have made it clear that we do not think that anything will happen at the 1996 IGC that will remotely justify a referendum. The question of a referendum would arise only if decisions were taken at the conference which had serious implications for Britain's constitutional position—and we will not allow such decisions.

The Bill offers a choice on Europe of two extremes. People here want neither extreme. The fact is that the people of Britain want to be at the heart of Europe. We want to be able to influence Europe and, quite rightly, we want to ensure a European Union that meets the needs of its citizens. We want a Europe of nation states that meets the needs of the nation state.

Of course the present arrangements in Europe are not perfect—when, in the history of civilisation, have they ever been perfect in any organisation of men and women? But we are working hard to put right the problems of Europe.

Mr. Dykes: I am sure that the House will agree that my hon. Friend is putting the Government's case fairly and that there is a clear and stated policy. He rather surprised me when he announced tonight's engagement in his constituency, which will include an address by the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). Is my hon. Friend planning to be at that engagement so that he can counter some of the anti-European views of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford?

Mr. Baldry: I have every confidence that my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford will put fairly and reasonably the views of a collective party. I have every confidence also that the members of my local association will question my hon. Friend clearly and carefully on some of the views that he has advanced. I know that the views that the Government represent are wholeheartedly supported in north Oxfordshire.

Mr. Budgen *rose—*

Mr. Marlow *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I have given way to both my hon. Friends on several occasions. I wish to make further progress.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way on the very point that he has raised?

Mr. Baldry: No.

We are working hard to put right the problems in Europe.

Mr. Budgen: I want to say something nice.

Mr. Baldry: That is tempting, but I think that it is tempting with honey.

As I have said, we are working hard to put right problems in Europe. We want to have greater budgetary discipline. We want also to have war on fraud, reform of the common agricultural policy, a greater and continuing emphasis on subsidiarity, more deregulation and a reduction in the burdens on business. We should never overlook, however, the substantial benefits of our membership of the EU—peace, jobs and prosperity, real influence—

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Baldry: I know that my hon. Friend thinks that there is no advantage in our membership of the EU. That being so, perhaps he will listen while I outline what I consider to be the benefits of our membership.

We enjoy real influence in international trade negotiations, more influence in foreign policy and a common front against international crime and drug trafficking.

We commemorate this year the ending of the second world war. It is worth remembering that the EU, with NATO, has brought 50 years of peace and prosperity to our continent. War is now unthinkable in western Europe.

The EU is the world's largest trading bloc, with a massive 40 per cent. of world trade. Membership of the EU is crucial for British jobs, investment and prosperity. We in Britain successfully championed and helped secure the single market, which is the world's largest free trade area.

Britain is a great trading nation. Our exports to the EU have grown dramatically since we joined. The EU now takes over half of all our exports compared with just over a third before we joined. Our exports to—

Mr. Marlow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Baldry: I would be rather more inclined to give way to my hon. Friend to listen to what he has to say if he had been prepared to listen to what we had to say before he dashed to the television studios instantly to say that he was minded to vote against the Government next week. If he listens to what I have to say, I may be able to persuade him to change his mind. He may do so when he hears of the considerable advantages of membership of the EU and the leadership that we are taking within the Union to improve it.

Britain attracts one third of all inward investment in Europe, which means millions of pounds of new investment from Japan, the United States, Korea and elsewhere. It is—[*Interruption.*] My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) muttered, "What about jobs?" In 1993-94, there were about 400 inward investment decisions that created or safeguarded almost 100,000 jobs. Many of them were created in areas of high unemployment. That is a real choice for Britain.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend agree that the jobs position in Britain is so much better than in the rest of Europe because we do not have the huge costs bearing on our employers that have been imposed in other European countries? Does he agree also that it is vital as part of our membership of the Community that we do not give way and allow huge non-wage labour costs to be imposed on our industries?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In effect, my hon. Friend makes the point again that the Labour party would sign up to anything offered by Europe. We want to ensure that we have an EU that is in the best interests of the people of Europe. By our leadership, we are trying to persuade fellow member states in Europe that if they continue with uncompetitive practices, Europe will lose out as against the rest of the world. I have every confidence that our view will prevail.

Mr. Duncan: A moment ago, the hon. Member for Gateshead, East said that the Labour party would have opposed the opt-out on the single currency, but nonetheless would have given the House a choice to join it. Has my hon. Friend received any advice to suggest that one could have had an opt-out while keeping such a choice?

Mr. Baldry: No. My hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Gateshead, East and the House know that the Labour party's position on the matter is untenable. We must ensure that the country understands fully that its position is untenable.

Ms Quin *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: We have heard quite enough from the hon. Lady. I would listen more intently to the Labour party were it not for the fact that it has changed its position on this issue no fewer than six times in the past few years. When I came to the House in 1983, the present leader of the Labour party stood for election with a manifesto committing Britain to withdraw from the European Community. That is the same person who now postures around the country, pretending to speak for middle England.

It serves our interests better to act together, rather than to act alone. Every child can remember Aesop's fable about the man breaking sticks. He is able to break one or perhaps two, but certainly not a bundle of 15 or 20. Membership of the European Union gives us much more clout in the eyes of our competitors and rivals. They want to know that Britain is in the main stream of European development.

Inside Europe, we are pressing successfully for trade liberalisation, more deregulation and the elimination of major state aids and bureaucratic trade barriers which may discriminate against British firms. As a great European nation, Britain must be a participant, and not just a spectator, in matters affecting our freedom and prosperity. We must not break up the machinery of Europe, but make sure that the machinery works.

Of course it is for the House to decide what it wishes to do with the Bill. I suspect that the House will wish to take it no further. It offers electors a bogus choice, and I am sure that the people of Britain have far greater self-confidence in our ability as a nation to continue to influence and fashion Europe in a way that meets our needs and enables us all to gain the benefits which our membership of the European Union undoubtedly brings to us.

Ms Quin *rose—*

Mr. Baldry: I do not intend to give way to the hon. Lady again.

When I first came into politics, I was fortunate enough to work for Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven. Perhaps I ought to remind the House what her vision of Europe was, because it is as valid now as it was when we first came to office. She said:

[Mr. Baldry]

"compared with the interests we have in common, the differences which divide us shrink into insignificance. They must not be allowed to rob us of the prize which could be won by more effective common action—a new upsurge of European vitality."

Quite rightly, my noble Friend set her face firmly against federalism, saying:

"I do not believe that the nation states in Europe will wither away."

She emphasised the particular importance of European co-operation and the defence of European values for the a wider world. She said:

"The time has not yet come—I hope it never will—when the European Community turns inward upon itself. For Europe is the source of history's greatest endeavour, whereby the spirit of man, restless and ever ambitious, seeks always to renew itself by reaching outwards and upwards. The challenge for the next generation is to use the growing authority that will come from the greater unity of Europe to span the gaps between races and continents, between the rich and the poor, between the free and the unfree of the world . . . This is great work, and it cannot be carried out by timid minds".

Timid minds will not be found on the Government Benches, because we share Baroness Thatcher's vision that

"we are the European party in the British Parliament and among the British people; and we want to co-operate wholeheartedly with our partners in this joint venture."

2.4 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Despite her favourable mention of me in that vividly written book of hers, I cannot support the Bill of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). I oppose clause 1(1)(3) for the reasons so vividly outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). While there was more than a hint of desperation in the language used by the Minister—perhaps he has forebodings about next Wednesday—I agree with his criticism of the two questions that the hon. Lady would like to ask in her referendum. Clause 1(2)(b) is simply not in the gift of Her Majesty's Government, whichever party is in power.

Having said that, I offer my sincere compliments to the hon. Member for Billericay for initiating the debate. I entered the House with the Minister in 1983. It has been my experience that European Community debates in the House have always attracted the presence of fewer than 30 right hon. and hon. Members. But that was until the Maastricht affair. As the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) would say, there are some very well-kent faces here.

I can remember the historic moment when the European Court of Justice ruled against Her Majesty's Government on a recently enacted Act of Parliament. I refer to the Merchant Shipping Act 1988. The hon. Member for Southend, East and I were here. I spoke from the Dispatch Box in those days. On that evening there were fewer than 24 hon. Members in the House. It was the first time that the European Court of Justice—in that case, the President sitting on his own at an afternoon session of the ECJ—had advised the Government that they would have to suspend a certain section in an Act. The relevant section related to Spanish ownership of British trawlers. That was what it came down to.

Some of us told the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Bill was going through the House that it would be challenged by the European Commission in the European Court of Justice because in EC law it discriminated against non-British persons who owned or part-owned United Kingdom registered fishing vessels.

So the hon. Member for Billericay deserves our compliments. Only a small band of us in the past 10 years or so have taken part in debates on European Community and now European Union matters. In my experience, in that period of 11 or 12 years, the debates have always been dominated—if I may say so in, I hope, a fair-minded way—by those who are hostile to the European Community and hence deeply critical of its institutions. Those in favour of the Community and its institutions have been noticeable either by their absence from such debates or by their unwillingness to offer criticisms of the Union's institutions. I believe that they have let their side down.

The best advocacy, as I am sure that the late Nicky Fairbairn would have said, is to be as toughly critical of what one seeks to defend as of what one seeks to promote. Those who are in favour of the EU should be its toughest critics. Hon. Members on both sides of the House fail in that regard.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I compliment the hon. Gentleman on his sincerity and commitment to these debates, but after the merchant shipping decision and the case that will go to the court on Monday and abolish all our border controls, does it not worry him that, while he can complain, shout and scream, our democratic Parliament can do nothing about it, nor can we do anything in the councils of Europe?

Dr. Godman: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's compliments on my sincerity. Whatever one may say about him and his hostility to the Union, he is fair-minded and utterly sincere. I would describe him as passionate on such matters.

To be utterly honest, as I hope that I always am, I have mixed feelings about the European Court of Justice. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I come from a fishing family who were directly affected by that decision on merchant shipping. On the other hand, on 6 April the European Court of Justice will begin hearings on a test case that involves this Government's squalid refusal to pay invalidity benefit to women aged between 60 and 65. I am referring to the case of Mrs. Rosie Graham.

I have organised in Scotland, and helped to organise in Northern Ireland, take-up campaigns on behalf of women between those ages whose invalidity benefit has been taken away from them. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that more than 3,000 women came forward in Northern Ireland, with an even greater number in Scotland.

I have experience of the European Court of Justice, therefore, and said in another debate in which the hon. Member for Southend, East participated that it was taking on the powers of a supreme court over the 15 nations—I speak as an ex-shipwright, not as an ex-lawyer. It is a formidable decision-making body, and some of its decisions have eased the burdens of many people on low incomes throughout the 12 member states. I welcome some of its decisions, therefore, although not others.

Let us not fool ourselves. That court will go from strength to strength in terms of case law. I sincerely hope that the Government are yet again defeated on the non-payment of invalidity benefit to women aged between 60 and 65. I hope that they will expeditiously pay that money and all arrears to those women if the case goes against them. In fairness to the Government, they have a good record of compliance with directives and with decisions of the court.

One reason why I am so tough a critic of the European Union is that there are those who dodge the column where directives and decisions of the European Court of Justice are concerned. I refer with, I hope, no hint of ethnocentricity to some of the Mediterranean countries. I have been tempted to think momentarily that we would be better off without them, but that really would be ethnocentric. I wish that their Governments would behave as well as the Danish and the Dutch and, indeed, this Government, in complying with the directives.

I would welcome a referendum on the European Union, but it has to be at an appropriate moment. I do not support referendums on a yearly basis, but the people of the United Kingdom should be given the opportunity to pronounce judgment on what might prove to be radical constitutional change following the IGC. May I remind some Conservative Members when they talk about our country that this is the Parliament of a multinational state that is undergoing constitutional change, whether some hon. Members like it or not.

As I said, if Northern Ireland is given an assembly it will surely mark the beginning of the restructuring of the United Kingdom. Such a decision would gladden the hearts of secessionists and devolutionists throughout the United Kingdom. It would certainly gladden the hearts of many of my constituents in Scotland if an assembly were set up across the water. I said "assembly", but I should have said a legislature without tax-raising powers. The framework document, which everyone here will have read, refers to a legislature. If one were set up following a referendum in Northern Ireland, it would strengthen the peaceable resolution of secessionists and devolutionists elsewhere, particularly in Scotland.

Numerous institutions within the European Union cause considerable concern. I have long been a critic of the common fisheries policy. If the hon. Member for Billericay were successful today and we moved, heaven forbid, to a referendum on Europe, we might have such a wide-ranging debate that we could discuss with our constituents issues like the common fisheries policy. This may not be the moment to discuss it, but that policy needs to be changed dramatically to emphasise the regional management of fisheries and tougher policing of foreign vessels that fish within our territorial waters.

We could also debate the role, functions and powers of the European Commission and the Council of Ministers. When critics on either side of the House refer to decisions taken in Brussels, they mean decisions taken by the supreme decision-making body, the Council of Ministers, which meets in secret. Those Ministers have formidable powers and a British Minister is one of 15 major decision makers in all spheres of activity, on whom no constraints whatever are placed.

It has been suggested that the constraints placed on a Danish Minister are much more powerful than those placed on a UK Minister. Strictly speaking, that is not true. Danish Members of Parliament are not in a much stronger position than UK Members of Parliament in terms of scrutinising European Union legislation and constraining ministerial decision making in Brussels.

May I return to the intervention by the hon. Member for Southend, East? Somehow, we must seek means by which domestic Parliaments can put a democratic check on decisions made by those 15 Ministers at European Council meetings. Inevitably, that means that greater power will have to be given to the European Parliament.

Whether hon. Members like it or not, power is seeping away from domestic Parliaments, and it is obvious that Members of the European Parliament will continue to chafe at the restraints placed on them. Members of the European Parliament, whether Conservative, Labour or whatever, want greater powers vis-a-vis the European Commission and the Council of Ministers. Whether hon. Members in this House welcome that or not, it is how things will progress in the next few years.

We are witnessing creeping integration. I agree with the hon. Member for Southend, East that it might be better to have a federal system than the current mess where the European Parliament is a talking shop and this House of Commons is increasingly constrained by decisions taken by European institutions, for example, the European Court of Justice, the Commission and the Council of Ministers. Major changes are taking place over which we have no control, so, in the end, the federalist approach might be the best bet.

Ms Quin: As I said in my speech, I am worried about seepage of powers. I criticised the Government's strategy of opt-outs, but explained that it is the Labour party's view that, as a country, we have the right to decide whether to join a single currency. That option is available to countries whether they have negotiated opt-outs of the kind negotiated by the Government or not.

Dr. Godman: I support what my hon. Friend says about the social chapter. During a debate last year, I predicted that multinationals with satellite subsidiaries in Scotland or England will increasingly find it easier to conform to some of the rules and regulations emanating from the European Union than to stand out against them. I said many months ago that it does not make sense in terms of good industrial relations and good employer-employee relations to deny advances made elsewhere to employees in Scotland and other parts of the United Kingdom. That is another type of development that will take place whether we are in or out of Europe.

Those who support the European Union the strongest, those who are its keenest advocates, should be its toughest-minded critics. Some of them have sought to smooth over the inadequacies of the European institutions or the unrestrained power that some of them exercise. By doing so and by being so weak-kneed in their assessment of the European Union, they have betrayed their own cause.

Although I do not necessarily agree with those people who are mistakenly labelled Europhobes, I have a great deal of sympathy for them because at least they are tough critics of the European Union. That is what is needed before we can even talk about its expansion and about extending the mechanisms of integration. We need that scepticism in our approach to the European Union, particularly on the issue of subsidiarity.

[Dr. Godman]

If the House and, I hope, one day, a Scottish Parliament, is to have any decisive decision-making powers, that will come about only through a democratic interpretation of article 3b of the Maastricht treaty, which relates to subsidiarity. That article is subject to an entirely different interpretation in other countries, particularly the Federal Republic of Germany.

The supporters of the European Union should start to voice criticisms of it because others will then listen to them more sympathetically.

2.23 pm

Mrs. Angela Knight (Erewash): I am conscious of the time, so I shall be as brief as I can.

The debate has been dominated by experts on European matters and by lawyers and, perhaps even more formidably, by lawyers who are also experts in European matters. I refer especially to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), who falls very clearly into that bracket. I have a great deal of respect for his opinions, and agree with him that a clear divide between the two parties is essential, and preferable to a referendum.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), who instigated the debate. Her opening remarks covered many of the issues that are a worry to British people. I recall that she mentioned fishing and the common agricultural policy, which are both areas of great concern.

I worry about a referendum. My postbag is full of requests for a referendum on hanging, not a referendum on Europe. I know that that matter has been discussed earlier. Although we may stand here and discuss the fact that one is a constitutional matter and the other is not, I am not convinced that that argument holds any water in the country.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend agree that the benefits of a referendum are, first, that it enables one to discover what public opinion is on an issue that is not necessarily presented to the general public in a general election; and, secondly, that it gives the opportunity of invigorating our politics by allowing the general public to become involved in the debate in a much more obvious way?

Mrs. Knight: Those are two of the fundamental arguments in favour of a referendum—arguments that cannot be ignored. There are equal arguments against a referendum, such as that concerning the question that is asked. The problem of the question that is asked is a significant reason why I am worried about the Bill. The question, with all due respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay, is extraordinarily vague. One cannot envisage a circumstance in which one might ask a vague question, whereas one can envisage a circumstance in which one might ask a precise question. It is the generality of the clause that worries me most.

I am also worried about whether a referendum will be helpful in the run-up to the 1996 intergovernmental conference. In my opinion, the most important aspect of the run-up to the 1996 conference is that we should have our own agenda.

Mrs. Gorman: Is it true that my hon. Friend has just been handed a note asking her to speak until gone 2.30 pm?

Mrs. Knight: I will say to my hon. Friend that the notes that I have are in my hand and have been here since 9.30 this morning. I am under the impression that the debate does finish at 2.30 pm. If I am wrong about that, someone will no doubt tell me. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will inform me if I speak for too long or, indeed, stand up or sit down at the wrong moment. I hope that that answers the question.

The argument that I wished to make was that we must devote most attention to—

Mrs. Gorman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I call for a closure?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. What the hon. Lady wishes to do is entirely for her, but she must understand the procedures of the House and not just stand up and ask permission to do things. If she does not know the Standing Orders of the House, it is high time that she learnt them.

Mrs. Gorman: May I ask that the Question now be put? I have moved it on a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There is a point of order from the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman).

Mrs. Gorman *rose in her place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

The House divided: Ayes 24, Noes 2.

Division No. 85] **[2.29 pm**

AYES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Body, Sir Richard
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Cohen, Harry
Cox, Tom
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hoey, Kate
Jessel, Toby
Livingstone, Ken
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Marlow, Tony
Mills, Iain
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Wilkinson, John

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Christopher Gill and
Mr. Roger Knapman

NOES

Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alan Duncan and
Mr. Gary Streeter

It appearing on the report of the Division that fewer than forty members had taken part in the Division, Mr. Deputy Speaker *declared that the Question was not decided.*

It being after half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday 27 February.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

REFERENDUM (SINGLE CURRENCY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 July.

PRISONERS (RETURN TO CUSTODY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 March.

PROTECTION OF ANIMALS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 17 March.

NATURAL DISASTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 March.

PREVENTION OF FRAUD (REGISTRATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

INSURANCE COMPANIES (RESERVES) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [27 January], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 3 March.

LAND REGISTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 3 March.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That—

(1) the Scottish Grand Committee shall meet on Wednesday 29th March at half-past Ten o'clock;

(2) at that meeting, notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 94A (Scottish Grand Committee (composition and business))—

(i) a Motion for the adjournment of the Committee may be made by a member of the government;

(ii) attention may be called to the subject chosen by the Member specified in the Table below until the hour there specified; and

(iii) at One o'clock the Motion shall lapse; and

(3) each Member so specified shall give notice not later than Wednesday 15th March of his choice of subject.

TABLE

Mr. Secretary Lang	11.15 a.m.
Mr. George Robertson	12.00 noon
Mr. Jim Wallace	12.30 p.m
Mr. Alex Salmond	—

—[Mr. Wells.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 28th February, the Speaker shall—

(1) not later than Seven o'clock put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Lilley relating to the draft Statutory Sick Pay Percentage Threshold, Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase, Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Fund Payments) and Social Security Benefits Up-rating Orders 1995 and the draft Social Security (Contributions) Amendment Regulations 1995 and in the name of Mr. Tony Blair relating to the Income-related Benefits Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 3) Regulations 1994; and

(2) not later than Ten o'clock put the Questions on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Gummer relating to the draft North Yorkshire (District of York) (Structural and Boundary Changes) and Humberside (Structural Change) Orders 1995—*[Mr. Wells].*

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (SCOTLAND) BILL [*LORDS*]

Ordered,

That the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with as if it had been certified by Madam Speaker as relating exclusively to Scotland.—*[Mr. Wells].*

M40 (Widening)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

2.40 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the subject of the proposed widening of the M40 between the M25 and High Wycombe. I last raised the question of motorways in my constituency in an Adjournment debate on 15 May 1992, when my starting point was—as today—the problem of increasing noise.

Three motorways run through my constituency. The M4 will be familiar to my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads, as it runs the full length of his constituency. The M25 runs from just south of its junction with the M4 to just north of its junction with the M40, and the M40 extends to just beyond the Loudwater flyover at High Wycombe. Three years ago, it was proposed that each of those stretches of motorway be widened to four lanes in each direction. Work on the M25 has been completed. Traffic flows much more smoothly and, consequently, traffic volumes on the A355 between Beaconsfield and Slough have fallen.

The scheme to widen the M4 was replaced by a more ambitious scheme, effectively to construct a new Slough bypass. It is a great comfort that my hon. Friend will be replying because, as my neighbour, he is as familiar as I am with the roads that I am describing.

The M40 widening scheme was added to the trunk road construction programme in May 1989 as part of the "Roads for Prosperity" White Paper and confirmed in the February 1990 report, "Trunk Roads, England—Into the 1990s", which stated that the preferred route would be decided in 1992. In fact, the scheme was published in 1993. When local public exhibitions were held, my constituents were principally concerned with the environmental consequences of the proposed widening—noise, atmospheric pollution and lighting at night.

As I explained to the House three years ago, the most extreme example of the growing noise problem in my constituency is provided by the M40. When it opened more than 20 years ago, it was relatively quiet—perhaps even underused. With the extension of the M40 to Birmingham, which was not originally envisaged, traffic volumes grew rapidly. There has been a substantial increase in the number of heavy goods vehicles and the noise is intolerable in parts of Beaconsfield and Gerrards Cross.

The purpose of my debate three years ago was to persuade the Department of Transport of the merits of porous asphalt. I was delighted when, two months later, my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Sir K. Carlisle), then Minister for Roads and Traffic, announced a three-prong attack on the source of noise from road surfaces following an in-depth review.

My hon. Friend said that, in urban and more sensitive areas, porous asphalt would be used where conditions were suitable, and that the benefits outweighed both the higher cost and the need for expensive winter maintenance and more frequent resurfacing. We then had to set about persuading the Department that porous asphalt should be used on this particular stretch of motorway. There was no doubt that Beaconsfield and Gerrards Cross were noise-sensitive, and my constituents needed no encouragement to write to the Department in large numbers, pressing the case for porous asphalt.

In August 1992, my hon. Friend the then Minister for Roads and Traffic wrote to me that it was still too early to say whether porous asphalt would be the right material in the circumstances. By August 1993, the motorway widening unit was writing to my constituents to confirm that

"porous asphalt will be provided as the running surface for this section of the M40 as part of the widening works."

That was, of course, not the only noise amelioration measure; the symptoms and the cause were to be treated by means of environmental barriers, which would serve the dual purpose of a visual screen and noise barrier.

Understandably, my constituents were demanding those improvements whether or not the motorway was widened. I explained that the Department was empowered by Parliament to make such improvements only as part of a widening scheme. From mid-1993 onwards, therefore, I was pressing the Department to announce a final start date. Last year, the motorway widening unit confirmed that it hoped to start work this March so that most of the cost would be incurred in the financial year 1995-96.

Then came the Secretary of State's announcement on 19 December that he was refocusing the roads programme. Because of the redirecting of resources, he would no longer be proceeding immediately with six publicly funded schemes on which work was scheduled to begin in 1994-95. He said that he would consider proceeding with four of them by design, build, finance and operate—or DBFO—contracts. One of them was the widening of the M40.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State, whom I should like to thank for keeping me so well informed, wrote to me at once to say that his provisional view was that the length of the M40 improvement scheme itself was too short for the scheme to be free standing as a DBFO. The issue was what might partner it to form a sensible management task.

I commend my hon. Friend for the speed with which he then proceeded to a decision on the matter. He wrote to me on 14 February to say that he had decided to invite bids for the management of the M40 between junctions 1 and 15, a length of some 75 miles. One of the first tasks for the appointed company would be to widen the section between junctions 1A and 3.

My hon. Friend had an important point to make about the Handy Cross junction improvement. He said that, because that scheme is to be the subject of a public inquiry, that element of construction could not be included in the DBFO contract since it was not legally authorised. The Department would, however, expect the appointed company to co-operate in its delivery should it be subsequently approved. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney), who shares my concern about motorway noise and who is especially concerned about traffic congestion at Handy Cross, has asked me to say that he welcomes that, as I do, but that he hopes that the scheme will be approved soon.

My hon. Friend the Minister told me that he would invite expressions of interest with responses due by the end of March; he would select bidders by May and invite tenders by June. Tenders would be in by the end of the year and construction could start in the late spring of

1996. I should like to make it clear to my hon. Friend that the DBFO scheme and his proposed timetable have my full support. I want the widening scheme to be implemented as soon as possible, and I believe that that is the best way to achieve it.

As it happens, we debated clause 87 of the Finance Bill in Standing Committee last night. It amends the Capital Allowances Act 1990 to provide industrial buildings allowances for so-called highway concessions. That will allow a company appointed to operate a DBFO contract to write off its capital expenditure for tax purposes over a 25-year period. In addition, the Department has now published its pre-qualification document for the four DBFO contracts, one of which is the M40 project.

I was glad to read paragraph 3.5.3 of appendix A to the document, which states clearly that the finished surface of the road must be porous asphalt; and paragraph 3.6.1 lists the environmental commitments and undertakings that the Department has made during the statutory procedures. All those must be adhered to by the appointed company.

The traffic information in the document shows that the number of vehicles using the stretch between the M25 and Beaconsfield exceeded 100,000 for the first time last year. The number using the stretch between Beaconsfield and Loudwater was 98,000. So for both traffic congestion and noise pollution reasons, this is an urgent scheme. I hope that my hon. Friend will today reaffirm his commitment to its early completion, and in particular to all the environmental improvements that my constituents want to see in place at the earliest opportunity.

2.50 pm

The Minister for Railways and Roads (Mr. John Watts): I congratulate my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), on securing this debate—the second in three years that he has initiated on the M40. It is typical of the care and concern that he shows for his constituents in advocating their needs in the House. He has also taken many opportunities to lobby me and to write to me on the same matters.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the issue again, and to say a little about the schemes for improvement between junction 1A and junction 4 at High Wycombe, and about our choice of the DBFO route to deliver this important scheme.

As my hon. Friend said, traffic has grown considerably, now averaging between 87,000 and 101,000 vehicles a day between junctions 1A and 4. As I have found when travelling to the midlands and further north using the M40, congestion at these junctions and along that stretch is particularly heavy. We expect traffic to continue to grow in line with the long-term growth of the economy. If this stretch is left unattended, the expected increase in traffic would lead to existing congestion at peak times becoming more frequent and longer lasting.

Congestion has no merits. It brings with it longer journey times, greater fuel consumption, stress and frustration, accidents and higher levels of pollution. In this case there is also the possibility of traffic diverting to alternative, less appropriate routes such as the A40.

I wrote in December to my hon. Friend explaining why this improvement was being considered for a privately financed shadow toll contract—a design, build, finance and operate project. I shall return to the merits and timing of DBFO contracts a little later, but I am convinced that we can deliver the benefits of this scheme more quickly under the DBFO arrangement than we could on the public sector budget under conventional procurement.

My hon. Friend has raised a number of questions about the environmental effects of the motorway and of the improvement scheme, and I want to deal with the substance of these issues. He will know that the Highways Agency routinely examines very carefully the environmental effects of schemes and the measures needed to mitigate them. That has been done with these improvements.

A considerable advantage of building on the existing road network—such as widening, rather than building completely new roads across new routes—is that it limits intrusion into built-up and rural areas. But there is no reason why those living alongside existing routes should suffer more from the policy of containing road improvements to existing corridors. It is therefore very much our aim to try to improve the level of protection that they enjoy. I know that my hon. Friend appreciates the degree of environmental protection designed into the scheme between junctions 1A and 3. The Highways Agency has sought to limit the local effect of the widening still further by designing it to be carried out entirely within the existing highway boundary.

Noise is always a legitimate concern. We are all too aware that existing traffic noise levels next to the motorway are generally very high. Prevailing noise levels are estimated to be as high as 75 dB within 55 yd of the motorway and between 70 and 75 adjacent to existing main roads. At about 325 yd from the motorway, noise levels generally have dropped to only about 68 dB. The area around the Loudwater viaduct is particularly noisy where the motorway is elevated.

The proposed improvement includes extensive environmental protection: 6 to 9 ft noise barriers and bunding are proposed at sensitive locations. The overall aim is to reduce existing traffic noise by a significant level for people living near to the motorway. As my hon. Friend knows, I am delighted to be able to confirm to him again today that we are intending to use a porous asphalt surface where it is required, although not all of the normal criteria are met.

Where durability and maintenance are not a problem, as in this instance, the use of porous asphalt brings significant noise reduction benefits as well as improving safety by reducing spray in wet conditions. I am pleased to say that this and all other commitments to environmental measures made in our original decision letter will be honoured in the DBFO contract.

Between junctions 1A and 3, about 90 properties qualify for noise insulation either from traffic noise or construction noise. Installation of secondary glazing is currently under way. The insulation should all be complete before the start of work, which will protect against the inevitably high levels of construction noise. There will, of course, be strict controls over the timing of construction. There will also be extensive visual screening. The DBFO contract will honour those undertakings too.

My hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Whitney) have pressed me about the need to get on with the further scheme for widening between junctions 3 and 4, which includes the notorious Handy

[Mr. John Watts]

Cross interchange. The scheme is in the early stages of its development. The improvement is important and it will be pursued, but other schemes have higher priority.

There has been extensive public consultation about the nature of the improvement between junctions 3 and 4. It was on the basis of two options, one of which would incorporate an improved Handy Cross junction on its present alignment, and the other a new junction further to the south. The second option would encroach slightly on an area of outstanding natural beauty, so it raises some sensitive issues. All the responses that have been received are being carefully analysed. I hope that it will not be too long before we can announce our conclusions on the route to be developed. Following that, the scheme will have to be developed so that it is ready for presentation at a public inquiry, which I think is almost inevitable.

We have not pinned all our hopes on the major improvement scheme. There has been a continuing programme of smaller improvements to the Handy Cross roundabout during the past three years. These include slip-road widening, traffic-monitoring loops and upgraded traffic-signal equipment. All these improvements provide increased capacity in the short term. The Highways Agency has undertaken extensive reviews of traffic-signal timings to prevent queuing on the existing slip road, so reducing the possibility of the interchange becoming gridlocked.

I turn now to our private finance policy and how we propose to apply it to the M40. The private finance initiative is gathering pace. We see new opportunities in many areas day by day, and transport is at the forefront of them. The Highways Agency and the Department have been keen to innovate in getting roads built and maintained. That is as it should be. The nation's most important roads are among its most important assets. There is no place for old-fashioned thinking.

These considerations underpin our design, build, finance and operate contracts. We view the investment from the service end of the project and pay accordingly. The principle is, no service, no pay. That is the basis on which we tendered the initial four projects in January. It will underpin the further tranche of four, which includes the M40, which I announced last week.

I shall comment briefly on the contract's main features. First, design. That means two things. There is the strategic, external element of design as it benefits the national roads system—that remains primarily the Government's responsibility—and taking the case through a public inquiry.

All undertakings given at or since public inquiries will be binding on the company which eventually delivers the project. But there is still significant scope for greater freedom for the appointed company to apply business principles in the realisation of that design during the building phase of work. There are efficiencies to be gained in the process of construction, not least as in the case of the M40, where the project must be conducted on a live motorway.

With financial responsibility goes risk. The company will not be paid fully until the full service is delivered, post-construction. Its payments will depend, at the margin, on delivering an efficient service. Finance is clearly significant both in terms of cost control and reinforcing discipline in the process of construction, but also in terms of volume and speed. Private finance enables projects to tap into a flexible and enthusiastic investment market. Private finance also allows us to proceed with projects that we could not otherwise afford or only at a later date.

We shall be able to realise the benefits of these further projects both to the national road system and the local communities it serves. The most important element of the new contract is, however, the operational phase. We shall pay shadow tolls in return for a service given. The amount of those tolls will in practice be set by a market judgment of the standard and reliability of that service.

The contract will last for 30 years. My hon. Friend knows as much about the City as any of use in the House, and will recognise that a DBFO is not merely a deferred payment or credit arrangement. If that was all we wanted, we could get project finance over a period of 15 to 18 years. We would not have to go to 30 years for such an arrangement. Crucially, we want bidders to base their assumptions not only on having to live with what they build, but on taking on long-term maintenance obligations and the obligation to provide reliability of service to the motoring public. That means extending company obligations, both geographically and in time.

The eight projects announced so far cover nearly 6 per cent. of the trunk road and motorway system. They provide us with the test bed for a new industry. The contract gives us the opportunity to unify responsibilities which are now distributed between private companies and public authorities. The private sector already has a great deal to do with design, construction and maintenance. The next logical step is to extend this into road management. But the Secretary of State remains the client as the proxy for the travelling public, and he also remains the highways authority for motorways and trunk roads.

From what my hon. Friend said—I know that he is supported by other hon. Members—there is no doubt that the section between the M25 and High Wycombe must be widened. The widening scheme between junctions 1A and 3 is fully authorised. It will supply a fourth lane in each direction on the most heavily used section of the motorway. The next section to the west between junctions 3 and 4 is at an early stage and it must be developed and taken through a public inquiry before it can be implemented.

The DBFO contract, however, contains provisions which allow further contracts to be let to deliver schemes subsequently authorised. The first task at High Wycombe is to get a scheme through a public inquiry.

In taking forward private finance proposals, we have been met with great enthusiasm to take on significant management tasks as well as construction. The M40 project is a direct response to that enthusiasm. The company will maintain and manage in daily service for 30 years some 75 miles of motorway from London to Warwick. It will need to co-operate with the highway authorities, the police and other organisations with a direct interest in the road.

As to time scale, my hon. Friend is naturally concerned that the scheme is delivered as rapidly as possible. We invited expressions of interest only last week, and submissions are due by the end of March. We shall go out to tender in June, and negotiate bids received in November. On that basis, construction should start next

spring, and we should also achieve a transfer of managerial responsibility for the existing M40, from junction 1 to junction 15 at Warwick.

I very much welcome the warm support which my hon. Friend expressed for our decision to make use of the DBFO route for carrying forward this scheme. I see the M40 as leading the way to the future management of our national roads system, and I look for the project to receive as warm a welcome locally as it has received from my hon. Friend.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 27 February 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Discrimination in Sport

1. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he last met representatives of the Rugby Football Union to discuss discrimination in sport.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Iain Sproat): I meet representatives of the Rugby Football Union and the Rugby League on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of issues.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is the Minister aware that one of the finest qualities of the Secretary of State is his sense of humour? Is he aware that in his previous post at the Treasury the Secretary of State told me in a parliamentary answer that top rugby union players did not pay income tax because theirs was strictly an amateur sport? In view of the money now accruing to the Government as a result of the Inland Revenue investigation of rugby union, would it not be right and proper for that funding to be passed directly to the Rugby League for use in ground improvement, in recognition of the discrimination that that sport has suffered in the past 100 years?

Mr. Sproat: It is true that the Inland Revenue is currently investigating the income of not only rugby league but rugby union players. As for the safety of sports grounds, I am trying to find a way to help rugby league and not just association football.

Sir Donald Thompson: Does my hon. Friend agree that rugby union is a game played nationwide by men and boys aged six to 60—

Mr. Menzies Campbell: And women.

Sir Donald Thompson:—and by some ladies, and that relations between the Rugby League and the Rugby Football Union have never been better since the Rugby League was formed at the George hotel in 1895?

Mr. Sproat: My hon. Friend is right. Relations between the Rugby Football Union and the Rugby League are at an all-time peak. The meeting on 27 January between Mr. Walker and Mr. Lindsey, representing rugby league, and Mr. Pugh and Mr. Rowlands, representing rugby union, was of great symbolic importance. The gangways between rugby union and rugby league are opening up. That is a good thing. I should also point out that Wasps rugby football club has provided the ground for the amateur rugby league final in London for the past five years. That is a good thing and typical.

Mr. Hoyle: In view of that encouraging reply, is the Minister aware of the case of my constituent, Adrian Spencer, who played amateur rugby league football with Woolston? He played a few games for London Crusaders, for which he received no payment; yet when he played in the Varsity match he was suspended for 12 months. Will the Minister note the contrast between him and Mike Catt, the England player, who admitted receiving £140 per week expenses when he played in South Africa but was exonerated? Will he seek a meeting with the Rugby Union to condemn the injustice to my constituent and ask for his reinstatement forthwith? Will he also ask it to apply rules for 1995 and not those more akin to 1895?

Mr. Sproat: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about Adrian Spencer, who played for only a few minutes; he was on and off the field so quickly that I hardly noticed him, but the hon. Gentleman's point is none the less important and I will draw it to the attention of the rugby union authorities.

Gardening

2. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make it his policy to allocate funds to promote gardening.

Mr. Sproat: The Department of National Heritage, its agencies and sponsored bodies do not give grants to gardening as an activity in its own right. However, through a number of its agencies and bodies the Department supports the maintenance and preservation of gardens of historic and heritage interest.

Dr. Spink: Is my hon. Friend aware of the outstanding success of Benfleet horticultural society, of which I am a member? Does he agree that the national heritage of Great Britain is characterised by ordinary front and rear gardens and allotments and not by men in tights and large Italian singers? Will any funds be available from the national lottery for our great garden institutions, such as Kew gardens?

Mr. Sproat: I agree about the great importance of allotments. In fact, the Department of the Environment gives £35,000 per year to the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners. On the national lottery, it would be appropriate for applications to be made to the National Heritage memorial fund for historic gardens and I saw in the newspaper this morning that Kew gardens is applying for £41 million from the millennium fund.

Mr. Flynn: Is not the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) right in saying that our gardens are a great tourist attraction? The Secretary of State said that he would announce the strategy for tourism—promised before Christmas—on St. David's day at the Tower of London. While the choice of day is admirable, why on earth is it not being presented to Parliament so that we

can debate in detail many of the controversial issues in that statement? When will the House hear what our strategy for tourism is?

Mr. Sproat: I have no doubt that a proper opportunity will be found for the House to express its views on that important matter.

Cross-media Ownership

4. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent representations he has received on cross-media ownership; and if he will make a statement.

6. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he intends to announce his proposals on cross-media ownership.

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): The Government have received 64 written representations since the review was announced last year. We shall announce our conclusions when we have completed consideration of the issues that they raise.

Sir Michael Neubert: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the series of separate boxes within which the different aspects of the media are regulated are looking as outdated as a 1950s television set? Would it not better reflect the interaction of rapidly developing technologies if considerations of monopoly and limitations on ownership were determined by reference to a more fluid, across-the-board assessment at national or local level or both?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point, which he will know has been the subject of an investigation by the British media industry group. He will also know that if we pursued the train of thought that he suggests, the most difficult questions would arise in terms of the measurement of the value of a share in one part of the media compared with the value of a share in another part of that market. In other words, how much is one newspaper share worth as against one television share? Those are difficult and intricate issues to which I do not think that anyone in the industry believes that we have a convincing solution.

Mr. Mitchell: Will the Minister bear it in mind that in this consideration it is more important to get it right than to get it quick? Will he bear in mind primarily the need to stop any further erosion of the regionally based ITV companies, which have already been far too undermined by the Broadcasting Act 1990? Secondly, will he bear in mind the need to avoid local media monopolies of any kind? Thirdly, will he bear in mind the need to attract more money into programme production rather than any struggle for transmission facilities?

Mr. Dorrell: I certainly agree that it is more important to get it right than to get it quickly. That is why we are taking our time to ensure that the issues are properly teased out. Having said that, however, it is also important to bring the process to a close because important issues to do with the structure of the market, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) referred, need to be resolved. As regards the hon. Gentleman's emphasis on the importance of regional diversity and of ensuring that monopolies are avoided at regional as well as national level, I agree with him and it will be one of the aspects covered in the Government's conclusions.

Mr. Fabricant: Does my right hon. Friend agree that mobility of labour within the media is tremendously important? Does he not think it a little rich and rather worrying that the head of news at BBC Westminster is leaving to become director of campaigning and elections for the Labour party?

Mr. Dorrell: I do not intend to get involved in offering career advice to an employee of any part of the public sector. Clearly, it is important that anyone who takes a job as campaigning officer for the Labour party should have career plans beyond the next election because the Labour party will not provide them.

Mr. Chris Smith: The Secretary of State will agree that one of the main strands of a fair and sensible cross-media ownership settlement is to ensure that self-regulation of the press works and is seen to work. Does he also agree that, above all, a fair-minded and impartial weighing up of sensitive evidence is needed from the Press Complaints Commission? How can that possibly happen when a man as rudely opinionated and irrational as Sir Bernard Ingham is proposed for membership?

Mr. Dorrell: I am not sure that press privacy regulations arise directly out of cross-media ownership, but I am happy to reply to the hon. Gentleman's question. The Government have made it clear that we would prefer a model for regulation of the press built on the principles of self-regulation. It follows from that proposition that responsibility for appointing people to the self-regulatory body rests not with the Government or the Opposition but with the press itself. None the less, the effectiveness of any model for self-regulation depends on an effective policing body. Whatever else may be said about Sir Bernard Ingham—for this purpose, his views are frankly irrelevant—no one can deny that he is effective. If we want an effective regulator, effectiveness is the criterion that we should apply to potential candidates.

Football Stadiums

5. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will review the requirement for all-seater stadiums at league football matches.

Mr. Sproat: The issue was most recently reviewed in 1992 when it was decided that the all-seater requirement would apply only to clubs in the Football Association premier league and the first division of the Football League. Virtually all those clubs now have all-seater stadiums. All other Football League clubs are being allowed to retain standing accommodation. I have no plans to review the matter again.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is the Minister aware that the majority of football fans seem to agree that the exciting character of football matches has been seriously undermined by the removal of standing areas? In view of recent initiatives on safe standing areas, is there not

a case for the Minister to review the matter, particularly for clubs in the first division which have not completed their all-seater arrangements?

Mr. Sproat: I am sorry to say that the short answer is no. As for football fans enjoying standing on the terraces, it is true that they did and there are arguments in favour of terraces, but they are not so great as the arguments for all-seater stadiums which, although not a panacea, have helped to increase the number of people watching football matches over the past 10 years by 1.2 million.

Mr. Orme: As one who supports all-seater stadiums, does the Minister agree with me that their purpose is not only to make football more accessible and allow people to see matches properly but to have some control over crowds? What action will the Government take to offset the current rise in racism in sport?

Mr. Sproat: The right hon. Gentleman is certainly correct to say that all-seater stadiums appear to have helped to control violence, from whatever source, at grounds. They do not stop it but, combined with measures such as closed-circuit television, they are of great benefit. I am in the process of holding a number of meetings with the premier league, the Football Association and the Football League to see what more, if anything, can be done.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is only right and proper that in the 1990s people should be able to watch football in comfort and safety, and that all-seater stadiums provide both? Does he agree that, where people can choose between attending an all-seater stadium or a stadium in which there is standing room only, they usually prefer the all-seater stadium?

Mr. Sproat: I think that, on balance, my hon. Friend is correct. It is interesting that a number of clubs which do not have to go all-seater, such as Birmingham, Huddersfield and Northampton, have chosen to do so because their fans find such grounds better for watching football matches.

Mr. Pendry: The hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) made a strong point about safe standing areas at football grounds. Is the Minister also aware of the need for more flexibility towards clubs attempting to relocate their grounds outside town centres, as recommended in the Taylor report and by the Sports Council? Does he appreciate that unless he resolves the differences between his Department and the Department of the Environment as the planning Department, many clubs will go to the wall and that our national game will be the poorer for the loss of clubs already in difficulty such as Southampton, Portsmouth, Exeter, Bristol Rovers, Sunderland, Oxford United and Grimsby, to name but a few?

Mr. Sproat: It is certainly true that a number of clubs want to relocate, but have been unable to do so. I believe that Southend wants to relocate, but has been unable to find a place to relocate. The recent decision about Portsmouth is a good example. A balance must be struck between the needs of the planning authorities and those of the football clubs. We shall do our best to see that a fair balance is struck.

National Lottery

8. **Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received from organisations which wish to relieve the Arts Council of its responsibilities for distributing funds from the national lottery.

Mr. Sproat: I have received no such representations.

Mr. Duncan: In view of some rather puzzling criticism that has appeared in the newspapers, notably the *Evening Standard* and *The Independent*, about the distribution of lottery funds by the Arts Council, will the Minister undertake to consult Lord Gowrie to satisfy himself that the procedures laid down by the Arts Council are set at the highest possible standard?

Mr. Sproat: Yes. My hon. Friend has made an important point. I also noticed the article in *The Independent*, which seemed to suggest that some members of advisory panels on the Arts Council, or their institutions, had been in receipt of funds from the Arts Council. Now that the national lottery is more than doubling—or is at least likely to do so—the amount of money that the Arts Council has to distribute, it is only right that the financial procedures should be absolutely above all suspicion. My hon. Friend will be interested to know that the National Audit Office expects shortly to announce its validation—or otherwise, I suppose—of the Arts Council's suggestions.

Ms Hoey: Does the Minister accept that the Arts Council would have more money to distribute from the national lottery if Camelot was not taking such huge profits, which were not taken into account when the regulations governing who should get the contract to start with were drawn up? It is about time that the Minister addressed that problem and forced Camelot to pay back its start-up costs immediately.

Mr. Sproat: No, I do not agree. Camelot agreed to bid and accept the franchise on the basis of a return of between 5 and 6 per cent. of the franchise. That was the risk that it took and that percentage is a perfectly fair return. In fact, it was the lowest return offered by any of the companies which bid for the franchise.

Tourism

9. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the importance of the arts in attracting visitors to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dorrell: The arts play a vital role in bringing visitors to this country. In the 1993 London overseas visitors survey, 69 per cent. of overseas visitors cited the heritage as one of the main reasons for their visit and 45 per cent. mentioned the arts and museums and galleries as being among the main reasons for their visit.

Mr. Waterson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that on top of the figures he has already quoted, on average one theatre seat in three in London is filled by a foreign visitor? Does he agree

that that illustrates the importance of his support for the arts, and particularly the extra £7 million for cultural causes that he announced recently?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about London theatres. He might have added that not only are one third of London theatre seats sold to overseas visitors, but a further third are sold to visitors from out of London who buy theatre tickets during their visit to the city. That is a good example of the circular and benign relationship which binds the arts and the tourist industry, giving each a vested interest in the expansion of the other.

Mr. Enright: Does the Secretary of State agree that regional arts are extremely important in that context? Will he specifically consider Wakefield sculpture park, which is a world leader and desperately in need of assistance?

Mr. Dorrell: I entirely agree that the principles illustrated by the London case apply with equal force across the United Kingdom. The example of the Wakefield sculpture park is regularly cited to me as an arts venue that attracts visitors to a region to which they might not otherwise go.

National Centre for Athletics

10. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to establish a new national centre for athletics; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: The establishment of a new national centre for athletics is essentially a matter for the British Athletic Federation. However, I am concerned that proper sporting structures should exist to enable our young sportsmen and women to reach their potential.

Mr. Greenway: Bearing in mind the great distinction that our colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe), achieved largely without support, would it be possible to encourage and support future athletes? During my hon. Friend the Minister's visit to Australia, did he manage to visit the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra? If so, what does it cost to run and who profits, and would such an institution in Britain be eligible for national lottery funding?

Mr. Sproat: It would certainly be possible for an organisation in this country comparable with the Australian Institute of Sport to be funded by the national lottery. From memory, I believe that the cost of the Australian model is about £10 million per year. I am sure that the relevant organisations will want to consider that closely.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: May I persuade the Minister not to be diverted by the suggestion that a national centre is the way to increase the standard of performance in athletics once and for all? Will he accept from me that proper opportunities at school, a vibrant system of club athletics and the provision of adequate facilities—especially indoor facilities, given the climate of the United Kingdom—are much more likely in the long term to produce the type of performances that we would all wish?

Mr. Sproat: I agree 100 per cent. with what the hon. and learned Gentleman said about the benefits which would flow from obtaining the school, university, club and indoor facilities that he would wish. However, I do not think that any of that means that we should not consider something more central as well, but that is a matter for the British Athletic Federation to consider.

Company Connections, Wales

11. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on his investigations into the connection between the Penwyn Pinc Company, the Welsh Rock and Folk Music Company, the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts and the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority-S4C.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department has received reports from ABSA and the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority on the circumstances of an award to the Welsh Rock and Folk Music Council under the business sponsorship incentive scheme. It has commissioned a separate review, independent of the bodies involved, from a senior Treasury official, Mr. John Beastall. Both ABSA and the Welsh Fourth Channel Authority will be closely involved in the review.

Mr. Morgan: Notwithstanding that answer, does the Secretary of State agree that there is the whiff of cultural money laundering about the entire episode? In the light of previous unhappy experiences with aspects of ABSA's management and the insider trading that went on in that organisation, will he agree to accelerate the review and announce its results to the House at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Dorrell: It was because we were concerned about reports in respect of the Welsh arrangements for BSIS distribution that we asked Mr. Beastall to conduct the investigation. I can give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that his report will be made available to the House.

Quality of Service

12. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what criteria or benchmarks are used to measure the quality of service provided by his Department.

Mr. Sproat: We have performance targets for the key areas in which services are delivered to ensure that they are of high quality and that they support the Department's aims and objectives.

Mr. Mackinlay: Why does the Minister not use the year 1979 as his benchmark? Does he agree that our cherished buildings are falling into decay, we cannot excel in international sporting competitions and the quality of our performing arts is being diminished as a result of lack of funding? Is he aware that the Library Association is especially worried about the serious cuts in the public library service in recent years and the fact that the Treasury projects a further two years of cuts in that area? How does the Minister intend to ensure

that public libraries are enhanced, improved and reopened instead of being closed, as has been the hallmark of the Tory years?

Mr. Sproat: I will deal with as many of the hon. Gentleman's questions as I can remember.

Capital expenditure on sports facilities will come under the lottery and I hope that that will be wisely used.

On the arts, the hon. Gentleman knows that £191.1 million has been given to the Arts Council of England next year—an increase of 3.7 per cent.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I wish local public libraries to flourish. With regard to spending, the hon. Gentleman should speak to the Department of the Environment about the standard spending assessment.

Mr. Fisher: Has the Minister actually read the Library Association's survey, which shows the cuts that are taking place in library authorities controlled by all political parties throughout the country? Does he not understand the damage that cuts in public libraries do to communities, to the education of children and of adults, to literacy and to the information revolution that the Government surely want to take place? How can people take full advantage of the information revolution coming through the super-highways if, as a result of the stupid cuts that the Conservative Government are implementing, access to information cannot be obtained through public libraries, which are the one means of access that everyone—small companies and individuals—can have to the information revolution?

Mr. Sproat: On the hon. Gentleman's main point, I share his views on the importance of public libraries. My Department will shortly be publishing our response to the review and opportunities will no doubt be found in the House to discuss both the review and the Department's response to it.

British Film Industry

15. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to give additional help and support to the British film industry.

Mr. Dorrell: The Select Committee on National Heritage is currently conducting an inquiry on the subject and I have undertaken to set out the Government's approach in my response to the Committee's findings.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that British-production films such as "Four Weddings and a Funeral" and "Shallow Grave" are excellent? Will he agree to promote the British film industry as much as he can and to try to encourage as many British business men as possible to invest in that worthwhile venture?

Mr. Dorrell: I agree with my hon. Friend on all counts and I look forward to responding to the invitation from Mr. Michael Grade to attend the launch in Britain of "The Madness of King George". My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the flowering of the British film industry which is taking place at present. We must now ensure that we take advantage of the skills and resources available within the British film industry, not merely to promote the development of British films—although that is important—but to attract to our shores internationally mobile film-making projects. That is why the Government continue to support the British Film Commission and why I was so pleased to be able to tell the Select Committee that last year's expenditure on films made in Britain was higher than in any year since 1980.

Mr. Dafis: Does the Minister agree that Channel 4's "Film on Four" is now the cornerstone of the British film industry, both by virtue of the budget made available through it and because films shown on that channel are eligible for nomination for Oscars and BAFTA awards? Does he accept that the number of films commissioned from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for "Film on Four" is unacceptably low? Will he give the figures and undertake to do something to ensure that that serious imbalance is corrected?

Mr. Dorrell: I recognise that Channel 4 has played a distinguished role in the resurgence of film making in Britain and I hope that that process will continue. As for assistance to specific forms of film making—whether through Channel 4 or another film-making agency—we shall have to wait until the response to the Select Committee report, which I mentioned in my initial answer.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Notwithstanding the considerable success that the British film industry is enjoying—which many of us hope will be reflected in the academy awards ceremony next month, with an Oscar for Mr. Nigel Hawthorne, the former civil servant—does my right hon. Friend agree that the Irish have captured much of the potential market for film making in this country as they have a much more liberal tax regime? Will my right hon. Friend bear that point in mind and go and see for himself what the Irish are doing before he responds to the Select Committee report?

Mr. Dorrell: I will certainly take account of the package of support and the environment available to film makers working in Britain compared with what is available in comparable countries. Before we go overboard in our praise for the Irish film-making regime, I should remind the House that the amount spent on film making in Ireland last year was roughly £100 million while the amount spent on film making in Britain last year was roughly £400 million, so the imbalance is not quite as is sometimes suggested.

Mr. Maclennan: In recognising the distinguished role of Channel 4 in film making, would not the Secretary of State do well to listen to the channel's chairman, Sir Michael Bishop, who advocated a change in the funding formula, which currently results in about £60 million per year being siphoned away from programme and film making by Channel 4? The right hon. Gentleman should listen particularly to the offers to recompense any companies in the independent sector which have not made the income that they predicted to the Independent Television Commission in 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: What the hon. Member describes as siphoning off money is a payment by Channel 4 to the Channel 3 licensees—the people who took the risk associated with Channel 4.

The management of Channel 4 has cause to celebrate the fact that that risk has proved a triumphant success. However, I do not believe that it is a reason to rewrite the agreement that binds Channel 3 and Channel 4 under terms that were known to both when the licences were granted.

Football Players

16. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what recent meetings he has had with officers of the Football Association to discuss the behaviour of football players during matches.

Mr. Sproat: I have regular meetings with the various footballing bodies and I have made my concerns about the behaviour of football players clear. Responsibility, however, rests with the Football Association, which has firm disciplinary procedures to deal with player misconduct.

Mr. Cox: I welcome the Minister's reply, but, sadly, we see more and more pretty despicable behaviour by players during football matches. If we condemn so-called football supporters for their deplorable behaviour, we must be equally tough on footballers. Will the Minister assure the House that he will continue to press the appropriate football authorities about the need to get really tough with players who bring this great game into disrepute?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. The Football Association's response to the incident involving Mr. Cantona—whereby it doubled the fine imposed and greatly lengthened the amount of time that he will be out of football—showed that it is prepared to act in a way that the hon. Gentleman and I would like.

Mr. Matthew Banks: I welcome my hon. Friend's remarks. At a future meeting with officers of the Football Association, will he make it quite clear that professional footballers have a duty to set a much better example in terms of their behaviour both on and off the pitch to the youth of this country?

Mr. Sproat: Professional footballers—indeed, professional and amateur players of all sports—have a tremendous duty to provide proper role models for young people, and I think that the overwhelming number of them do so.

National Lottery

17. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received on the timing of distribution of national lottery funds for good causes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I have received a number of representations from members of the public and others expressing a variety of views.

Mr. Hawkins: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Will he bear it in mind that the historic success of the national lottery—which has so captured the public's imagination and is an enormous credit to the bravery of those in the Government who decided to push ahead with it in the face of much carping and unfair criticism from the Opposition—must be reinforced by ensuring that the funds raised are distributed in a timely manner and to good causes?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I assure him that arrangements are proceeding to ensure that the distributer bodies make the first announcements of lottery distribution decisions within the next few weeks. As my hon. Friend said, I am confident that they will reflect a major step forward in funding not only sport, the arts and heritage but, ultimately, through the millennium fund and the charities board, those activities that will result from the decision of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to introduce the lottery.

Mr. Olner: What has happened to the lottery moneys that are waiting to be distributed to those bodies? How transparent are Camelot's accounting procedures? What is happening to the interest that is accruing on the millions of pounds that are still waiting to be distributed?

Mr. Dorrell: Each week Camelot pays the amount available for good causes into the national loans distribution fund, where it is invested in public sector instruments and collects interest which accrues to the benefit of the distribution fund. So far, that interest amounts to more than £1 million.

Mr. Jessel: Can my right hon. Friend say whether the projection for the sums available for good causes is substantially larger than originally forecast and, if so, should we not all take credit for what is a brilliant national achievement?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is quite right to say that the amounts being raised by the lottery week after week are substantially greater than the estimates that were offered when the legislation was introduced. They are also higher than the more ambitious figures that were published around the time when the licence was granted. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the lottery is a substantial success which has unlocked a new source of funding for various good causes that could not reasonably be anticipated to come from any other source.

Royal Naval College

18. **Mr. Raynsford:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he is taking to ensure the future maintenance of the buildings currently occupied by the Royal Naval college at Greenwich.

Mr. Sproat: My Department is currently responsible for maintaining these important historic buildings. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will ensure that there is a suitable occupant to secure their future. Proposals, including one from an organisation outside the Ministry of Defence, are being evaluated by my right hon. and learned Friend, in consultation with my Department.

Mr. Raynsford: Will the Minister ensure that his Department does rather better with buildings currently occupied by the Royal Naval college than it has in respect of the adjacent building, the Dreadnought seamen's hospital, which has been empty for almost nine years and the condition of which, despite it being a historic building, is deteriorating badly? It is costing

the taxpayer an enormous amount to maintain. Will the Minister ensure that a similar fate does not befall the historic buildings occupied by the Naval college?

Mr. Sproat: Yes, I will do everything that I can in respect of the Royal Naval college. As to the Dreadnought hospital, I will look at the papers again after this Question Time.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Sentencing

29. **Dr. Spink:** To ask the Attorney-General how many cases he has referred to the Court of Appeal for review of an apparently over-lenient sentence.

The Attorney-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): Since 1989, 181 cases have been referred to the Court of Appeal in England and Wales and 11 in Northern Ireland; 19 were subsequently withdrawn. Of the 166 cases heard to date, 136—or 82 per cent.—resulted in an increased sentence.

Dr. Spink: Will my right hon. and learned Friend join me and the whole House in expressing condolences to the family of Tony Martin, a 17-year-old who died in my constituency? In the words of the judge, a knife was opened and plunged into the boy's body. Does my right hon. and learned Friend understand the sense of great outrage in the community that I represent because a six-year sentence only was passed on the 31-year-old man, Mr. Osborne, who committed that crime? Although I entirely understand—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman on a serious issue, but this seems to be a constituency matter on which representations should be made in writing, or should be the subject of an Adjournment debate. In Question Time, questions must be brief and the Minister concerned must be fully aware of all the circumstances.

Dr. Spink: I was coming to the point, Madam Speaker, and I appreciate your help.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that severe and harsh deterrent sentences should be passed, to prevent people from going armed with knives and other weapons to places of entertainment, where they put our constituents at unacceptable risk?

The Attorney-General: The whole House will have the deepest sympathy for the family of the victim in that tragic case. The sentence imposed by the learned judge depended on the facts as found by the jury. It found proved a case of manslaughter, but found the defendant not guilty of murder. In those circumstances, there can be no doubt that the sentence imposed was well within the range available to the learned judge.

Mr. Mullin: Does the Attorney-General think that his powers to appeal against sentences should be extended to those imposed by magistrates?

The Attorney-General: No. That jurisdiction must be exercised with great care, with individual attention being given to each case. If one extended it to the just over 1 million cases dealt with by magistrates courts each year, it would not be possible to apply the detailed care and consideration that the jurisdiction requires.

Leon Patterson

30. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the circumstances surrounding the death of Leon Patterson in Stockport police station; and what discussions he has had with the Crown Prosecution Service on this matter.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Derek Spencer): The Attorney-General received a report on the death of Leon Patterson from the Director of Public Prosecutions. Following an investigation by Greater Manchester police, the headquarters of the Crown Prosecution Service carefully considered all the facts and decided that the evidence did not provide a realistic prospect of convicting any person of any criminal offence against the deceased.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Solicitor-General realise that that is an appalling response to a terrible tragedy? It is nearly two years since the inquest on Leon Patterson returned a verdict of unlawful killing. Eventually, an investigation was mounted by Greater Manchester police, who apparently claimed that they could not find the culprits responsible, even though Mr. Patterson died in a police station and there was a verdict of unlawful death.

Does not the Minister think that it is time to reopen this case and ensure that those who are guilty of the death of Leon Patterson are brought to justice? My constituent's family have suffered grievously since his death, and I believe that justice should be done and be seen to be done in this case.

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman omitted a very important statement of fact from his recitation. The coroner's verdict of unlawful killing was quashed by the High Court on 25 October 1994. The divisional court ordered a re-hearing, and all these matters, which have given rise to understandable anguish among the family and the community, can be ventilated at that coroner's inquest.

The hon. Gentleman may agree that it is greatly in the interests of the family of the deceased, the doctors who attended and the police that there should be no rush to judgment before this full and further inquest has been held.

Victims' Families

31. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Attorney-General to what extent the families of victims are taken into account by the Crown Prosecution Service during the prosecution process.

The Attorney-General: When taking a decision to prosecute, the interests of the victim and his or her family are an important factor in determining the balance of the public interest.

Mr. Hendry: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for that answer. Does he agree that it is of paramount importance that the Crown Prosecution Service keep in close contact with the families of victims at each stage of a prosecution? Does he further

agree that that is particularly important when a case is not brought to court, so that the families may understand the precise reasons why?

The Attorney-General: Yes, my hon. Friend makes two good points. It is very important that both the CPS and the police, who are often the main point of contact, keep in touch with the victim on all sorts of matters in relation to a crime and potential prosecution—bail, compensation, dates of hearing and progress of the case. In particular, as my hon. Friend says, this is most important where it has been decided not to prosecute, so that that decision can be properly explained to the victim or the family.

Mr. Donald Anderson: We welcome the fact that the Director of Public Prosecutions will now record the views of victims for bail purposes, but will the Attorney-General go further and allow the trial judge—who, after all, is aware of relations between the victim and the accused—to direct, in cases of sexual offences and of violence, that the victim and family be informed before the accused or convicted person is released on parole or on licence? Indeed, in cases of violence and of sexual offences, perhaps the trial judge should even direct where the convicted person should go on home leave.

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman raises important questions, but they are, as he realises, matters for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I quite agree with him about the importance of keeping victims in touch, especially when a dangerous convicted person is likely to return to a neighbourhood.

Mr. Beith: Is the Attorney-General aware that the anguish of a victim's family is particularly acute during the court proceedings, when they may be treated by court officials merely as witnesses? They need to be kept informed of progress, and perhaps to be taken aside and informed of important developments in the case or its outcome. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman feed the experience of his Department into that of the Home Office when considering this aspect?

The Attorney-General: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. It can be very muddling for family members who go to court, and it is important that prosecutors and police try to find time to explain to the family of the victim, or to the victim himself, what stage a case has reached. The same applies to court staff.

Lenient Sentencing

32. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on trends on appeals against lenient sentencing.

The Solicitor-General : As the Attorney-General's power of review has become more widely recognised, the number of sentences that he has been asked to consider has increased.

Mr. Spring: Will my hon. and learned Friend confirm that the power to refer unduly lenient sentences to the Court of Appeal has begun to impact on sentences in the first instance? As that matches the public mood, it is greatly to be welcomed.

The Solicitor-General: I can indeed confirm that. In the past 12 months or so we have referred about 12 cases arising out of deaths on the road. The Lord Chief Justice has taken the opportunity in those cases not only to increase the sentence but to update the guidelines in Boswell to take account of the decision taken in the House to increase the maximum sentence from five years to 10 years. As a result of these decisions, general sentencing for causing death on the road has increased nationwide.

Racial Attacks

33. **Ms Abbott:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last met the head of the Crown Prosecution Service to discuss racial attacks.

The Attorney-General: I meet the Director of Public Prosecutions regularly. Cases with a racial element are discussed as and when they arise.

Ms Abbott: Is the Attorney-General aware of the concern in the black and Asian communities about the failure to bring people to book for a number of notorious racist killings and attacks in recent months?

The Attorney-General: Yes, I am aware of the concerns raised by the hon. Lady. I am aware too of the specific concerns that she and two of her hon. Friends have raised with the Director of Public Prosecutions. The Crown Prosecution Service takes any case with a racial element especially seriously. I urge the hon. Lady to accept the invitation given to her by the director and the chief Crown prosecutor for London to visit the chief prosecutor to discuss these cases with him so that she may understand fully the lengths and efforts that have been gone to and the background to the cases.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Kenya

39. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding has been allocated for this year to help the Government of Kenya with the problems caused by street children in that country; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): We have allocated £150,000 for a shelter, education and feeding programme run by the International Child Care Trust in Kitale, £30,000 of which has been allocated for this year.

Mr. Cox: I welcome the Minister's reply, but is he aware that the problems are on-going in Kenya? Does he accept that there is no more depressing sight than to see young street children roaming without any stability in their lives? Is he further aware that many people—not necessarily within organisations, but members of the general public—seek to help these

children? They need advice, however, and resources. Will the Minister seek to pursue the matter via the Kenyan Government and to offer them resources?

Mr. Baldry: The whole House shares the hon. Gentleman's concern about street children in Kenya and elsewhere. We have a substantial aid programme in Kenya; we donate £31 million of bilateral aid to Kenya. The purpose of our aid programme in Kenya is to reduce poverty and to promote economic growth. We think that that is the most effective way to tackle the underlying causes that make the life of street children so desperate. When we are discussing the forward aid programme with the Kenyan Government, we shall certainly discuss what further initiatives might be taken to tackle the problems of street children.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the funds that have been made available for dealing with the problems of street children in Kenya. I recommend that he bears in mind the successful work that has been done in Brazil with street children following the recent visit of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the home concerned in Rio de Janeiro. Should we not be learning the lessons of that work—that providing a stable and secure home for youngsters, along with education and training, will enable them to go on and make successful lives for themselves?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend is right to remind the House that, sadly, the problem of street children extends worldwide. He is correct to say that 18 months ago our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister launched an initiative for street children in support of a consortium of non-governmental organisations working on behalf of street children in developing countries. I am glad to say that we are providing financial support over a five-year period to carry forward this important work. We are working to tackle the problem of street children worldwide.

South Africa

41. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional funding has been made available to South Africa for educational purposes since April 1994.

Mr. Baldry: We have agreed new education projects and bursaries for tertiary education in South Africa at a total cost of more than £3.3 million since April 1994. Total expenditure on education and training projects in South Africa is expected to exceed £6 million in this financial year.

Mr. Pike: Will the Minister give the undertaking that at the United Nations social summit next week the British Government will commit themselves to allocating 20 per cent. of their aid to basic needs, including education? If they did that, would not they be able massively to increase basic education in South Africa?

Mr. Baldry: We have a very substantial bilateral aid programme for South Africa. We are giving £60 million of bilateral aid to South Africa, of which education and training activities account for about 40 per cent. Our commitment to assisting the improvement of education and educational development in South Africa is there for the whole world to see.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that, while South Africa may be suffering from a crisis of rising expectations, its political and economic changes will succeed only if it creates the circumstances in which overseas private investors are encouraged to invest?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. Of course, trade and investment is crucial to South Africa. We are the largest foreign investor in South Africa. Indeed, during a visit to South Africa last year, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade announced a new ODA-backed scheme to encourage further UK investment in smaller businesses. Circumstances that attract investment to South Africa are fundamental to the country's future.

Pergau Dam

42. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he is able to announce in respect of funds from the Overseas Development Administration budget reallocated from the Pergau dam project.

Mr. Baldry: We are using the reallocated amounts this year for additional emergency aid, primarily in Bosnia, Rwanda and Chechnya, for additional contributions to multilateral organisations in health and population, and for additional country programme spending, including mine clearance in Cambodia.

Mr. Watson: That will clearly be welcomed by all the various organisations that will benefit from the projects to which the Minister referred. In debates in the House following the courts' finding that the Government had acted illegally in their funding of the Pergau dam project, the Government undertook to provide funding in the next two financial years, but not beyond that. Will the Minister commit the Government to going that bit further and confirm that mistakes made with respect to the Pergau dam refer to more than just the next two years and, for the first time on behalf of anyone in the Government, will he apologise for what happened?

Mr. Baldry: We have debated this matter at considerable length in the House. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman was present for a debate the other day on Pergau. The settlement, under which an extra £65 million has been made available to the aid budget over a two-year period, is seen by most reasonable people in this country as fair and to be commended. The fact that so much money this year is now being spent on additional programmes in Malawi, on mine clearance in Cambodia and on relief in Chechnya, Rwanda and elsewhere, is also widely welcomed. The whole House generally sees that settlement as fair.

Mr. Dover: Will the Minister try to ensure that as much aid as possible is bilateral, so that British goods may be exported as part of the deal?

Mr. Baldry: Yes, we have a substantial aid programme in this country: some £2.2 billion. We want

to ensure that we have a robust, bilateral British aid programme, under which, wherever possible, we use UK know-how and goods.

Miss Lestor: To add to the confusion over the Pergau dam, which I think the Minister will find will not go away, may I say that earlier this month the Minister for Overseas Development shocked Europe and dismayed the developing world when she announced the Government's intention to slash their contribution to Lomé by 30 per cent.? If the Government really intend to cut that contribution—I hope that they will change their mind—to concentrate on the British bilateral aid programme, what additional aid programmes does the ODA plan to fund with the unexpected windfall, which will result unless he is prepared to change his mind?

Mr. Baldry: The facts are straightforward. The United Kingdom bilateral aid programme worldwide is widely recognised as being of high quality. However, multilateral aid is now growing to unacceptable levels; it will be 60 per cent. of total aid in three years' time. Our EC aid alone will be more than 40 per cent. That will be made at the expense of the British bilateral programme unless we can achieve a better balance—hence our offer to EDF VIII. However, our contribution to EDF will still be substantial. Our aim is to set the right size for the UK contribution, one that reflects the means at our disposal, our aid priorities and the need to ensure a robust and sizeable British bilateral aid programme.

Rwanda

43. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about aid in Rwanda.

Mr. Baldry: Ministers have received a wide range of personal and written representations about aid to Rwanda since the crisis began in April 1994.

Mr. Ainger: Does the Minister accept the threefold priorities identified by Oxfam and Human Rights Watch: first, that the Rwandan judiciary needs to be strengthened and rebuilt immediately to deal with the thousands of prisoners awaiting trial; secondly, that the international tribunal should be set up immediately to prosecute the ringleaders of the genocide in Rwanda; and, thirdly, that the civil administration should be rebuilt to deal with the problems of refugees returning to their homes? What particular and practical help can the Government give to achieve those priorities?

Mr. Baldry: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we were co-sponsors of the resolution that set up the international criminal tribunal. We are donating £200,000 worth of personnel and equipment to that tribunal. Our support for Rwanda is on-going. When the Prime Minister of Rwanda was here last week, we committed a further £500,000 for security in the refugee camps. Only today, we have announced a further commitment of £3.2 million of food aid for use both inside and outside Rwanda. United Nations Zairean monitors are now protecting convoys. We are now beginning to see people moving back into Rwanda. Real progress is being made in resettlement and in ensuring that the international war crimes tribunal starts its work effectively.

Barings

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the insolvency of the merchant bank Barings. The Bank of England announced late last night, ahead of the opening of the far east financial markets, that Barings was unable to continue trading and was applying for administration.

Barings' problems have arisen from major losses caused by unauthorised dealings by the chief trader in its Singapore incorporated subsidiary. The losses arise from contracts on the Singapore, Osaka and Tokyo exchanges. At the close of business last week, total losses appear to have been in excess of £600 million. Crucially, those contracts have further to run, exposing Barings to further unquantifiable losses. As a result, Barings was unable to continue to trade without the injection of substantial new capital.

As the Bank of England announced last night, the British banks were prepared to supply all the capital needed to recapitalise Barings, but only if it were possible to cap the potential liability of the outstanding contracts. In the event, that did not prove possible. Other parties were not prepared to take on open-ended and therefore unlimited liabilities. The Governor did not recommend, and in any event, I would not have agreed, that public funds should take on those liabilities. Regrettably, in the circumstances, there was no alternative to Barings having to apply for administration.

Although it was not possible at the end of the day to recapitalise Barings, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Governor and his staff and the London financial community for their commitment, which I followed closely over the weekend, to the search for a solution.

I stress to the House that these circumstances are unique to Barings and should not apply to other banks operating in London. The Bank of England is ready to provide liquidity to the banking system to ensure that it continues to function normally. Deposits at Barings are, of course, at the moment frozen, and the extent of any losses on them will not become clear for some time. The Deposit Protection Board will be writing to all Barings' depositors who are potentially eligible for assistance.

The House will be rightly concerned about how such huge unauthorised exposures could be allowed to happen and build up so quickly without the knowledge of the company, the exchanges or the regulators. I am determined to address that question rigorously and to review the regulatory system thoroughly in the light of this collapse. However, before we come to any firm conclusions, it will be necessary to establish in detail the facts of the case. Those were transactions conducted on the far side of the world by overseas subsidiaries on overseas exchanges. *[Interruption.]* I should have thought that the Opposition's knowledge of geography at least would have enabled them to agree with that statement.

There may be some falsification of the relevant records within the subsidiaries concerned. It will therefore take some time to unearth the full and detailed catalogue of events and the methods employed to evade all the required management and regulatory controls.

I have asked the Board of Banking Supervision to investigate fully and urgently all aspects of this episode and to report back to me. The investigation will include the circumstances in which such unauthorised transactions were able to take place and to remain undetected until too late. The board will need to work closely both with Barings and with the Singapore, Osaka and Tokyo exchanges. The House will recall that the Board of Banking Supervision is chaired by the Governor of the Bank of England and comprises six independent members and three members appointed ex officio from the Bank.

I can assure the House that I am determined that, when the full facts are known, all the appropriate lessons will be drawn and any necessary corrective steps will be taken.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Government said that after Johnson Matthey.

Mr. Clarke: That is when we set up the Board of Banking Supervision, as the hon. Gentleman will recall.

In today's global markets, the regulatory tasks are international and they must be tackled internationally. Over the past two years, with other Finance Ministers in the G7, the G10 and the International Monetary Fund, I have taken part in several discussions on the need to ensure effective regulation of international dealings in derivatives and other instruments in high-technology 24-hour trading conditions. The problems are obvious, but practicable solutions are less self-evident. No system of regulation can ever guarantee total security. There is always the chance of unwise or fraudulent dealing by one or a group of individuals. The better a bank's systems and controls, the less likely that is to happen. Every regulatory authority and every bank must now be considering what further steps it can take to protect itself against such risk.

I shall report back to the House at the earliest opportunity on our analysis of this case, the lessons to be drawn, and any proposals to strengthen security in highly complex financial markets. I would expect to publish the full report of the Board of Banking Supervision subject only to the need to protect the legitimate confidentiality of innocent third parties and any other legal constraints.

Meanwhile, we must also be concerned about the implications of the matter for the employees of what was, until a few days ago, a successful and highly respected firm. The administrator will no doubt take early steps to clarify the position of the 4,000 or so employees, some of whom will be needed to administer the assets of the business, and many of whom work for successful and profitable businesses for which purchasers will no doubt be found. Some redundancies will be inevitable, but the employees in this country will of course be able to rely on a measure of statutory protection in the event of their employer being so insolvent that difficulties arise in the payment of salaries and redundancy payments.

This failure is, of course, a blow to the City of London. But it appears to be a specific incident unique to Barings, centred on one rogue trader in Singapore. Inevitably, there has been some turbulence in the markets since the announcement, but global markets should be quite strong enough to absorb it without lasting damage, since the events have not changed any of the fundamentals that underlie foreign exchange, equity and bond markets.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I thank the Chancellor for making his statement, and for accepting the need for an inquiry and for the report of that inquiry

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

to be published. May I ask him to tell us in more detail what action is being taken to save as many of Barings' businesses, and as many of its 2,000 United Kingdom and 2,000 overseas jobs, as possible? Will he assure us that he and the Bank of England will continue those efforts?

As for the immediate event, will the Chancellor tell us the extent to which depositors are protected so that they do not fall victim to other people's mistakes? Will he tell us the total scale of the losses involved? Will he confirm that the inquiry will examine why there appear to have been warning signals in the far east as many as 10 days ago, which were apparently not acted on?

Does the Chancellor agree that the public will also want to know in some detail from the inquiry why a single trader operating from one desk in Singapore could not just lose £500 million last week and another £200 million last night, but—unknown to his superiors, and without the knowledge of his company—enter into between 15,000 and 40,000 contracts, threatening losses that are still open ended?

The Chancellor said in his statement that the issue was simply the evasion of existing managerial and regulatory controls by a rogue trader—controls that were already in existence. Does he accept, however, that the inquiry must examine whether there were sufficient regulatory and managerial controls in the first place? Will he assure us that the inquiry will examine what the internal control systems at Barings were, why they failed to detect the huge operations of just one trader before it was too late, and what supervisory requirements were imposed on Barings and the other banks by the Bank of England to ensure the existence of adequate controls to detect excessive exposure on a daily basis? The Bank of England, as a supervisory organisation in the United Kingdom, should be the first to find out, rather than just about the last to be told. What changes does the Bank now propose to ensure that there are adequate safeguards to minimise this type of risk?

We join the Chancellor in praising the Bank of England for its efforts over the weekend. Will he, however, continue to agree with the Governor of the Bank of England, whose considered views we examined last summer? He felt that there was no need to worry about the derivatives market, and commented that American legislators were wrong to become

"excited at the need for regulation".

Of Barings and others in the derivatives market, he said:

"These people know what they are doing whether it's at director level or the chaps on the desk."

Of the Bank of England's role, he said:

"We now have an expert team monitoring derivatives . . . getting better every time".

All that, he said, was "reassuring".

In the light of what I consider to be a culture of complacency, is not a fully independent inquiry necessary, rather than simply a Board of Banking Supervision inquiry chaired by the Governor, so that—among other things—the actions of the Bank of England and regulatory authorities can be examined objectively? Is not it also clear that an analysis of not just the events of the past few days but the wider policy implications involved will be necessary in the inquiry?

Given the calls from the Bank of International Settlements, the proposals of the G30 think tank, the requirements of the United States Congress general accounting officer and the call by the Basle committee and other international organisations for much greater transparency, tighter codes of practice, consistent adequacy standards for derivatives dealers and daily accurate risk evaluations by banks, along with the identification by them of concentrations of risk—and given the concern expressed by the Securities and Investments Board and the Securities and Exchange Commission about the need for greater co-ordination among the international regulators—does the Chancellor agree not only that the inquiry should examine those issues, but that he should explain why until now he has refused to act on the recommendations that have been made?

While we recognise that no system can be foolproof, do not the weekend's events demonstrate the clear public interest in better supervision, stronger safeguards and more adequate investor protection, both in the United Kingdom and through international co-operation, so that we can maintain confidence in the integrity of the financial system?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman rightly asked what action was being taken today to examine the interests of both employees and depositors involved with the bank. I assure him and the House that a great deal of work is going on today. The administrator has moved in, and continued inquiries are being made to discover how many depositors are affected, to identify them and to see what can be done to protect them and also to prepare for the management of assets and the disposal of profitable parts of the business in order to restore the position to some stability. A great many people are working on that at this moment. I am updated at regular intervals, but it is a rapidly moving scene.

As for depositors, their deposits are frozen at the moment while work is done to discover to what extent losses will lead to less than a full pound in the pound eventually being distributed. That may take some time. Eventually, we shall no doubt discover the extent of any losses incurred by the depositors. Such money as remains, which may be a substantial proportion of the full amount, will be distributed.

As far as we are aware, although I do not yet know, the bank did not have small retail depositors in any great numbers. The depositors tend to be other banks and institutions. So far, we have not discovered any other bank or institution that is subject to dangerous exposure, given that in any event the assets are frozen, but not necessarily lost. They are almost certainly not totally lost.

I said in my statement that by the end of last week more than £600 million of losses had been incurred. The extent to which the losses continue to build up has yet to be finalised. It depends on the closing of the contracts in Singapore, Osaka and Tokyo. That will become clear in the next few days. Obviously, no further liabilities could possibly be financed by Barings.

I have heard the rumours about warning signals from the far east. I think that they are rather wise after the event. Of course, we still do not have the complete picture of what was going on in the dealings conducted by the trader in Singapore, but the positions that he took, which exposed the bank so fatally, were taken in the

comparatively recent past. They built up in the end in a matter of days. So people who claim that there were warnings of those positions some time in advance exaggerate the situation.

The whole point of what I have said is that, of course it is necessary to answer the question that the hon. Gentleman asked. How could activities centred on this one man in Singapore allow such heavy liabilities to build up so quickly to the destruction of the total bank? That is what will be investigated. It will be investigated by the Board of Banking Supervision, because that body was set up in the aftermath of the Johnson Matthey scandal precisely to exercise supervision of the Bank of England's supervisory role and to audit its performance. It is plainly the right body not only to take part in the investigation of the facts of the incident, but to produce a proper analysis and make recommendations, which I shall implement.

The difficulty in this case may well not be the controls and regulatory systems, or even the internal control systems of Barings. We do not yet know. We shall act if we discover that they played a significant part. The fact is that there was undoubtedly falsification of records inside the bank. The controls in place within the bank were avoided. Hence the regulatory controls of the Bank of England were avoided again. It is essential that we first discover the facts of the case, then we can consider whether changes in the regulatory laws could have touched this case or any case in which such risk might occur in other ways. That is by far the most sensible way of proceeding.

Wild talk of derivatives can also mislead people. It is certainly the case that derivatives are a new and in some ways dangerous development in the financial market, but such problems could have occurred in cash markets, futures and options. It is undoubtedly easier and quicker for them to arise now that we have derivatives. We must discover whether the problems in derivatives were at the heart of the problem.

We have not failed to act on any of the reports that have been produced by the Basle Group of Bankers, the G10 central bank governors and the like. Many of them deal with data and supervision. A great deal of analysis of those problems is taking place. It is nonsense for the hon. Gentleman to give a great list of bodies as if he had some authoritative knowledge of proposals made around the world and to claim that we have failed to act on them. No regulatory body has made proposals on which we have failed to act.

I very much hope that the lessons that we learn from this case, involving the activities in Barings' Singapore subsidiary, will enable us and other regulatory authorities to take steps forward in the international control of risks in that area.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: After that initial exchange, I appeal to Back Benchers on both sides of the House to put their questions quickly and to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to respond briskly, so that I may call as many hon. Members as possible.

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): Whatever the lessons of this bitter affair, will my right hon. and learned Friend be ever mindful of the fact that the pre-eminent position of the City of London derives from its skilful acceptance and management of risk and that if there were excessive regulation to remove risk, along the lines that the shadow Chancellor hinted at, the principal casualty would be the strategic salience of the City of London?

Mr. Clarke: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. The City of London's reputation is paramount. It was impressive to see the British banks, as well as the Bank of England, mobilise this weekend to provide the necessary capital for Barings to keep going. In fact, an international effort was mobilised, involving overseas banks as well, because most of the major international banks are present in the City of London and have excellent contacts with the Bank of England. Of course, no one could take on those open-ended commitments, which might continue to pile up under the contracts. It is certainly absolutely essential that we protect the reputation of the City by proper regulation. I completely agree that to rush instantly into some wodge of further regulations before we even know where the fault lies in sufficient detail in this case, could lead to our imposing endless constraints on what is the most successful financial market in the world.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does the Chancellor nevertheless accept that this is a black Monday for the City of London and that the implications are not as confined as he suggested? The fact that one trader in Singapore could achieve that scale of loss makes the situation worse and not better, as he tried to imply in his statement. Will he consider the announcement today of a £550 million plunge in the trading profits of the Midland bank as an indication that such gambling is not confined to banks of the character of Barings, but also takes place in the main clearing banks? What guarantee can he give that the Barings bank collapse today will not become a clearing bank catastrophe tomorrow?

Mr. Clarke: It is important to realise that it is likely to turn out that what happened to Barings could have happened to a German, Swiss, French or American bank, if someone trading in derivatives falsified records and evaded the regulatory controls that the bank or the regulator had put in place. We shall have to wait to find out if that is the case. With the greatest of respect, it is a mistake to describe all trading of that type, in such things as derivatives, as pure gambling. There is a need for sophisticated financial instruments that can be used for hedging. They can be used in circumstances in which risk is minimal. It is a difficult and sophisticated world and it needs proper regulation and proper internal processes in banks. We need to discover what went wrong in this case. I do not deny that for one man to be at the centre of something that destroyed a whole bank is a very serious problem, which is why we anxiously await the report of the Board of Banking Supervision, to find out what can be done to reduce the risk of that recurring.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that there is a fundamental difference between futures markets in agricultural products, base metals and oil and a futures market that seeks to guess at the movements of stock exchange indices? That latter form of futures market is so speculative as to deserve the term "gambling" and should perhaps be banned by international law.

Mr. Clarke: All derivatives have to be based on some market—in this case, they were based on dealings in a combination of things, including the Nikkei-Dow average,

[Mr. Clarke]

Japanese Government bonds, Japanese short-term interest rates and futures. Most banks engage in some trading of that kind, including the major institutions. There can be occasions when it is necessary for hedging purposes of one type or another. As my hon. Friend says, we have to ensure that the regulations stop pure gambling or taking positions of a highly speculative and impossibly risky type, but that we nevertheless do not overregulate to destroy legitimate financial activity on behalf of clients. I shall bear my hon. Friend's strictures in mind and no doubt the Board of Banking Supervision will come back with some opinions on that type of trading.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Chancellor aware that his statement will be seen as complacent? The problem is not unique—we have had Maxwell; Lloyd's; the Bank of Credit and Commerce International; Asil Nadir; and a man who made $1 billion when the British pound fell out of the ERM. This is gambling and speculation, and it characterises the world financial community. Those people create no wealth, yet they play a dominant role in the world economy. To try to pin the responsibility on one man who apparently had the capacity to bring down a whole bank is to miss the point that the global economy is unstable and not run in the interests of those who create the world's wealth.

Mr. Clarke: The financial services industry in this country is a great creator of wealth and employment. Invisibles account for some 15 or 16 per cent. of our gross domestic product. In the modern world, the fact that Britain is so successful in the financial services industry is one of the strengths of our economy, not one of its weaknesses. As the right hon. Gentleman says, it is impossible totally to eliminate fraud or incompetence in any system of trade, manufacture or commerce, but we have tight regulatory controls to try to minimise the risk. With respect, I advise the right hon. Gentleman, before reacting so predictably, to wait for more light to be thrown on the facts of this case and to see precisely what that trader and anyone in collusion with him were doing in Singapore. It would be absurd, on the back of all that, to sweep away every part of the financial services industry and the investment in industry at home and abroad that the British financial services industry provides.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that his measured and timely response to these events has been entirely appropriate? Conservative Members believe that he has approached the matter in the right way and that the Governor of the Bank of England is also to be congratulated on his response. Will my right hon. and learned Friend look carefully, however, at the aspect of fraud that may be involved? What jurisdiction, if any, would be relevant to deal with a possible conspiracy to defraud within Singapore?

Mr. Clarke: We do not know whether there has been fraud. The trader has not yet been found. When he is discovered, we must first see whether there was an element of fraud and to what extent he colluded with other people inside the bank or the Singapore stock exchange, or whether it was simply a case of misguided and panicky trading, which was concealed from his employers. I do not want to speculate on the facts as that would be not only unfair to the individual concerned, but totally reckless until someone has done much more work to discover the actual sequence of events. In the event of criminal charges being brought, I assume that problems will arise as to which jurisdiction they will be in. I think that, in the first instance, they will be in the Singapore jurisdiction, but the problem of jurisdiction for financial crimes is not always that straightforward and one would need to take a more considered view.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Is the Chancellor aware that most supervisors, regulators and managers of banks do not have the knowledge of mathematics needed to understand the technicalities of derivatives markets? Will he appoint an expert and experienced committee with knowledge of the moral hazards involved to advise both him and the City on how to proceed in order to restore public confidence in the banking system?

Mr. Clarke: It is the responsibility of each bank and financial institution to ensure that it is properly informed about the exposure of its institution to whatever dealings in derivatives are taking place inside the organisation. I have no doubt that experiences such as this, and that of Orange County in the United States, are making every responsible chairman, chief executive and board of financial institutions throughout the world ensure that they are properly informed about their exposure in that area at any given moment. Numerous expert committees are looking at the evolution of the market in the light of the development of the derivatives market. As the hon. Gentleman probably knows, only today the G10 central bank governors published a further report on the quality of the data and statistics required to give national regulators a better overall picture of what is happening in today's financial world.

Although they are extremely complicated and can be extremely risky investment in the hands of the less sophisticated, I do not think that we should invest derivatives with this air of awe, as if they represented some new, magic and unintelligible form of investment compared with other forms. It is a question of making sure that our technology, management controls inside banks and national regulatory systems can keep abreast of continual developments.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that financial futures, properly used, are a means of reducing risk for corporate entities and banks? Does he further agree that regulation of the financial futures markets in London is already close and effective? Does he accept that before we rush in with new regulations, we need to make certain whether the losses that Barings sustained were not caused by abuse of the existing regulations and flouting the existing internal controls in the bank?

Mr. Clarke: I agree. The reason why the futures markets, such as the highly successful London International Financial Futures Exchange—LIFFE—have developed so rapidly is that they fulfil a real financial need. They enable some of those participating in the market—not all of them—to hedge themselves against risk that they might otherwise face. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that, first, we must discover to what extent this case depended on any deliberate

evasion of controls and systems that otherwise would have protected anyone against the disastrous risk that unfolded in this case.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Why does not the Chancellor call a spade a spade? Derivatives and gambling on derivatives are based upon, in this case, betting on the Japanese stock exchange in another 12 months' time. What wealth creation is there in that? Why does not the Chancellor admit that this case has come about partly as a result of the total deregulation in the exchange markets and the rest of them, which the Government have supported? They have learnt no lessons whatever from Johnson Matthey. One of the top elite banks is going under because someone gambled and gambled, just like someone in a betting shop—one bet after another, trying to recoup his losses, when all those jobs were at stake. You cannot run a country with a betting shop mentality.

Mr. Clarke: As my hon. Friend the Member for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) just said, people can invest in futures markets precisely to protect their firm and their jobs against movements in markets, which might otherwise jeopardise the business and the trade in which they are engaged.

One never listens to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) without sensing the warming touch of nostalgia about him. The hon. Gentleman belongs to that section of the Labour party that has always regarded all investment—the stock exchange and the process of capitalism and free markets—as gambling of which it disapproves. He knows no more about derivatives and he understands derivatives as little as he understands the rest of the process of financial markets in a free market economy. I do not think that his advice should be heeded in this case.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that it is a fundamental principle of English and, I believe, Singaporean law that a principal is not responsible for the unauthorised acts of its agents, and in some cases, employees? I believe that my right hon. and learned Friend said that the acts were unauthorised dealings, so could he explain that inconsistency?

Mr. Clarke: I do not want to engage in a legal argument with my hon. Friend about whether an agent is acting within the apparent scope of his authority and so on, but there is no doubt that Barings is liable for the losses on the contracts. Those contracts were engaged upon as Barings' contracts or contracts of a subsidiary, and the group—certainly the subsidiary—has been left exposed to open-ended risks, which cannot be covered. When I say "unauthorised", I mean that we must discover how far the person, or people responsible, was evading the internal controls of the bank and exceeding or avoiding the restraints that the bank would otherwise have put upon him.

We must also consider the extent to which the Bank of England's regulatory requirements and investigations of Barings were being avoided. Although I use the word "unauthorised", I regret to say that I do not believe that there is any question but that Barings remains legally liable for the losses that are still piling up on those contracts, if they have not already been closed.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does the Chancellor accept that one does not need to be an expert on financial markets to be worried that thousands of British jobs and a major British company can be put at risk by an individual gambling on the movements of the Japanese stock exchange? If that transpires to have been the consequence of regulatory failure, and as the bank itself is the regulator, is not it true, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) said, that there must be an objective consideration of what went on surrounding the collapse of Barings?

If it proves, as some of the press comment implies, that it is not possible properly to regulate speculation in those financial instruments offshore, perhaps, as other hon. Members have said, that type of activity should be banned altogether.

Mr. Clarke: I share the hon. Lady's concern for the people who work for Barings, including over 2,000 employees who work in this country. They worked for one of the most successful and respected banking groups in the City, and they turned in an extremely good performance. It is wrong to say that they were gamblers or that they were engaged in any improper activity; they were among the best in the financial services world in this country. I trust that the successful parts of the Barings Group will rapidly be sold by the administrator to people who will take on those successful businesses.

We need to discover the way in which operations in one subsidiary have brought the whole group to a state of financial collapse. There are regulators in both countries. One cannot ban international financial dealings; financial markets are moving on to a global basis extremely rapidly. It happens that the country at the other end, Singapore, is one of the most effectively regulated countries in the world. The Monetary Authority of Singapore is also highly regarded as a rather strict and severe regulatory authority, with which the Bank of England happens to be on very good terms.

The conclusion is that something happened in Barings' Singapore subsidiary that evaded the Bank of England's regulatory controls, evaded, through the counterparties, the Monetary Authority of Singapore's controls and evaded whatever controls were being applied by Barings. That is why we are all agreed that 2,500 jobs are at risk; we hope that soon that will all be resolved. We need to know the facts about the way in which it happened, instead of making broad-brush statements about gambling, the financial world, international dealing and so on.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): When my right hon. and learned Friend considers all that, will he bear in mind the fact that, in the past year, the financial services of the City earned a £16 billion surplus in export trade for this country, so the fact that they do not produce anything goes by the by on that basis? Will he also consider the fact that industry here and abroad relies on access to capital, which is what that is all about, so by retaining a light touch and being very careful about what he does regarding future regulation, my right hon. and learned Friend serves both the City and industry well?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. The management of our investments overseas and the flow that that produces back to this country is vital, not only to our economy, but to the well-being of pension funds and other institutional investments here, which are of extreme importance to the country.

[Mr. Clarke]

In that area, as in every other area of commerce, regulation is essential to avoid fraud and mismanagement and to protect the depositor. Excessive regulation is destructive of a successful economy and destructive of jobs. When one investigates a matter of that type, one must get the balance right, so that there is no unnecessary risk, but so that one is not panicked into doing things that will damage the legitimate activities of the City of London.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is not it true that Mr. Leeson may well have a very different story to tell from the one that is being peddled in London by people who have an obvious motive to blame him? Is not the truth that it might well be that Mr. Leeson's life is at risk, and that he would do well to consider to whom he should give himself up? Will the Chancellor join me in asking Mr. Leeson to ensure that he gives himself up as soon as possible, and to authorities in which he can place his trust?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman dramatises matters—I hope, excessively. He is right to say that we cannot leap to the conclusion that fraud or criminal offences have been committed, as we have no idea. Mr. Leeson has left his desk, no doubt because he finds it, at the very least, embarrassing to describe his responsibility for a series of investments that have brought down a 250-year-old banking group. His explanation will be interesting when he emerges. I have been cautious about what I have said about the facts. It would be wrong for me to act on the best information that I have at the moment and find, as more and more investigations are done, that the picture becomes clearer. I fear that it appears to be clear that an accurate description of the transactions was not being fed back by those engaged in them in Singapore.

Sir Terence Higgins (Worthing): Will the Chancellor confirm that the previously open-ended contracts are now closed? What priority do the holders of those contracts have compared with depositors and other creditors?

Mr. Clarke: Again, I shall check and give my right hon. Friend the most up-to-date information that I have. My belief, as I stand here, is that the Singapore contracts have been closed. I do not think that the Osaka contracts have been closed, and I do not know what has happened at the Tokyo stock exchange—it has been a moving picture all day. The issue of the various creditors is in the hands of the administrator. The capital of Barings Group has already been absorbed by the losses incurred on those particular contracts. That is why the deposits have been frozen and the depositors will doubtless, in due course, discover to what extent their deposits can be released without deduction or, if with deduction, the extent of that deduction. These are early days, and those are exactly the sort of matters that the administrator is meant to be sorting out.

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): Does not today's significant fall in the value of the pound as a direct result of what has been described as unauthorised dealing on far eastern stock markets demonstrate the limitations of the concept of national sovereignty when it comes to international money markets?

Mr. Clarke: Other currencies have fallen today—the franc, lira and peseta are not having too good a day. We live in a system of floating exchange rates, where such things move all the time. The hon. Gentleman's question did not have much bearing on dealings in Japanese futures and is not relevant to today's statement.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Can my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House that the Governor of the Bank of England has been able to give an assurance that other banks in the City of London have better and more efficient financial and internal controls? Will he also assure the House that recommendations are being put in place? Can he assure the House that when people deal in the derivatives markets, which operate on a minute-by-minute basis, financial controls are set up that also operate on a minute-by-minute basis? In this instance, there seems to have been an enormous delay between reporting what was going wrong in Singapore and reporting it in London. The information never seems to have got to London in the first place.

Mr. Clarke: The Bank's responsibility is to regulate banks and obtain the information required, but that is not done minute by minute. It would be totally impractical to suggest that the Bank of England could possibly supervise every transaction carried out by every bank. The Bank of England has to ensure that a bank's internal systems are satisfactory, and that any controls on which the Bank of England has insisted are adhered to by the bank that it is supervising. The Bank keeps a regular check on banks' balance sheets and calls for audits of particular aspects of banks' performance about which it is concerned. All those issues must be addressed.

My most up-to-date information on the information coming back is that Barings in London first seemed to become aware of serious problems in Singapore the weekend before last. It sent someone out from London to investigate the position on about Monday of last week. By Wednesday or Thursday of last week, it had become obvious that there was a serious problem. The Bank of England was notified at about noon on Friday and the Treasury was notified during the afternoon. Although that sounds very late, most of the liabilities had piled up in a very short time. Most of the contracts that now give rise to Barings' exposure—as the market moves against the various options taken—were built up in a remarkably short time.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): When a bank fails, the secondary effects are often the most grievous. In his statement, the Chancellor said that the Bank of England is ready to provide liquidity to the banking system. Does that give some assurance to major depositors with Barings that they will receive help if they are in difficulty?

Mr. Clarke: Inevitably, some turbulence and uncertainty in the markets surrounds a blow of this kind to the financial system, which can give rise to liquidity problems within the banking system as a whole. If such problems arose, the Bank of England would fulfil its function as the central bank and ensure that liquidity problems were overcome and that the London banking system could operate normally. My reference does not relate to the depositors with Barings.

Madam Speaker: We will now move on.

Points of Order

4.15 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I ask you to rule on a case of "gross discourtesy"—to use his own words—on the part of the Leader of the Opposition, who visited my constituency at the weekend without giving me prior notice of his intention to do so. I understand that the purpose of his visit was to instruct members of the Gravesham branch of the Labour party to vote against clause IV. If he had given me notice of his visit, I could have told him that the people of Gravesham have voted against clause IV in the last four general elections.

Madam Speaker: I have made my views on such matters known on a number of occasions.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, of which I have given you notice. My point of order is not really a matter of complaint, but a matter of curiosity.

I have been banned from putting down any more written questions on the subject of Lockerbie. Madam Speaker, will you clarify the conditions under which a Member of Parliament can be told that he should not put down any more questions on the same subject on the ground that it is part of a campaign?

I would not raise a point of order about a trivial or frivolous subject. However, Lockerbie represents the worst mass murder of civilians anywhere in the western world since 1945. As a result, our relations with the Arab world are at stake, British industry is being damaged severely and 5,000 of our fellow countrymen are working at a disadvantage in Libya because of continuing sanctions. They are hardly trivial matters. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I ask you what the rules are.

Madam Speaker: If the point raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was trivial, I would not give it a serious answer—although, as he says himself, it is by no means a point of order.

The hon. Gentleman is a very distinguished and successful campaigner and I have a great deal of sympathy with what he said and with the way in which he has pursued his campaign. In my view, a legitimate campaign through the means of parliamentary questions is one of the most effective weapons available to a Back Bencher. At the same time, I must uphold the rule that is set out on page 294 of "Erskine May", which prohibits the asking of questions that

"are multiplied with slight variations on the same point".

Without such a rule, there is potential for total abuse of the Order Paper. The Table Office will continue to apply that rule sensitively and it will not seek to prevent any Member from pursuing, by reasonable means, a matter about which he or she feels very strongly.

In the case cited by the hon. Gentleman, I have to say—I think that he will agree with me—that the Table Office has bent over backwards to help him. The hon. Gentleman has properly pursued his campaign for more than six years. He recently tabled about 90 questions in two days, which are to be answered next Monday, 6 March. I have to rule that he must await those answers before he proceeds further and before he tables any further questions.

Much will depend on the answers that the hon. Gentleman receives to those questions, but I am sure that, given his ingenuity and the help that the Table Office provides to him and all other hon. Members, he may have further opportunities to ask questions. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is very satisfied with my response to his comments. We will now proceed.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. There can be no further points of order on that matter, on which I gave a thorough ruling.

Orders of the Day

Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I must inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.19 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

No one can be in any doubt that this Government are at the forefront in the fight against crime. Making this country a safer and more secure place to live is one of our top priorities, and has been since we came to power. But that task is not for Government alone. Our approach to crime prevention has always emphasised the role that all sections of society—individuals, community groups and businesses, as well as public agencies—can play in tackling crime.

Before proceeding to deal with the detail of the Bill, I must comment on the terms of the extraordinary amendment tabled by the Leader of the Opposition which you, Madam Speaker, have just intimated has been selected. Its terms are wrong, misconceived and inaccurate in almost every particular. The amendment shows a remarkably muddled approach to policy by the Opposition, in that they supported—in fact, passed with acclaim—this important measure when it recently came under careful scrutiny in another place, only to turn on it now with such unselective and ill-informed hostility.

In the other place, the official Opposition spokesman said:

"The Government can rest assured that from this side of the House everything will be done to expedite the passage of the Bill".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 559, c. 552.]

Yet now, for what can only be partisan purposes, Labour seeks to frustrate a Bill that will do a power of good to the dispatch of criminal justice in Scotland.

The amendment suggests that the Bill

"is not an acceptable or effective measure to tackle crime . . . in Scotland".

It states that the fight against crime is under-resourced, and that we are making a major assault on the right to silence and moving towards an adversarial system. That is simply bunkum, and it reflects the apparent cynicism with which Labour approaches the issue.

How can Labour Members sit there and say that we are not tackling crime in Scotland? Of course, not many of them are sitting there. The number of recorded crimes in Scotland has fallen for three successive years—most recently by 8 per cent. in 1993, and by a further 3 per cent. in 1994. Coming as they do after a period when recorded crime was on an upward trend, the figures for recent years are encouraging and an indication of the success of our crime prevention and other policies aimed at tackling crime.

We have committed substantial resources to crime prevention. We have backed the police with substantial extra resources, new technology and almost 1,600 extra officers since 1979, to help in their fight against crime. Almost £5 million extra, after allowing for inflation, is spent on the police force in Scotland each week than when Labour was in power. That is in stark contrast to the actions of Labour-controlled Strathclyde region, which we have had to cajole for years to bring its police force up to establishment standards.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is the Secretary of State concerned also about the squandering of police time? Police witnesses still are kept hanging around sheriff courts such as Linlithgow. Is he aware also of the importance of the streamlining of courts? To take a Lothian example, it would be highly desirable to move the court structure from Linlithgow to Livingston, for reasons that the Minister of State—Lord Fraser of Carmyllie—knows well, because he received a delegation led by Mr. Jim Keegan, on behalf of solicitors, and myself.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is right to put his finger on a central issue that concerns us and the various committees that we established to review criminal justice procedural systems. I will return to that theme at various points in my speech.

The fight against crime is not one that the criminal justice system alone can win. If we want to divert potential offenders before they begin offending, we must begin the process much earlier. That is why we are tackling crime prevention in schools through the national guidelines, emphasising social responsibility and respect for others. We are taking measures to combat truancy, indiscipline, bullying and vandalism. We believe that if these problems are tackled at an early stage there is a significant possibility that those children will not later turn to more serious offences and start to commit crime.

We are not content, however, to rest on initiatives in schools. We are also very much aware that the problem of offending by young people needs close attention. We are addressing this by new initiatives through the children's hearings and through new community-based development projects to address the problems caused by persistent young offenders.

We are also pursuing traditional crime prevention measures, and a more general national crime prevention publicity campaign to engage much more widespread public awareness of the part which individuals can play in the fight against crime. The multi-media campaign will be launched in spring 1995 and will focus on housebreaking.

I find it extraordinary that Opposition Members wish to oppose the Bill on the basis that the Scottish court system is under pressure from increasing work loads. One of the principal aims of the Bill is to relieve the pressure on the courts and prosecutors. We are making changes to the bail system, to late pleas, to pre-trial procedures, and improving procedures without unbalancing the scales of justice. If the Opposition have further suggestions to make, I hope that they will offer them to the House today.

If Opposition Members oppose the Bill, they oppose measures to improve the operation of bail; they oppose giving the courts powers to deprive criminals of the proceeds of their crimes; they oppose measures to assist the police in detecting crime through extending the use of DNA; and they oppose taking the opportunity to improve the operation of the criminal justice system in Scotland. And they oppose measures, of the kind referred to a moment ago by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), to reduce the waste of police time involved in waiting unnecessarily at court.

It does little credit to the Labour party and its pretence to care about these issues that it should so distort the facts and oppose a measure designed to reinforce the fight in which we should all be joining against crime in Scotland.

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I know that the Secretary of State is under pressure on almost every front today, but that really is no excuse for his misrepresentation of our reasons for tabling a reasoned amendment in a Second Reading debate. He tries to imply that we oppose the Bill's Second Reading, but we do not. The amendment, in the tradition of reasoned amendments down the years, regrets certain aspects of the Bill, and states that the House should not give the Bill a Second Reading on certain specific grounds.

I intend to welcome certain aspects of the Bill, but its general failure to tackle the crisis of crime that so many people fear has led us to table a reasoned amendment, not to oppose the Second Reading of the Bill.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity in his speech to tell us whether his party will vote against the Bill tonight. He will also be able to tell us which measures he will propose in Committee; and he will have a chance to respond to some of the points that I have just made in answer to the terms of his reasoned amendment.

The Bill contains provisions which will mark a watershed in the operation of the criminal justice system in Scotland, and will equip it to deal with the challenges that we will all face in combating crime as we move into the 21st century. It is a Scottish Bill tailored to Scottish needs and circumstances which builds on the best traditions of our distinctive legal system.

The measures in the Bill were drafted after a comprehensive and detailed review of the present system and a consultation process which took account of the views of all the major organisations associated with the criminal justice system in Scotland and of a great number of individuals with particular knowledge and expertise. We are grateful for the many thoughtful comments that we received, which have informed the development of our proposals.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): At least one Opposition Member—namely, me—would be more sympathetic to the Bill if it included some provisions to give power to licensing committees, along the lines suggested by Sheriff Gow, in relation to places such as Hangar 13 which run raves. I know that the right hon. Gentleman shares my concern about the increase in drugs crime. I have tabled a parliamentary question, which has not yet had a reply, asking him to give some consideration to legislation that would take account of the recommendations of Sheriff Neil Gow in the wake of a fatal accident inquiry.

Will the right hon. Gentleman consider the possibility of including some such provision in the Bill?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman raises a topic that has the makings of an interesting debate in Committee. I have no doubt that he will look forward to participating in such a debate.

I am confident that we have struck the correct balance with the proposals in the Bill. We have been prepared to listen to the advice that we have been given and to come to conclusions in the light of that advice. That view was endorsed by the support that the Bill received in another place.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I understand the approach that the Secretary of State is adopting about the extent of the consultation that was carried through. Will he tell us why the Scottish Office rejected the approach that was exemplified in the early 1970s with the appointment of Lord Thomson to head a committee that was given the task of examining Scottish criminal law and procedure, which produced two extremely valuable reports? Why was the same approach not followed in this instance?

Mr. Lang: I shall have something to say about Lord Thomson's report or reports when I reach that stage in my comments on the contents of the Bill, if the hon. and learned Gentleman will bear with me until then.

The Bill seeks essentially to do two things: first, it contains provisions that will significantly enhance the powers of the criminal justice agencies in the fight against crime; secondly, and equally important, are provisions that are aimed at making the system work more effectively and efficiently.

I turn to the specific proposals in the Bill. Concern about the operation of bail, and especially offending while on bail, has featured in correspondence from hon. Members on both sides of the House in recent years. Breach of bail is a breach of the court's trust. We intend to tighten bail procedures by restricting the circumstances in which bail may be granted or reviewed, and by increasing the courts' powers to deal firmly with offending on bail. These proposals are contained in clauses 1 to 5.

In particular, the provisions on bail would enable a court to increase any sentence beyond what it would otherwise impose if a person has offended while on bail. Separately, we are extending to a limited, but desirable, degree the circumstances in which bail cannot be granted. Fewer than one in five of court cases is made the subject of a bail order, but there were an estimated 27,000 offences committed while on bail last year. Those offences were carried out by relatively few offenders. An extra six months, or 60 days in district courts, and/or a fine of £1,000 will, with the other provisions, send a clear message that release on bail is not a right to be abused. The provisions that are set out in the Bill will offer greater protection to the public from the menace of offending on bail.

Fundamental to our criminal justice system is the principle of trial by jury. The Bill contains a number of proposals to improve the selection of juries; to make them more representative and to reduce the inconvenience that is experienced by those who are called to court but not asked to serve. Those proposals are contained in clauses 6 to 8. They include the abolition of peremptory challenge, a procedure which the Government believe is widely abused and which serves no useful purpose that cannot be achieved by the other more rational means of exemption, namely, of cause shown to the court.

There are about 1,300 jury trials a year. Of the 100,000 people cited annually for jury service, only about 20,000 serve on a jury. That is one in five. Clearly there is a need for more effective ways of avoiding such a huge waste of time and waste of resources.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): Does my right hon. Friend agree that under the present system of peremptory

[Mr. Allan Stewart]

challenge, people turn up wearing nice suits, shirts and ties and are challenged by defence lawyers because they look respectable? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a disgrace and that it is one of the reasons for voting for the Bill?

Mr. Lang: I agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that he will find that the package of measures that bear on juries in clauses 6 to 8 meets the concern to which he has properly drawn attention.

The Bill contains two proposals flowing from a review of judicial examination and the right to silence. These have given rise to some controversy. That must be because they have been misunderstood. I look forward to hearing how Opposition Members justify their opposition. It may be helpful to the House if I try to make clear exactly what is involved.

The proposal in clause 10 to allow prosecutors to ask accused persons under examination whether they admit rather than deny certain facts is little more than a technical change. Judicial examination takes place at an early stage, usually just after the accused has been arrested and charged. It enables the accused in the presence of his solicitor, and under the protection of a sheriff, to answer the procurator fiscal's questions and, if he wishes, to state his own position at the earliest opportunity.

At present the procurator fiscal's questions must be framed in a convoluted form to avoid appearing to seek an admission, even though a failure to deny could be just as incriminating. The proceedings can be difficult for everyone, not least the accused, to understand. Clause 10 will enable a simpler and more intelligible form of questioning to be adopted, which will benefit all who participate in judicial examination and a subsequent trial, including the accused person.

The clause will not, contrary to what some have suggested, require the accused person to break his silence, or to incriminate himself. If the accused chooses not to answer questions, he could do so, as many accused persons do now. If he chooses to answer, his answers need not be any different from what they would be under the current law. After all, he can refuse to admit just as easily as he can deny.

Nor will clause 10 enable procurators fiscal to engage in cross-examination or to try to drag confessions out of the accused. The fiscal is prohibited from asking leading questions, or reiterating questions, or challenging the truth of anything that the accused has already said. The sheriff is under a duty to ensure that all questions are fairly put to and understood by the accused.

There appears to be some confusion among Opposition Members about adversarial and inquisitorial systems. Judicial examination, which is a quasi-inquisitorial procedure, has existed in one form or another for centuries, although it fell into disuse in the early part of this century. The procedure was revived in 1980 following the recommendation of the Thomson committee on criminal procedure, which recommended that the procurator fiscal should be able to ask questions designed to prevent the fabrication of a false line of defence at an early stage; and that the accused should have an early opportunity to state his or her case and perhaps clear himself or herself.

The committee also suggested the type of questions that should be permitted at judicial examination. I entirely agreed with the committee when it said:

"it is difficult to see how such questions could prejudice the position of an innocent accused and even more difficult to see why they should be regarded as unfair to a guilty accused".

Clause 28 will allow the prosecutor to comment on an accused person's failure to give evidence at his trial. I believe that that is simply common sense. When an accused person has not given evidence, everyone in the courtroom is aware of that fact. The judge and the defence may, in appropriate circumstances, comment on it, but the prosecutor may not. Such prohibition is a wholly artificial constraint on the prosecutor's ability to put the full case before the court. In Scotland, juries have always been able to draw inferences from an accused person's silence and it defies common sense to suggest that they should not. We believe that it is far better that the prosecutor should be able to raise the issue directly and in open court, when it can be dealt with fairly under the direction of the judge.

There is no need to fear that the ability to comment will result in unfairness. Comments are likely to be made with restraint, lest they are challenged on appeal. The defence has the opportunity to respond to any comments made in its summing up, and the judge has a duty to ensure that comments made by both sides are fair and that the jury understands the law.

Both provisions were supported by a wide range of parties, including the Scottish judiciary, in consultation, and both received endorsement in another place from Lord McCluskey, a senior High Court judge. I think that we may therefore claim authoritative support for these modest but sensible reforms. I hope that Opposition Members will resist the temptation to indulge in knee-jerk reaction to the proposals for their own reasons.

The Bill contains important proposals, in clauses 13 and 14, for reducing needless attendance in court by victims and witnesses of crime. At present, no fewer than four out of every five of those called to court do not have to give evidence. About half of them are police officers, who could otherwise be out investigating and detecting crime; many others are victims, whose stress and trauma is increased by attendance in court; others are simply law-abiding citizens who have witnessed a crime and have come forward to assist the police and prosecution in upholding the law. It would very serious if such people became disenchanted by their experience and, therefore, less likely to come forward in future.

Our proposals for mandatory intermediate diets in summary cases, and the introduction of first diets in sheriff and jury cases, have the potential to cut by half the number of people who attend court unnecessarily. We know that because similar proposals have been tested in pilot schemes and because more and more courts are introducing those procedures voluntarily. For example, in Edinburgh sheriff court, 1,500 civilian and police witnesses are being relieved from court attendance each month. That is the equivalent of 18,000 in a year. In Dunfermline sheriff court, 340 witnesses are being excused each month and a similar number are being excused in Kirkcaldy sheriff court.

Taken together, the courts which have introduced intermediate diets are already releasing more than 1,000 police officers for operational duties each month. A

similar rate of success across the country would result in several tens of thousands of police officer days each year being freed for the fight against crime.

Mr. Foulkes: I welcome what the Secretary of State has just described. However, that cannot work in a sheriff court such as Ayr sheriff court, where there are not even enough witness rooms. That puts witnesses off. When witnesses for the prosecution are put in the same room as witnesses for the defence, they can be intimidated. That causes a great deal of concern.

I have been writing to the Secretary of State—the matter is being dealt with by the Minister—and to Strathclyde asking them to get together to sort out the accommodation problems in Ayr sheriff court. The problem has been going on for years. What is the Secretary of State going to do about that, because that point is even more important than the provisions in the Bill? I hope that the Secretary of State will be able to answer that question because he seems to be unable to answer questions. I know that he has a lot of problems on his mind at the moment. My hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has been attacking him—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow the Secretary of State to respond.

Mr. Lang: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the extensive capital programme of upgrading sheriff courts on which the Government have embarked since coming to office in 1979 and having found a somewhat derelict case. With regard to the provisions in the Bill, I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that precisely the same consequence can be achieved in Ayr as has been achieved in Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline and Edinburgh.

The purpose of the provisions in the Bill is to provide a firmer and clearer statutory framework for the best practice that has been identified and to ensure that those benefits are brought to victims and witnesses all over Scotland. If the experience so far is repeated across Scotland, we can expect many thousands of victims and witnesses to be relieved of the burden of attending court unnecessarily. That would represent a dramatic improvement for the victims and witnesses of crime, on whose support our criminal justice system relies. It would also provide an enormous boost to the capacity of the police to fight crime.

Mr. Dalyell: Is any action going to be taken against solicitors who allow their clients to plead guilty at the last moment when they must have known jolly well, for weeks if not for months, that they were going to do that? Is that not a deep abuse of professional conduct?

Mr. Lang: Again, the hon. Gentleman puts his finger on a very germane point which I will address, if he will permit me, when I reach that stage in my speech.

The burden which being called to give evidence can impose on witnesses is also being tackled in the Bill. Clauses 16 to 25 contain important measures for the agreement of routine evidence. That will reduce the extent to which witnesses, in particular police witnesses, have to attend court to give evidence which is uncontroversial and, in the event, not disputed.

The Bill contains two important provisions on sentencing. Clause 29 will make it clear that courts may take into account the fact that an accused person has pleaded guilty and the timing and circumstances in which the plea was made when deciding the appropriate sentence. Nearly 70 per cent.—this is the point made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow—of accused persons plead guilty straight away while 90 per cent. do so eventually. Of those accused persons who at present plead not guilty up to the day of the trial, two out of three will plead guilty on the day of the trial. Clause 29 will clarify an area of law on which there has been some uncertainty in Scotland and may encourage those who will plead guilty anyway to do so at an earlier stage.

Clause 30 provides expressly for the Appeal Court to issue opinions on the appropriate sentence for cases similar to the particular case before it and requires the lower courts to have regard to those opinions. That should help to make available to the lower courts, on a systematic basis, the wisdom and experience of our most senior judges and so should help to increase consistency in sentencing without eroding judicial discretion.

The courts will continue to be able to take account of genuine variations in circumstances, which may not be apparent to the public in superficially similar cases. I believe that we should do all that we can to encourage consistency of sentencing in genuinely similar cases.

I want now to consider appeals. Further provisions aimed at reducing delay in the criminal justice system are contained in clause 37, which introduces a requirement for leave to appeal. The test which an application will have to pass in order for leave to appeal to be granted will be that it demonstrates arguable grounds of appeal. At present, many appeals are abandoned before they come to a hearing and the provision will allow frivolous and unmeritorious appeals to be sifted out at an early stage. There has been a threefold increase in the number of criminal appeals over the decade to 1992, but almost 40 per cent. are abandoned before the hearing and only about one in five is successful.

The new leave to appeal procedure, along with the proposals in clause 38 to reduce the number of High Court judges required to consider appeals against sentence only, should help the Appeal Court in dealing with the high number of appeals that have been lodged in recent years.

Clauses 41 to 49 contain proposals to change the way in which our criminal justice system deals with the small but vulnerable category of accused persons who are insane and therefore unfit to stand trial, and those who are tried but acquitted because they were insane at the time they committed the offence.

Our proposals will mean that, in future, when there can be no trial there will at least be an examination of the facts to establish that the accused did the act with which he is charged, before he is perhaps committed to hospital without limit of time. We also propose that the courts should have a wider range of disposal options in such cases, including a community-based "supervision and treatment order". However, let me stress that a court will still be able, on the same basis as now, to impose a hospital order with restrictions when it considers that necessary to protect the public from serious harm.

Clauses 54 and 55 provide for the extension of fiscal fines, a disposal unique to Scotland within the United Kingdom. The provisions will extend the scope of fiscal fines to a wider range of minor offences.

[Mr. Lang]

I should make it quite clear, since some commentators have misunderstood our intentions, that those proposals have nothing to do with decriminalisation; nor are they targeted on drugs offences. They provide an additional weapon in the procurator fiscal's armoury. The consequence will be an increase in the capacity of our prosecutors and our courts to deal with more serious crime. In deciding whether to offer a fine in a particular case, the fiscal will be operating under clear guidance from my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate.

The Government recognise the significant potential which criminal justice social work services have to reduce offending behaviour. Our intention continues to be to reduce, so far as is possible, the use of imprisonment by the courts in cases where a community-based disposal would be appropriate. That policy is particularly important for fine default and the proposals in the Bill will encourage the use of supervised attendance orders in place of custody or, for 16 and 17-year-olds, in place of the fine itself.

Part II contains comprehensive provisions to deprive offenders of the proceeds and the instruments of crime. These are simple objectives which will, I hope, draw support from both sides of the House. The provisions in part II are derived from the report on confiscation and forfeiture which was presented to Parliament last September by the Scottish Law Commission. That report recommended the extension of confiscation arrangements to general crime where the offences are prosecuted on indictment or the maximum sentence in summary proceedings exceeds the normal penalties. It also recommended the reform of forfeiture provisions to improve the effectiveness of court forfeiture of the instruments of crime and to clarify the rights of third parties.

The Government moved quickly to present those provisions to Parliament by including them in this Bill. While we accept the main recommendations, minor amendments to the Scottish Law Commission report have been necessary. Some further minor changes may be required.

We have also announced our intention to consolidate Scottish criminal procedure. It is now 20 years since the last major consolidation of criminal procedure legislation. A number of provisions to facilitate that exercise are included in the Bill and we will be bringing forward others. This modernisation and rationalisation of the legislation will, I am sure, be welcomed by all who use our criminal courts.

At the same time the Bill includes, at the suggestion of the Lord Justice-General, arrangements for a new rules council for criminal court proceedings. With similar functions to the existing rules councils for civil court proceedings and a broad-based membership, the new council will provide a structured consultative forum for considering and commenting on proposals for changes to the court rules.

I have outlined thus far the main provisions in the Bill. I should not conclude without referring to three issues on which there has been public debate recently, but which are not included in the Bill presented to the House.

The Bill does not contain any proposals to change the verdicts which may be returned in Scottish courts. We reviewed the three-verdict system very thoroughly. We set out the arguments for and against three verdicts impartially, and consulted widely before reaching a decision. The responses to that consultation made it clear that the three-verdict system continues to be valued in Scotland and that, although there are strong views on both sides, there is considerably more support for the retention of the not proven verdict than for its abolition. After full consideration of all the arguments, we concluded that the not proven verdict should remain. The Government's position is therefore based on the clear outcome of consultation with the people of Scotland, and I am sure that the House will take careful note of that.

We also consulted on whether there should be changes to the criteria for the consideration of appeals by the Appeal Court and the way in which alleged miscarriages of justice are handled in Scotland. We had in view the report of the Royal Commission on criminal justice, which recommended changes for England and Wales.

The outcome of our consultation was inconclusive. Many of those who responded felt that the issues were too complex to comment on in detail. We received no evidence that there was any consensus on the way forward in Scotland in that sensitive and complex matter.

As a result, I decided to ask Sir Stewart Sutherland, the principal of Edinburgh university, to chair an independent committee to advise on whether any changes were needed to the current criteria for the consideration of appeals by the Appeal Court and to the machinery for handling alleged miscarriages of justice and, if so, what the nature of those changes might be.

The committee has started its task energetically and it has extended a general invitation to interested parties and to members of the public to submit comments. I have asked the committee to report by or before July 1996. If the committee is to give those difficult issues the consideration that they deserve, it will need time to do so. Those who call for an early report from the committee perhaps underestimate the task that it has been set.

I do not believe, therefore, that it would be right to include in the Bill provisions which purport to deal with miscarriages of justice. I intend to await the report of the Sutherland committee before deciding how to proceed.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: As the Secretary of State may be aware, there is some judicial controversy in Scotland as to whether existing provisions allow for the use at appeal of evidence which was not available at the time of the original trial. Indeed, it appears that the illustrious Lord Justice-General, Lord Hope, takes one view and that the equally illustrious Lord Justice Clerk takes another. As the Secretary of State is probably aware, it is proposed to convene a court of five judges to try to deal with the matter. May we take it that the Sutherland committee will take evidence from the two senior judges in Scotland?

Mr. Lang: The hon. and learned Gentleman will understand why the idea of my coming between the Lord Justice-General and Lord Justice Clerk would be to put myself between a rock and a hard place. I will allow the Sutherland committee to consider how best it should proceed in considering that matter, as I am sure that it will wish to do.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): The Secretary of State is aware that the Home Secretary has published a miscarriages review authority Bill for England and Wales. It will mean a mismatch of remedies available to United

Kingdom citizens regarding miscarriages of justice—one rule for England and Wales and another for Scotland. In the event that the Sutherland committee recommends legislation, will the Government ensure that the matter is given sufficient time in the lifetime of this Parliament?

Mr. Lang: In our legal procedures, perhaps more than in any other matter, we in Scotland should decide upon what is right for Scotland and Scottish circumstances rather than be driven by what is decided upon south of the border. That has certainly always driven our approach in the past. However, I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall await with considerable interest the outcome of the Sutherland committee's report before we are able to consider how to react to it.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the committee's decision will not interfere with applications for the prerogative of mercy that are currently before him? Of course, the Secretary of State has used his discretion, for which we are very grateful, to look again at the Raymond Gilmour case. There is no need to wait for the committee's decision before that case is considered.

Mr. Lang: Of course, I cannot bind myself or my officials in the context of forthcoming cases, but, in respect of the cases that are before us, I see no reason why that should be the case. I am as keen as the hon. Gentleman to ensure that such cases are considered with all due haste but without prejudicing the interests of justice.

Certain amendments addressing various aspects of the interests of victims in the criminal justice process were tabled for consideration in another place. They generated widespread debate, which the Government welcomed.

Let there be no doubt about our commitment to improving the provision of support and information to victims. Our funding next year for the organisation Victim Support (Scotland) will rise by 11 per cent. to £975,000. Local court-based initiatives, such as that at Hamilton sheriff court, are looking at how best to improve victims' understanding of and experience at court. Also, research is under way into the delivery of support services to victims and into exactly what information victims at court need and want. Those projects will inform our decisions as to what further improvements can be made.

This Bill will also play an important part by reducing the demands made on victims by court procedures and improving the capacity of the police, the prosecution and the courts to deal quickly and efficiently with crime.

This is a substantial Bill, which aims to make significant improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency with which crime is tackled in Scotland. It builds on the best elements of our distinctive system of Scots law and takes account of the views of those who have participated in the comprehensive review that we have conducted in Scotland over the past two years.

Mr. Dalyell: Have the Government considered what some of us regard as the very unsatisfactory nature of fatal accident inquiries?

Mr. Lang: I do not think that anything in the Bill deals directly with fatal accident inquiries, but that issue could perfectly reasonably be raised in Committee.

We are fortunate in Scotland in enjoying a criminal justice system which commands widespread respect. Nevertheless, there can be no room for complacency, and none exists among Conservative Members. The public rightly expect justice to be delivered quickly, fairly and efficiently by our criminal justice system. I believe that the Bill, building on the strengths of our distinctive system of criminal justice, will, if enacted, mark a step change in the efficiency and effectiveness of our system. It will play an important part in reducing demands on victims by court procedures, and ensure that the system is more sensitive to their needs. It will help to clamp down on the unnecessary attendance of witnesses in courts, reduce the burden on the police and the public and, more important, allow thousands if not tens of thousands of police days to be spent back on the beat, not idled away in our courtrooms. It will bring in new provisions to tighten up bail procedures and help to tackle offending on bail, which the public rightly abhor.

In contrast, the frivolous and opportunistic approach of the Labour party is reflected in the preposterous amendment. The Bill is one more set of measures that have been developed with care, thoroughness and determination, based on the authoritative reports of four distinguished review bodies to help us to fight crime, deal with the criminal, assist the victim, and improve efficiency, for the benefit of police, witnesses and society generally.

In recent years, we have substantially strengthened the police, increased the funding of law and order maintenance, toughened sentences, and built up crime prevention measures. For three successive years, we have turned back the tide of crime. Now we must make sure that the criminal justice system plays its full part in continuing that battle and in preparing for the needs of the next century. The Bill enables it to do that, and I commend it to the House.

4.58 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I beg to move,

That this House declines to give the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]* a Second Reading because it believes that the Bill is not an acceptable or effective measure to tackle crime because it fails to address adequately levels of crime in Scotland, particularly the rising trends in violent crime, vandalism, robberies and drugs offences, does nothing to address the underlying causes of crime, represents a major assault on the presumption of innocence and the right to silence as well as a tacit shift away from Scotland's present adversarial system of justice to an inquisitorial system, and fails to relieve adequately the pressure on the Scottish court system created by increasing workloads and under-resourcing.

It is staggering how sensitive the Secretary of State is to a reasonably expressed, reasoned amendment. The Secretary of State, perhaps rattled by criticism over the weekend, has decided that the procedure, which is well known in the House, is opposition to the Bill. Our reasoned amendment is as reasoned amendments always have been—a reason for the House of Commons to delay consideration of a Bill until issues identified in the amendment have been addressed and settled. Nothing in the amendment is controversial. Indeed, I am sure that, if they examine it, other Conservative Members—although precious few are present—will find that it has attractive aspects.

[Mr. George Robertson]

The Secretary of State, of course, may consider debates such as this as big a burden on the Conservative party as the whole Scottish contingent seems to be.

Mr. Stewart: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why 43 Scottish Labour Members of Parliament are not present?

Mr. Robertson: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that they are not all out on the Pollok estate. The Pollok estate is probably quite safe; they are all out undermining the Government's credibility—which is low enough already—without the aid of any artificial implement.

The House greatly regrets the absence of the late hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross—

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) clearly cannot count. He suggested that only seven Labour Members of Parliament were present; at least 12 are here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for the Chair. If the hon. Gentleman had been paying attention to his Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), he would probably not have chosen that moment to make a frivolous point of order.

Mr. Robertson: Let me repeat that we regret the absence of our late hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross. He would have brought his distinctive knowledge and experience of Scottish law to our debate, and I venture to suggest that he would have had a few acerbic comments to offer the Secretary of State about some of the Bill's provisions.

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, whose remarks are much appreciated by Conservative Members.

Mr. Robertson: I thank the Secretary of State, but I do not think that much of what follows will be greeted in the same way.

I welcome the fact that the Government have at last introduced a separate Bill to reform the criminal justice system in Scotland. It makes a pleasant change from Ministers' usual practice of tagging Scottish measures on to English Bills. Many of us remember with considerable dissatisfaction the disgraceful way in which the crime of aggravated trespass—an alien concept—was introduced into Scottish law: it was simply added at the end of the Criminal Justice Bill affecting England and Wales.

I am sure that the Secretary of State will forgive me for saying that my colleagues and I look forward to the day when matters such as this will be decided in a Scottish Parliament sitting in Edinburgh, and when Scotland's legal system will at last have its own legislature.

Mr. Stewart: Will the hon. Gentleman be there?

Mr. Robertson: I certainly hope to be. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman will be elected to any Parliament at the next general election.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I wish to ask the hon. Gentleman a question that is not frivolous, but important and fundamental. If he plans to sit in a Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, will he tell us where he proposes to pay his tax and where it will be deducted for the purposes of that Parliament?

Mr. Robertson: I have said—I will say it no more—that I shall be proud to be a Member of a Scottish Parliament: the Scottish Parliament that we alone will provide for the Scottish people, in accordance with their views. Even given the breadth of the Bill's long title, the details of taxation relating to that Parliament are not relevant to today's debate, but there is a perfectly reasonable answer to be made.

Ministers have spoken at length, in the other place and outside Westminster, about the painstaking consultation that preceded the publication of the Bill. I hope, however, that the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State will give an assurance that we shall have adequate time in Committee to debate all aspects of the Bill. It may well be some time before we have a chance to debate such matters again; I hope that we shall do so in a devolved Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, but it is vital for us to get the balance right at this stage.

In the House of Lords, the Minister of State described the Bill as

"the most substantial overhaul of the criminal justice system in Scotland in the last 15 years."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*; 29 November 1994; Vol. 559, c. 545.]

Although the Bill contains some worthy reforms, it hardly amounts to a major assault on crime and its underlying causes. No one would recognise it from the Minister of State's description.

The White Paper "Firm and Fair", which preceded the Bill, said:

"This White Paper is a further step in our fight against crime . . . our highest priority is to protect the public from crime and criminals."

Some people in Scotland, sickened and let down by the rise in crime and the consequent fear of crime, will gain some comfort from the Bill, thinking that it may contribute to allaying their distress. They will be deeply disappointed. There will be victims of crime, left scarred emotionally and physically long after a trial and even a sentence, who are looking for hope—people trapped in their houses after dark, afraid to walk the streets or leave their cars unattended in the streets of the Scotland of 1995. They, too, will look today for reassurance and peace of mind and they, too, will be disappointed.

Reform and reorganisation of the Scottish criminal justice system on a piecemeal basis, containing inexplicable, alien and party political attacks on certain basic Scottish characteristics of the system, are no contribution at all to tackling some of the most worrying and depressing features of the way in which crime and criminality affect people in Scotland today.

Of course I welcome the recent drops in recorded crime figures. It must be said, indeed, that it is in the big Labour regions in Scotland that the most progress has been made, and it is there that some projects have had their impact. But is it not strange that when the crime figures are good and progress has been made it is to the Government's credit, while when things go wrong or establishment levels cannot be attained it is all the fault of local authorities? Those of us who observed the success of Operation Blade—pioneered in Strathclyde by a chief constable under a Labour local authority—can have no doubt that a locally accountable police force in an area

that was responsive to its own people and their needs was able to make a dramatic impact on a form of crime that intimidated people. The Labour regions should be given some of the credit for the impact that has been made.

There is, however, no justification for complacency. The most recent figures must be set against the massive increases of previous years. Between 1981 and 1991, for example, the number of recorded offences in Scotland increased by 44 per cent. The fact remains that, although crime figures have dropped recently, they have increased substantially as a whole since the Conservative party came to power.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): The number of violent crimes is increasing, but they are not always reported or recorded.

Mr. Robertson: As my hon. Friend says, we must also recognise that crime figures do not take into account the significant number of offences that are either not reported or not recorded. We are seeing only the tip of the iceberg. The Scottish crime survey, published in April last year, estimated that in 1992 just over 1 million crimes and offences were committed in Scotland. Of that number, only 39 per cent. ended up in police statistics on recorded crime. There is good reason to believe that the Government's figures do not tell the whole story.

Beyond that, there are some disturbing trends that are hidden within the overall figures: the rise in violent crime, the explosion in drug offences and the increase in vandalism, robberies and car thefts. Between 1989 and 1993, robberies in Scotland rose by 26 per cent. and car thefts by 47 per cent. Since the Conservative party came to power, drug offences have increased by 1,056 per cent. That is proof, if statistical proof were needed, that the Government are losing the battle against drugs. It is a battle with which we have as much sympathy and concern as anyone on the Government Benches. It is a bleak picture that we see before us.

There is precious little in the Bill to tackle the underlying causes of crime. I was interested to hear the Secretary of State for Social Security on television last week finally admit that there was a link between poverty and crime. There is a blinding flash of inspiration for that last, free market, neanderthal individual. Not only have Ministers now admitted that they bear a responsibility for tackling inequality but they have at long last conceded the link between poverty, deprivation and crime. Those two key concessions clearly show that Ministers are now being forced on to Labour's agenda and that Labour is winning the battle of ideas on how to tackle crime.

Of course poverty can never excuse crime, nor does it always lead to criminal behaviour; but it would be folly to ignore the clear links that exist between poverty and crime. They are there. They are manifest. They stare us in the face. For that reason, any strategy for tackling crime that fails to deal with its underlying social causes is bound to fail. A root-and-branch attack on crime and the causes of crime is needed. By any standards, the Bill cannot be said to meet that task.

Nevertheless, as I said before, several provisions in the Bill are commendable and will enjoy our support. I was interested to note that the Minister of State in the House of Lords was kind enough to concede that many of the Government's proposals were included in our party's consultative paper "Protection and Justice", which arose out of the working party chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). We welcome, for example, the greater use of pre-trial hearings to prevent last-minute plea changes and to establish non-controversial evidence. That will greatly reduce the inconvenience and waste that are created throughout the system by the adjournment or cancellation of trials and spare many thousands of police and civilian witnesses unnecessary attendance at court.

Similarly, we support the greater use of fiscal fines. We note the contrast between the different approaches north and south of the border. Fiscal fines will provide much-needed relief to our overburdened court system and allow those who may have offended once or in minor ways to accept responsibility for their conduct without getting a criminal record. The use of fiscal fines has so far proved extremely effective in keeping a range of minor offences out of our courts. Therefore, we welcome the proposals in the Bill to extend the range of offences for which fiscal fines can be offered, provided that they are not applied inflexibly. With fiscal fines in mind, we also support, as my hon. and noble Friends said in the House of Lords, the use of a sliding scale for fiscal fines and of attendance orders as alternatives to imprisonment for 16 to 17-year-olds as a means of dealing with fine defaults.

We welcome the proposal to extend the powers of our courts to confiscate the proceeds of crimes such as pornography, fraud, extortion, insider dealing and corruption. The powers exist now in respect of drug dealing and it is right that they should be extended to other serious crimes.

We also welcome the new safeguards in the Bill for dealing with accused persons who are insane and therefore cannot stand trial, and persons acquitted on grounds of insanity. It is wrong that, at present, a man or a woman found unfit to stand trial may be detained in a mental hospital, possibly for the rest of his or her life, without our courts reaching any view of the innocence or guilt of the individual. Therefore, we support the requirements in the Bill for courts to undertake an examination of the facts to determine whether the accused person committed the offence for which he or she was charged.

Although the Bill contains many sound proposals, we have concerns on several matters which led us to table the reasoned amendment. First, although we support the Government's aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system, we believe that there must be a balance between streamlining the operation of the system and preserving the rights of the individual in criminal proceedings and the presumption of the defendant's innocence. The Secretary of State will be aware of the deep concern in Scotland that the Bill does not properly respect that balance.

It is all very well the Secretary of State coming to the Dispatch Box and pretending that everything in the reasoned amendment and everything that is likely to be said by the Opposition are purely partisan. He knows that bodies as conservative—I use that word with a small "c"; few organisations in Scotland would any longer be described as Conservative with a capital "C"—as the Law Society of Scotland and the Glasgow Bar Association have deep misgivings about the Bill.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The Glasgow Bar Association is not very conservative.

Mr. Robertson: That is an accusation which I am sure the hon. and learned Gentleman will substantiate later in

[Mr. Robertson]

the debate. I wonder whether it would describe itself as liberal. Does anyone these days? That is the problem for the hon. and learned Gentleman.

It is right that, in the light of those misgivings, we should streamline procedures and eliminate waste, but we should not at the same time sacrifice the basic principles of our legal system for reasons of expediency and cost cutting.

Unfortunately, the bulk of the proposed changes in the Bill, designed as they are to tip the balance of justice away from the accused in favour of the prosecution, will do just that. The accused's right of silence will be curtailed. The defence's right of peremptory challenge of a juror will be abolished. The disclosure of the accused's criminal record to juries will be permitted and the judicial examinations will be allowed to elicit an admission of guilt from the accused before there has been sufficient time for the defence to advise his or her client.

Taken together, those measures amount to a fundamental shift in the balance of justice away from the defence and in favour of the prosecution. More than that, they potentially represent a change in the very nature of the criminal justice system. At present, we have in Scotland an adversarial system in which the burden of proof is placed on the Crown. If we are to move towards watering down that obligation significantly, we will have, by default and without any real debate on what is proposed, an inquisitorial system such as that which exists on the continent. If that is the Secretary of State's intention, he should say so and make proposals for consultation on that grave and important matter. He should not pretend that he can introduce those changes without fundamentally altering the nature of our legal system.

Apart from making those general criticisms of the Bill, we shall examine more closely in Committee a number of other issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton will deal with some of them in his reply. They include the abolition of the right of peremptory challenge of jurors, the requirement that the defence should know the occupation and address of prospective jurors, the proposal for more judicial investigations and the new restrictions on bail.

I should like to highlight a few of the key issues that worry Opposition Members and many more people in Scotland. Clause 28 of the Bill permits the prosecutor in a trial to comment on the failure of the accused to give evidence at his or her trial. No one should be in any doubt that that represents a major attack on one of the most fundamental rights of Scottish law. Our criminal justice system in Scotland is based on the principle that a person is innocent until proved guilty. The change proposed by Ministers will erode that principle and is, therefore, a fundamental attack on the nature of our criminal justice system.

Mr. Lang *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Robertson: Predictably, the Secretary of State shakes his head and mutters under his breath that that is not true, but what about the words of Michael Clancy of the Law Society of Scotland? He is a distinguished representative with no partisan view. He is in hospital and I am sure that the whole House would want to send its best wishes for a quick recovery. He is someone of real substance in Scotland—the deputy secretary of the Law Society—and he was quoted in *The Herald* last November as saying,

"This is not just tinkering. This is the abolition of the right to silence."

Mr. Clancy said that it was not merely a modification or a qualification, but the abolition of the right to silence in Scotland.

The Scottish Council for Civil Liberties described the Government's proposals in this area as "ill-considered" and even the liberal, conservative or revolutionary—depending on how one thinks of it—Glasgow Bar Association warned that clause 28 might well conflict with articles of the European convention on human rights.

To make matters much worse, that major change has been tagged on to the Bill as a mere afterthought with only minimal consultation. Indeed, the proposal virtually or completely to abolish the right to silence in Scotland was introduced into draft statute two weeks and three days after the consultation period on the right to silence had been closed. In rushing ahead with such proposals, Ministers even ignored the advice of their own advisers, the Scottish Law Commission. To try to sneak in that change under the wire and to ignore the advice of their advisers displays a degree of contempt and arrogance that is breathtaking even by the Government's standards.

Will the Secretary of State or the Under-Secretary of State explain why such a fundamental change was introduced at such a late date? What is the reason for the sudden decision by Ministers? The official justification offered by the Minister of State in the other place was that the prosecution should have the same right as judges to comment on an accused person's silence, but that is no justification at all. The fact that the right to silence has already been eroded is not a reason for, justification of or explanation why it should be eroded still further.

Moreover, the prosecutor is already able to point out that Crown evidence is uncontradicted. As the Law Society of Scotland has noted, allowing the prosecution to comment further will only discourage accused persons from refraining to give evidence and the right to silence will inevitably be undermined. I therefore urge the Government to think again on that matter and to listen to what will be reasoned debate in the Standing Committee.

I must discuss two major omissions from the Bill. We already tackled one in our interventions—the lack of provision for new machinery for considering alleged miscarriages of justice. Of course, I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement that he has established the Sutherland committee, which will report on that matter no later than the summer of 1996. Now that the committee has been set up, it is right that that complex subject should not be decided on precipitately, but why has it taken so long for the committee to be established?

The Royal Commission on criminal justice in England and Wales was appointed in spring 1991 to consider that matter, among others, in respect of England and Wales. It reported in June 1993 and the Government have acted on its recommendations by establishing the new criminal cases review commission only last week. Why then has it taken so long for a similar committee to be established in Scotland? Clearly, there have been more high-profile examples of miscarriages of justice south of the border—

that remains a fact—but is the Secretary of State seriously arguing that there is no concern about the matter in Scotland?

The second notable omission from the Bill concerns the question of the not proven verdict. I would be the first to concede that there are passionate advocates on both sides of that argument and, for that reason, the question should be decided in Parliament on a free vote. When the matter is raised on Report, there will be a free vote among my colleagues in the Opposition on whether to retain or abolish Scotland's third verdict in Scotland.

I have long campaigned for the abolition of the not proven verdict, which is a bad and unnecessary verdict. Indeed, Sir Walter Scott described it as

"that bastard verdict, illogical, contrary to legal principle and wholly indefensible."

Since then, many other people have come to that opinion. It neither clears nor convicts the accused and, as a consequence, it undermines the fundamental principle that a person is innocent until proved guilty.

As a verdict, it leaves the accused and the victim hanging in limbo and for the rest of us it leaves a permanent question mark. The accused person may well be acquitted but will still bear a stain on his or her character. The accused may never be tried again but may never be able to clear his or her name. It is as unjust to the accused as it is to the victim and the victim's family.

Obliging a jury to choose between a guilty or a not guilty verdict, as is the case in every other country, means that the accused and the victim at least know where they stand. More importantly, the presumption of innocence that is at the heart of our Scottish legal system demands that if the Crown cannot prove its case "beyond reasonable doubt", the accused should be completely cleared.

Not proven has some backers among the legal fraternity and among the criminal fraternity, because it increases the chance of acquittal in a difficult case. It is also popular among some juries because it enables them to avoid a difficult decision. Undoubtedly, it is an attractive proposition for defendants who view it as an alternative to conviction and gaol.

In the White Paper on which the Bill is based, the Government make it clear on page 49 that

"Although the remit of the Royal Commission did not extend to Scotland, the Secretary of State undertook to consider the implications of the Commission's recommendations in the Scottish context".

The Secretary of State has hardly dealt with some of the issues that fall into that category. For the record, I shall tell the House what the Royal Commission on criminal justice in England and Wales had to say about the not proven verdict, as it is germane to the debate. It states:

"During our deliberations we considered the case for introducing into England and Wales the Scottish verdict of 'not proven'. This is available in Scotland as an alternative to 'not guilty' although it still counts as an acquittal. Most of those who gave evidence to us did not favour such a verdict. We too regard it as an unsatisfactory option, particularly from the point of view of the defendant, who is left with a cloud hanging over his or her reputation. If the jury does not convict, it means that the prosecution have been unable to discharge the burden of proof and the defendant should in our view be entitled to a verdict of not guilty."

In one short, concise and economic paragraph, the royal commission, which studied that matter in some depth, came to precisely the right conclusion. My opinion is that, for the Scottish criminal justice system and the public, it is an anomaly and an anachronism and it should be consigned to the dustbin of history.

Finally, on the resource implications of the Bill, the explanatory and financial memorandum states that it is to be "cost neutral". Frankly, that claim stretches all credulity. Indeed, I remind the Secretary and the Under-Secretary of State of Lord McCluskey's description of that claim in the House of Lords as "cloud cuckoo land".

I appreciate that there are difficulties in producing detailed estimates of the additional expenditure required to implement the Bill's provisions, but I understand that the Government provided some estimates of the financial implications in the consultation paper.

Will the Secretary of State now act on the suggestion of the Law Society and assure us today that we can see the information on which that cost-neutral estimate was made? In that way, hon. Members may have a proper reasoned debate about the Bill's financial implications. It is vital that we have that debate, because it is widely recognised that the fiscal system in particular is overburdened and under-resourced. If the Bill is to be enacted on a cost-neutral basis, it will have serious implications for the way in which justice is delivered in Scotland.

Far from the House of Commons, and even further from Ministers' offices in St. Andrew's house, crime and its impact are the overriding concerns for millions of ordinary Scots, who are told that crime statistics are falling but see in their daily lives a totally different picture. They know what Ministers simply refuse to learn: that the roots of crime are deep in deprivation and poverty, in gross inequalities and stark financial inequities that have grown during the Conservative party's period in office. Those causes are fed by the unemployment that is still so damagingly high in Scotland.

Crime and criminality hit us all, some much more than others, and cost everyone in society a vast amount in human and financial terms. That is why those tinkering knee-jerk measures go nowhere near far enough to tackle the crime crisis that affects Scotland today. That is why the Bill should be taken away and looked at again and that is why the House should vote for the reasoned amendment. Although we shall not vote against Second Reading, I commend the reasoned amendment for the attention and support of the entire House.

5.31 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): This is an important debate on an important Bill. It has already resulted in an important statement from the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson). In dealing with the procedures that he believes should in future apply to the Bill's measures, he said that not only should they be considered by a Scottish Parliament under a Labour Government, but that he would serve in that Parliament. Let us be clear, therefore, that he has told the people of Hamilton that there will be a by-election in the middle of the next Labour Parliament.

Mr. George Robertson *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. Will he or will he not serve in a Scottish Assembly if there is a Labour Government? I understood that he told

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the House that measures should be considered by a Scottish Parliament in which he would serve, which means a by-election.

I strongly support the Bill. Furthermore, I shall even apply to the Committee of Selection to serve on the Standing Committee. The queue of Conservative Members may be so long that I shall be killed in the rush, but I should be delighted to be considered to serve on the Committee because I believe that the Bill is extremely important.

I have good and bad news for the hon. Member for Hamilton: the good news is that I welcome the fact that the Labour party has tabled a reasoned amendment and will not vote against Second Reading; the bad news is that I shall not vote for it.

I wish to discuss three major issues relating to the Bill. The first is the right to make a peremptory challenge. The Government's proposals are absolutely correct because hon. Members on both sides of the House know what happens with the right of peremptory challenge. It is easy to turn up for jury service in Scotland and ensure that one is challenged by the defence lawyer. One simply turns up looking like the hon. Member for Hamilton or his hon. Friends—respectable, wearing suits, nice shirts and ties. One is then challenged and can leave. Everyone knows that that is what happens, so I strongly support my right hon. Friend's proposal.

Secondly, I strongly support the proposals to deal with further offences committed while on bail. Nothing outrages ordinary citizens more than when someone on bail reoffends.

Thirdly, I strongly support the proposals, in clauses 13 and 14 in particular, on witnesses who are not called. The hon. Member for Hamilton made it clear to the House that the Labour party also supports those proposals. There is no doubt about what happens in Scottish courts. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), who has slipped out of the Chamber for a moment, made a valid point on that matter. Witnesses turn up at court and find that the case has been deferred or the plea changed. Prosecution and defence witnesses are in the same room and intimidation takes place. The result is not just inconvenience but that ordinary citizens vow that they will not go through that again. They decide that, the next time they see an offence being committed, they will walk on the other side of the street.

Mr. McMaster: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that another group of people who suffer inconvenience are the police? When I last asked for an estimate of the amount of police time wasted in courtrooms on cases that would not be heard on the specified date or at the specified time, I was told that up to a third of the police overtime budget can be wasted on time spent hanging around courts.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is a waste of police time and is extremely frustrating for the police, who simply want to get on with their job. They do not want to sit around waiting for trials that do not take place.

The Bill will spare thousands of victims and witnesses unnecessary attendance at court by reducing late cancellations and adjournments of trials. The figures are well known and accepted on both sides of the House. In sheriff courts, more than 40 per cent. of trials are cancelled and 30 per cent. are adjourned, while only some 20 per cent. go ahead on the day specified. The Bill will help to deal with those problems and should be supported by the entire House.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): The hon. Gentleman is correct, but that is not the only issue that concerns people who attend court as witnesses. They are also concerned about the provision for witnesses. In some courts in Scotland, witnesses are not separated, which leads to intimidation of witnesses by others present, such as friends who may be there to give evidence for the defence rather than the prosecution. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Hamilton) is right to ask for the financial cost of implementing the best parts of the Bill. That needs to be spelt out so that we can ensure that facilities for witnesses attending sheriff courts do not allow for the aggression that takes place in many courts.

Mr. Stewart: In principle, the hon. Gentleman is entirely right. As the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley has said, I have no doubt that intimidation takes place. My hon. Friend the Minister will be delighted to hear, however, that I am not advocating a general increase in public expenditure to deal with that—that would astonish the House—but the hon. Member makes a perfectly fair point. It is all very well for senior lawyers in Edinburgh to say that everything is all right but other hon. Members and I are well aware that intimidation occurs in such circumstances.

I strongly support the record of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Minister on law and order in Scotland. Expenditure is not, of course, a measure of effectiveness, but there is no doubt that spending on law and order in Scotland has increased by 55 per cent. in real terms since 1979. There are now 1,500 more police officers in Scotland than there were in 1979; police constables' salaries have increased greatly; and victim support groups now receive substantial funding. I therefore believe that the Government's record is outstanding. I also believe, however, that there is never any room for complacency.

I do not want to speak at length on the clear challenge to law and order that now exists in relation to the M77 extension. Opposition Members, notably the hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson), perhaps the most right-wing member of the Scottish Labour party, will disagree with me about the principle of the road. That is their right, but there was a demonstration at the weekend—we all saw the pictures—which was illegal. It did not conform with the terms of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, which was passed by the House. As I recall, the provisions governing demonstrations were passed without a Division. That illegal demonstration was against the law of the land.

The Minister has worked enormously hard in his capacity as the Minister with responsibility for roads—no one could have worked harder for the extension. He must accept that that demonstration, which is a challenge to the House of Commons and to the law of the land, must be met. The issue is not about trees or roads, but whether people can act illegally against the law that the House has passed.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): Since the hon. Gentleman has impugned my reputation by describing me

as the most right-wing member of the Labour party in Scotland, I am bound to respond. I do not condone the violence that has occurred at the site of the proposed M77 extension, but when the hon. Gentleman speaks about upholding the law, he must recognise that those hon. Members who do not support that extension are concerned about the legality of the decision. In fact, we have the backing of official Labour party policy, which is in favour of a moratorium on motorway building. We are comfortable about that decision.

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is some doubt about whether the motorway extension is legal, as it has not yet been clarified whether an environmental protection order was established before permission to give the go-ahead was granted? Does he accept that there are different aspects to legality and that whether the extension is built remains to be put firmly in a sound legal context?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot debate the M77 when discussing the Bill.

Mr. Stewart: I wholly support the hon. Gentleman's right to put his point of view democratically. No doubt those on the Opposition Front Bench will, at an appropriate juncture, make it clear whether they support Strathclyde regional council.

The Bill is about law and order, criminal justice and improving the legal system. A challenge has been launched against the law of Scotland, irrespective of our democratic views, by the Pollok free state and the illegal march. I hope that when my hon. Friend the Minister replies to the debate, he will make it unequivocally clear that the House passes legislation about the laws of the United Kingdom and that the Government, or any other Government, are thereby committed to implementing those laws on behalf of the citizens of our country.

5.45 pm

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Govan): I would like to consider whether the measures in the Bill are likely to improve the real situation that faces people in the community. I want to look in particular at the provisions dealing with bail and to highlight a real difficulty faced by many of my constituents. It has been caused by groups of marauding young men and women, in gangs, who are terrorising decent people and committing serious assaults and robberies in small geographical areas.

A particular gang, which has been active in part of my area for a while, is not being dealt with adequately by the existing legal system. I do not believe that the Bill's provisions will overcome that difficulty. The gang, which is known as the "Crossey Posse"—the name comes from the Crossloan road and, presumably, the diet of westerns of those youngsters—has been causing havoc. The police have identified them and are now taking some action against them. Of the 18 members, they have accumulated between them 259 arrests for violence, dishonesty, breaches of the peace and carrying weapons. It is clear that detection has not acted as a deterrent to those youngsters. The legal system does not seem able to protect decent people from them. The delays in the system and the way in which it operates often mean that those people, once caught, are freed to commit a similar or different offence that same weekend. I do not believe that any provisions in the Bill would remedy that problem.

The police, having identified that gang, are taking steps, with my support, to target those individuals. They gave me their case notes on the individuals involved and it is interesting to note that they all have one thing in common. If I go through their ages and their descriptions, even the Minister will recognise it. They are described as follows: aged 17 and unemployed; aged 17 and unemployed; aged 18 and unemployed; aged 21 and unemployed; aged 18 and unemployed; aged 18 and unemployed; aged 17 and unemployed; the next is 15 and is still at school; another is aged 19 and is unemployed; the next is 19 and is unemployed; another is 15 and is described as unemployed. Perhaps that information about the latter youngster came from a highland policeman with the gift of second sight, because a youngster of 15 will not yet be unemployed. Given his background, however, he is likely to be so in due course. The other members of the gang are described as follows: aged 20 and unemployed; aged 17 and unemployed; aged 16 and unemployed; aged 19 and unemployed; aged 16 and unemployed; aged 19 and unemployed; aged 17 and unemployed and aged 16 and unemployed.

I believe that the fact that all those people are unemployed is more than a coincidence. The circumstances in which they grew up and developed do not excuse their behaviour, but the fact that they are unemployed, with, in the vast majority of cases, no prospect of gainful employment, affects the way in which they live their lives, alters their horizons, limits their choice and channels them into anti-social paths.

The system does not appear to be dealing adequately with those people, given the offences that they have committed. One of those youngsters, aged 17, and unemployed as I mentioned, committed 34 offences and has 28 cases pending. Obviously, the system is not operating quickly enough if it allows someone to build up a backlog of 28 cases pending, eight of which were offences under the Bail etc. (Scotland) Act 1980, whereby offences were committed while that person was on bail. Something is wrong with a system that allows that to occur.

Another member of the gang had 41 arrests for various offences, and 31 of those cases are still pending, including nine under the Bail etc. (Scotland) Act. If the system allows someone to accumulate that number of offences, the purpose of detection is partly lost. Detection should act as a deterrent. Those youngsters have been detected; they have been arrested; the papers are lying there, and nothing has happened.

Another member of the gang had arrests for 19 offences, 14 of which are still pending, two under the Bail etc. (Scotland) Act. Another member of the gang had arrests for 35 offences, 13 of which are still pending. Another had arrests for 42 offences, 18 of which are still pending, six under the Bail etc. (Scotland) Act. Another had arrests for 52 offences, 15 of which are still pending, eight under the Bail etc. (Scotland) Act. Another had arrests for 23 offences, 18 of which are still pending, four under the Bail etc. (Scotland) Act.

Can the Minister guarantee that the proposals in the Bill will ensure that offences do not accumulate to such an extent before a trial takes place? It causes great distress to many decent people in the community when they realise that youngsters committing crime are being caught but nothing is seen to happen. There is simply an accumulation of arrests and of pending cases, with no

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penalties whatsoever. That discredits the system. I hope that the Minister will tell us clearly and unequivocally that action will be taken to ensure that that is not allowed to continue.

I also hope that the Minister will clarify whether there are any measures in the Bill, or in the Government's mind to introduce in future, that affect the way in which the system deals with those who are involved with gangs, such as the one that I have described, whose members are under 16.

One of the young people in the gang, aged 15, committed 36 offences and received eight supervision orders, 14 "no proceedings" decisions—largely, I am told by the police, on the basis that the enormously overworked procurator fiscal's department has better things to do with its time—referral discharges and 10 abandoned charges. Those were not light offences. They were crimes of dishonesty such as breaking into cars, shops and houses. There are several assaults and offences of dishonesty.

When the system abandons any pretence at punishment, it is no wonder that the system is seen to be failing the people whom it is meant to protect.

In my area, complaints from members of the public were so frequent that there was the threat of vigilante groups forming to deal with some of the gang members. The police, to be fair to them, acted after they were approached recently by a substantial delegation with petitions and they have drafted in extra personnel, but such support to the community is not sustainable in the longer term. The system must be adjusted so that decent people may be confident that wrongdoers will be punished.

An argument was made earlier about the scale of police overtime wasted in courts. Certainly the staff of Govan police station tell me that a third of their overtime is wasted by waiting in court. In my opinion, that underestimates the scale of the problem, because many officers have their leave days adjusted in order to keep them in the station during the days when they are scheduled for trials. That is an enormous loss—an opportunity cost, as it were—when those officers should be doing something else. The figure of onethird grossly understates the real scale of wasted resources.

The judicial system is seen to be failing decent people, and I do not think that the Government response is adequate to deal with the scale of unhappiness in the community about those matters.

I see no evidence that the Government are prepared to do something that will make the existing bail system operate more constructively. For example, I would welcome the possibility of bail being conditional on a curfew in some circumstances—on the individuals involved staying away from specific areas where they have committed a series of offences in the past. We need fresher thinking from the Government on some of those issues.

Several issues have not been adequately tackled by the Bill, and I hope that the Government will be minded to consider those under the Bill or elsewhere.

One of the major difficulties is the problem of taking action against those who use houses owned by public authorities—council houses or housing association properties—for dealing in drugs. I believe strongly that those involved in dealing in drugs from such houses should be evicted from them, and I think that the Government have a responsibility to try to make eviction easier than it is at the moment, because it can be a long and convoluted process. As the Government have been prepared to consider forfeiture of the artefacts used in the commission of crimes, they should consider seriously making it easier for local authorities or housing associations to evict people who are involved in drug dealing from houses that are owned by associations or councils.

The Government should consider carefully the way in which they can introduce new legislation to help to curb anti-social behaviour by tenants in council or housing association property, especially when that involves excessive noise. That issue worries many people yet is not given the attention that it deserves, because few hon. Members live in property that is affected by noisy or anti-social neighbours. When one's next neighbour is two acres away, it is much easier to ignore the problems caused by noise than in circumstances where the neighbour lives next door and plays a stereo in the early hours of the morning.

Mention has been made of the circumstances in which the court system can allow the intimidation of witnesses. However, the intimidation of witnesses before cases come to court is prevalent in many areas, and I am aware of little evidence that the Government are prepared to treat the problem seriously. One of the means of tackling the problem is housing transfer, but it is difficult to envisage how housing transfer can accommodate the justified fears that witnesses have, in circumstances where public housing is being cut so drastically.

I am aware that, in my area, people living in public sector housing have appeared as witnesses for the prosecution. Their evidence has been vital to the prosecution cases yet, the case having finished, they are now being tormented by the friends of the guilty and the council cannot find adequate accommodation into which to transfer them. In those circumstances the Government have a responsibility to tackle that issue seriously. I recognise that there is no simple solution, but the problem must be recognised.

Finally, the Government must consider the fact that prevention is better than cure. I have already mentioned the fact that crime breeds in situations of unemployment and poverty, and it is a cause of regret to me that, having been a councillor in part of the area that I now represent as a Member of Parliament, I have known many youngsters growing up in that community who, bereft of hope and prospects, have now turned into criminals. In many cases it was the best and brightest, with little chance of an apprenticeship and little chance of employment, who perhaps were not bright enough to go on to higher or further education. In some cases they were bright enough, but did not believe that higher or further education would guarantee them a job, and they realised that the people in their communities who were making the most money the fastest were those involved in drug dealing. To my regret, many of them have become involved in such practices. The Government have a responsibility—which they are too willing to ignore—to tackle the problem seriously. Many of the youngsters drift into crime—petty crime initially and more serious crime subsequently—because there is little alternative.

For the youths in my area, where the opening hours of community centres are being restricted and youth clubs are being closed, there is little alternative to hanging around on street corners. In those circumstances, the prospect of breaking into a chemist, a shop or a house is often more attractive than doing nothing. We live in a consumer society and such youngsters have aspirations the same as everyone else. They want money in their pocket and can see no legitimate way to achieve that. Regrettably, many of them—those with a bit of entrepreneurial flair—turn to crime. The Government cannot and should not continue to bury their head in the sand.

Public spending will be necessary to try to combat crime. I have been struck by the way in which target hardening in my district has helped to protect houses, shops and business premises against break-ins. The concierge systems and closed circuit television cameras have combined to reduce drastically the prevalence of crime in specific areas, but such measures are not cheap and the Government must be willing to invest some money in trying to cut the cost of crime. Otherwise, the Bill will simply reorganise and improve some aspects of court procedure, but will not tackle the real burdens of crime carried by many citizens.

6.1 pm

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson (Aberdeen, South): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in the debate. I wish to associate myself with the comments of the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) about Sir Nicholas Fairbairn. It seems strange to be debating the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill without Sir Nicholas behind me, egging me on and giving me the odd word of what he considered to be advice. I am sure that he is looking down on our proceedings today and shaking his head in disbelief that those of us who are left should have the temerity to tamper with his beloved Scottish legal system.

In placing before the House the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, the Government send two clear, distinct messages. First, the passing of a specifically Scottish legal Act re-emphasises the uniqueness of the Scottish legal system, which we, north of the border, have always regarded as superior to that in England. Scotland's constitutional future appears to be the subject for almost daily deliberation and speculation in the pages of the newspapers. The fact that Scotland's legal system remains so distinctive and unique after almost 300 years of union, reiterates clearly that, far from the Union anglicising Scotland, it has given Scotland the identity and confidence to preserve and build on all that is distinctively and uniquely Scottish.

The Scottish legal system joins our education system and our national Church in helping to form the basis on which our national identity is founded. We in the House would never seek to change that. Our passionate defence of the Union is grounded in the firm belief that, through union, Scotland's nationhood and institutions have flourished. That today's debate takes place in the House of Commons underlines the fact that the correct and proper place in which to debate Scottish affairs is here in the sovereign Parliament of Scotland.

The second message from today's debate is that the Government remain determined to fight crime in every way that they can and to focus on driving fear from our streets and communities. My right hon. and hon. Friends will be interested, although not surprised, to learn that a recent survey carried out in areas of my constituency showed that people's fear of crime remains one of their key concerns.

People realise that much has been done to tackle crime. There are more policemen on the streets—as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, about 1,500 more than there were when the Conservative party came to power in 1979. Crime detection is at its highest level for five years. There are stiffer sentences for some offences and more powers for courts to deal with offenders. However, despite all those developments, many people still believe that the legal system often fails the very people whom it is designed to protect. It is self-defeating for the police to gather evidence and make arrests, if the court system does not deal with cases quickly and efficiently, and ensure that justice is seen to be done.

In opening the debate, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State reminded the House of the Bill's background—of the lengthy period of consultation that has involved the legal profession in Scotland, the police and, most importantly, the public, all uniting to create a coalition for change. In examining all aspects of the Scottish criminal justice system, from legal aid to juries, from sentencing to admissible evidence, my right hon. Friend and his colleagues have drawn up a Bill that is balanced and thorough and commands a good deal of public and professional support.

Through a detailed and systematic review of the criminal justice system, the Government have ensured that Scots will continue to have respect for the law and to have confidence in the system. Our legal system works well. Nevertheless, it makes good sense to carry out a regular and full audit, and to evaluate whether the system is working as smoothly and fairly as we would all want. Through what my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State has referred to in another place as an "overhaul", the Scottish criminal justice system is being prepared for the challenges of the new millennium. For those reasons, I warmly support the measures in the Bill, which will serve to reinforce public confidence in our justice system.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State outlined the Bill's major aspects and I have no intention of prevailing upon the patience of the House by merely repeating what he said. I shall, however, comment briefly on a few aspects of the Bill. The introduction of intermediate diets will be welcomed throughout Scotland. People will see cases coming to court much more quickly than at present. The Government have often emphasised the duty to highlight the needs of victims and witnesses, rather than just the criminal. Intermediate diets will provide an opportunity for both the defence and the prosecution to agree upon matters relating to a case that are not in dispute. Any such measure, which avoids the need for a witness or victim to undergo the trauma of testimony face to face with a defendant, must be viewed as a welcome development.

The clauses designed to amend the appeals procedure will also free court time. It is entirely unacceptable for the court system to be snarled up by an endless conveyor belt of appeals. Of course, the right of appeal must remain an inalienable right in a modern, enlightened democracy. No one in the House would want the right of appeal to be denied to anyone with a deserving case, but we must be practical. The number of appeals coming before Scottish courts has nearly trebled over the past 10 years. More and

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more frequently, the court case and conviction, far from marking a conclusion to the legal process, merely mark the beginning of a fresh round of procedures, which are placing an intolerable strain on court time and the court system.

For many defendants, the decision to appeal is a knee-jerk reaction to conviction. Often, little or no consideration is given to the merits of an appeal. Too many appeals seem to be motivated by a triumph of hope over expectation—the clutching at straws over reality. I welcome the proposals to allow a judge to decide on the merits of an appeal before court time is wasted. Provided that safeguards remain to ensure that deserving cases are not dismissed prematurely, surely the proposals will meet with the support of hon. Members.

There are few aspects of our legal system that inflame public opinion more than that of the so-called bail bandit—the defendant out on bail who goes on to commit further offences. Recent research suggests that 12 per cent. of those out on bail commit further offences. That is entirely unacceptable; bail is a privilege, not a right. It should be an option only when it is believed that further offending is unlikely. A breach of that trust should carry a heavy penalty. The ability to add six months' imprisonment for bail offences, in addition to any sentence imposed, is most welcome.

The clauses extending the rights of Scottish courts to deprive offenders of the proceeds of their crimes follow the already strenuous efforts by the Government to ensure that law breaking is never rewarded. Both those measures send an unequivocal message to criminals that their behaviour will not be tolerated.

The recent introduction of fiscal fines to deal with minor drug offences has been widely welcomed as a constructive development to deal with the escalating drug problem. The Bill will extend the range of offences for which fiscal fines can be imposed. Some have misconstrued fiscal fines for minor drug-possession offences as turning a blind eye to wrongdoing—as almost tacitly condoning the practice. A few have even ventured the suggestion that it marks the effective legalisation of drugs. That is certainly not the case. In the same way, the offences for which fiscal fines will become available will not be regarded as lesser offences simply because the matter does not go to court.

Fiscal fines represent a reasoned and logical response to the clogged court system; they are not a green light for certain crimes and no one should consider them as such. If used sensibly, they will provide an effective tool for streamlining the court system and ensuring that a court spends its time deliberating serious and deserving cases rather than acting as a clearing house for petty offences.

However, we must never fall into the trap of the blanket use of fiscal fines. Each case must be viewed on its merits, as I believe that there will always be cases where the defendant should answer to a court. I welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's assurance that the system will allow the prosecutor to elect for a trial rather than impose a fiscal fine if he deems it appropriate.

The public will warmly welcome the development of sentencing guidelines. I have no wish to highlight specific examples of when a sentence imposed by a sheriff or judge has caused anger and upset to those involved with a case, and a sense of general bewilderment, anger and sometimes outrage in the wider community. However, we are all familiar with such cases from the newspapers and from our mail.

Understandably, the media tend to highlight isolated examples of when justice has not been seen to be done. But of course, in highlighting the bad, the media obscure the many thousands of cases each year where conviction is followed by an appropriate sentence. Yet it is the few sensational examples of, shall we say, eccentric sentencing that undermine confidence in the entire criminal justice system.

The introduction of sentencing guidelines will serve an extremely useful function in attempting to eliminate the isolated cases where the punishment has clearly not fitted the crime. Of course, we must be mindful of the fact that sentencing guidelines can act only as an aid to sentencing in Scottish courts. I believe that the House never would or should sanction the introduction of sentencing rules. The sheriff or judge must retain a degree of autonomy and some room for manoeuvre in deciding upon an appropriate sentence. Flexibility and discretion are surely one reason why the Scottish legal system is admired throughout the world. Nevertheless, guidelines will be welcomed by those who are responsible for handing down sentences and they will assist in providing uniformity in the nature of sentences between courts.

I wish to remark briefly on the proposal to allow the prosecution to comment upon a defendant's silence during a trial. As the hon. Member for Hamilton said, the right to silence has long been a source of controversy within legal circles. As the House is aware, sweeping changes to the right to silence were contained within the criminal justice Act relating to England and Wales. The fact that the proposals that are before the House today are radically different from those relating to England and Wales provides a further illustration of the distinctive nature of the criminal justice system in Scotland and the way in which the House deals with it.

I again pay tribute to my right hon. Friend and to the Scottish Office for carrying out such detailed consultation on options to amend or even to abolish the right to silence. The Conservative party defends stoutly the rights of the individual. We have always emphasised the need to protect and enhance individual freedoms and rights. For that reason, a decision to erode the rights of the individual in the eyes of the law would be taken only after a great deal of careful thought and consideration. I welcome the fact that the Bill proposes to retain the individual's right to silence, but allows the prosecutor, in turn, the right to highlight a defendant's silence. I believe that that strikes a balance between the rights of the individual and the desire to ensure that a correct verdict is reached in the court.

I am sure that the changes outlined in clause 28 will satisfy the majority of people in Scotland who feel that, if people have nothing to hide, they will lose nothing by responding to questions put to them in court. As jurors are currently able to consider the silence of a defendant in arriving at a verdict, the change merely clarifies the position and may help to persuade defendants to put their side of the story on record during a trial.

In conclusion, I would like to convey to the House the views of some of my constituents. Since my election to the House in 1992, I have been surprised by the number of letters that I have received from people who are the unfortunate victims of crime. In almost every case, the

person asks why the system always seems to be on the side of the criminal and why the victim is constantly neglected or subjected to further suffering, often through the need to testify in court.

There is no doubt that the Bill continues the process of redressing the balance away from the criminal and toward the victim. We welcome the fact that, through the Bill's provisions, many victims will be saved the ordeal of testifying. Similarly, victims will be reassured that the proceeds of crime are likely to be forfeited by the guilty party and that further crimes by an accused who is out on bail simply will not be tolerated.

In short, the Bill signals the Government's determination to continue to crack down on crime and on criminals. Crime affects every constituency in Scotland as well as those throughout the United Kingdom. A crime-free society is an unattainable ideal. However, by supporting the Bill, hon. Members can play a part in putting in place measures that will further strengthen the courts' ability to deal with crime and with criminals. The people of Scotland expect and they deserve nothing less.

6.14 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) has left his place temporarily because I wish to tell him that, even though few hon. Members are present for the debate, I am sure that I am not the only one who was impressed by the somewhat Churchillian flourish with which he began his comments on the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill. It leads one to believe that, on all those self-contained and self-disciplined occasions when the hon. Gentleman stood at the Dispatch Box, he had the capacity, even the desire, to engage in rhetorical flourish.

That reference to rhetorical flourish brings me inevitably to a subject about which comment has been made already in the debate—the absence of Sir Nicholas Fairbairn from our midst. According to the conventions of the House, I could not call him "my friend", but outside the House he was my friend for a very long time. Like many hon. Members, I mourn the fact that he is no longer with us to ensure, through his curious amalgamation of ridicule and intellectual rigour, that the attention of the House is focused upon the detail of a measure such as the Bill.

Those of us who sat through the debates on the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill in the summer of 1990 will remember that as probably Sir Nicholas's finest hour—to use a Churchillian phrase—as he subjected the Minister, and indeed the whole Committee, to a full-frontal intellectual assault and, on occasion, made the Government's proposals look threadbare and second rate. It is a great pity that he will not be able to do that again on this and on other occasions.

With Sir Nicholas's passing, I believe that I am the only remaining practising member of the Faculty of Advocates in the House. Therefore, I declare an interest in the debate as the matters with which we are concerned might, on occasion, form part of the consideration of someone who is practising in the Scottish criminal courts.

Any opportunity to discuss the criminal law of Scotland should be welcomed by hon. Members. I do not exempt members of my own party from what I am about to say: I think that the poverty of attendance in the Chamber is a sad reflection on the seriousness with which people regard an important issue of this kind.

The Secretary of State began his remarks by drawing the attention of the House to some statistical information which he thought reflected well upon the Government's policies. He would do well to bear in mind the repeated warnings of Dr. Ian Oliver, the chief constable of Grampian—who has a robust reputation in such matters—that crime figures are notoriously unreliable as indicators of the true level of crime in society. The House would also do well to recall that, according to the most recently issued figures, crime in the category which includes vandalism and fireraising has risen by 5 per cent. Crimes of violence have risen by 2 per cent. and crimes in the category which includes drug offences have risen by 7 per cent. I do not think that those figures, which reflect specific areas of criminal behaviour, entitle any of us to enjoy a sense of comfort or achievement.

The Secretary of State also referred to the Bill's history. It is true that there have been consultation papers. It is a matter of judgment, but I do not believe that there is any evidence to suggest that the Bill which is now before the House has sprung from a systematic overall review of the Scottish criminal system. I particularly regret the fact that, whereas in the early 1970s, we had the benefit of a committee, the distinguished chairman of which was the late Lord Thomson, and two helpful and far-reaching reports, on this occasion we had no such assistance.

As the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) said, the Bill is a clear example of legislative proposals that should be scrutinised in a domestic Parliament. When people seek to draw distinctions between Scotland and that which may be available to Northern Ireland, it is often left out of account that Scotland's domestic law system is the only one in western Europe that lacks its own legislature. This debate may emphasise that as much as anything that I can say, but it is a compelling argument for a Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh.

These proceedings would also be better informed if we had taken evidence, as has been done with the Children (Scotland) Bill, from practitioners in Scotland, including the Faculty of Advocates; the Glasgow Bar Association, whose political complexion is neither here nor there; the Law Society of Scotland; the Scottish Council for Civil Liberties; the chief constables and the Police Federation. They are concerned daily with problems that we debate in abstract because, with few exceptions, we have no day-to-day experience of them—so our consideration of the Bill is necessarily flawed.

The explanatory and financial memorandum states that the Bill will be cost neutral, meaning that no additional resources will be made available. How many cases reported by the police to the procurator fiscal are marked "No pro"—that is, no proceedings—each year? Once proceedings have begun, and how many cases are dropped each year? Those statistics will give some indication of the extent to which anecdotal evidence that claims that the system is overburdened is justified.

Why are there temporary judges of the High Court of Justiciary? Why do more individuals hold commissions as temporary sheriffs than hold commissions as full-time sheriffs? The strength of the Scottish system is that it has been based on full-time, professional judges—unlike England and Wales, which use lay magistrates to far greater extent. If the Government are so committed to maintaining the Scottish legal system, why is increasing reliance placed on temporary High Court judges or

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temporary sheriffs? If commissions are justified, that can be only because work exists and judges are required to deal with it.

If we embark on a system in which intermediate diets play a fuller part and judicial examination may be extended in the way proposed, that will do nothing other than impact on judicial time. It seems self-evident that if the proposals are to work, additional resources will be required.

There was extended debate in the other place about victims. After 27 years of practising law in Scotland, I have reached the view that we have not in the past dealt properly with the victims of crime. I am wholly committed to the network of victim support agencies that has developed, not least in my constituency. Victim support is a separate and distinct function, and best done through the voluntary network now in place. Victims are assisted by clear information on the nature of procedures, scheduling of cases and their outcome. It is important to remember that all prosecutions in Scotland are brought in the public interest by the Lord Advocate, with the assistance of the procurator fiscal system. Private prosecution is extremely rare in Scotland. Our system does not have any principle of self-help or anything that might be thought to impinge on revenge. Other systems do.

I am worried that suggestions of consulting victims or even juries about penalties, which had some currency in the other place, move away from our legal system's objective and public interest nature. Sentencing must be the responsibility of judges. It must not be exercised in a vacuum. There must be proper training of judges on sentencing at all levels. They must not be bound by a tariff, as some suggest, but be aware of prevailing levels. The Bill's proposals in that respect are perfectly acceptable. Sentencing must be subject also to the supervision of the High Court—which, in the determination of appeals, may find itself able to give the guidance that is necessary for judges of inferior courts.

The essential feature is that every case must be determined on its merits. We must remember that reports of court proceedings that we receive from constituents, read in newspapers, see on television or hear on radio do not always reveal the whole circumstances of the case put before the court. Sentences must be judged objectively, not by the reactions of newspapers, Members of Parliament, victims or their families.

The Bill's complexity is almost overwhelming. Some hon. Members will be familiar with the principle, "Ignorantia iuris neminem excusat"—ignorance of the law excuses no man. If you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, think that that principle is important, I suggest that you read clause 37 and then ask yourself whether you are sufficiently seized of the Government's proposals to be certain that you understand the law in Scotland on the particular matters that clause concerns. The argument for simplification or codification is overwhelming. If we are to say to people that ignorance of the law is no defence, we have an overwhelming obligation to ensure that the law is readily understood, and not just by lawyers.

The Bill is welcome for attempting to create a more efficient system of justice. The provisions to obtain agreement on non-contentious evidence are entirely laudable, and the intermediate diet procedure seems a sensible extension of a principle that has been in operation in other parts of the system. The Bill seeks to amend bail provisions, and that justifies further discussion in Committee. I may have views about certain details of those proposals. To the extent that the Bill implements proposals of the Scottish Law Commission on confiscation and forfeiture, that, too, is welcome.

The hon. Member for Hamilton prayed in aid two authorities to support his views on the not proven verdict. The first was Sir Walter Scott. Anyone who read reviews of the most recent biography of Sir Walter, some of which were to be found in the weekend newspapers, may take the view for the moment that Sir Walter is not an authority on which one could place much reliance. In any event, as so much of that which is written about Sir Walter is apocryphal, it is the opinion of many people that he was driven to write the Waverley novels because he could not earn a living at the Scottish Bar. If that be so, his somewhat dismissive reference to the not proven verdict may not help much.

The hon. Member for Hamilton also referred to the English royal commission, which rejected the verdict of not proven in what one might describe as dismissive terms. We should remember, however, that the English commission was dealing with a system that requires a verdict of 10 to two to convict. That is entirely different from the Scottish system. Any change to the three existing verdicts could not, I believe, be properly effected in isolation, because we should then have to consider whether a system in which a person could be found guilty by eight votes to seven on a jury of 15 provided sufficient protection in the absence of the not proven verdict.

I accept that, on these occasions, anecdote is much more likely to triumph than objectivity, but it is my personal view and experience that the not proven verdict is a necessary protection in a system in which a person may be convicted by the odd vote in 15. It is also a sophisticated verdict; the jury expresses itself unwilling to give a certificate of credibility to the accused.

A woman in my constituency made a complaint about a sexual offence. She went to court and was subjected to the kind of harrowing and—sometimes inevitably—unpleasant cross-examination which accompanies cases of this sort. In the end, the verdict was not proven. Afterwards she told me that that verdict had allowed her to leave the court with a certain sense of dignity. Had the verdict been not guilty, it would have meant that she had not been believed.

We can speculate about the reasons why people will or will not come forward, depending on what they think the outcome of a case may be, but when sexual offences are alleged I believe that the not proven verdict is often an extremely important part of the system. It should not be cast aside lightly.

We should not change these verdicts out of a sense of sympathy with the outrage that victims or their families may feel. One understands why people feel aggrieved by the result of criminal trials, but my judgment is that people who are offended by a verdict of not proven are hardly likely to be less offended if the verdict is one of not guilty.

Mr. George Robertson: This appears to be a rerun of debates that have taken place elsewhere, although I appreciate that some hon. Members may not have heard them before.

In my defence, I should point out that Lord Wheatley and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) are two contemporary figures whose views substantiate the point that I was making about not proven—if Sir Walter Scott is not to be taken as a contemporary source.

Will the hon. and learned Gentleman concede that the case that I outlined this afternoon was not based on any particular trial in which the family of a victim was left aggrieved—although such cases do exist? My point is that the not proven verdict is just as unfair to the accused, who leaves with a stain on his or her character, as it is to the aggrieved victims, who may feel that justice has not been done.

Mr. Campbell: I have represented a number of accused people who—because of or despite the defence that I have mounted on their behalf—have had their cases found not proven. Not one of them has ever complained to me about the nature of the verdict. The hon. Gentleman may attach importance to the question of stains on the characters of accused people, but those in receipt of such verdicts do not apparently attach quite so much importance to it. I was not trying to argue ad hominem, except to say that I think that issues of this kind cannot be considered in isolation or in the abstract. If this proposal is to be discussed in Committee, I suspect that the hon. Gentleman may have to come up with other amendments then, designed to put his proposals for the not proven verdict into the broader context which they undoubtedly deserve.

I have been puzzled by the claim that the abolition of the peremptory objection and the abolition of the need to state a juror's occupation on the jury list will enhance the administration of justice. In place of the peremptory objection, we are offered the institution of something that may be described as a joint application for excusal. That may embrace more problems than it seeks to solve. What if, for instance, there is an intransigent agent or advocate for the defence? What about an intransigent prosecutor? In the real world one hopes that neither will be intransigent, but the fact is that people may take a concluded professional view in respect of an excusal, based on an analysis of what seems to them best for the prosecution or for the defence. In such circumstances agreement will not be possible; nor, therefore, will a joint application for excusal be possible.

I am sorry to note that the hon. Member for Eastwood is no longer here, but I point out that the fact that a person may have a particular occupation may give rise to an apprehension—not necessarily in the minds of the professionals engaged in the defence—on the part of the accused person that the person with that occupation will not be entirely objective. Let us imagine a case in which it is alleged that someone has attacked a postman on his rounds. The accused, who is entitled, as we have often heard, to a presumption of innocence, is likely to think that having a postman on the jury will give rise to an apprehension that objectivity will be difficult to achieve.

Another illustration—I am afraid that this often happens now—concerns a doctor to whose local surgery a false call has been put through and who is then ambushed by someone lying in wait for him to steal his drugs. Here again there might be a reasonable apprehension on the part of the ambusher that objectivity would be difficult to achieve if a doctor served on the jury.

The retention of the peremptory objection is thus a legitimate power in the hands of the defence, and it does no damage to the administration of justice.

Much has been made of the position of the accused at judicial examination and at trial in circumstances when he or she gives no evidence. There has, I think, been an understandable but flawed tendency to run the two issues together. They are quite separate, and they raise separate considerations. If enacted as drafted, clause 10 will turn judicial examination into something that may not quite justify the conclusion that it is an inquisitorial hearing, but it will have rather more of that character than has perhaps been appreciated hitherto.

An accused person may well be vulnerable at the time, because judicial examination follows hard upon a person being taken into custody. The accused is vulnerable because he or she is confused, apprehensive, upset and even frightened: and because at this stage he or she may have no knowledge of the facts on which the prosecution intends to proceed. That absence of knowledge may be shared by the defence solicitor.

As matters stand, the solicitor who appears on behalf of an accused person at judicial examination has no right to object to any of the questions—so a protection available at trial will not be available at the time of the judicial examination. The position of a solicitor will be difficult, either because the accused may be forced to answer questions that might ultimately prejudice the defence, or because the accused, on the advice of the solicitor, will say nothing, and that failure to comment may be relied on at a later stage. For a solicitor brought in at short notice, with little knowledge at this stage of the nature of the prosecution's case, it will create an intolerable professional burden.

There is no need for those provisions. I have yet to be convinced that there is any utility attached to them.

Clause 28 raises a different issue. At the moment, at least, I am open minded about it. If a prosecutor is given the right to refer to the fact that the accused has not given evidence, the accused should have had by that stage the benefit of legal advice—tactical and sometimes strategic—on whether it would be right to give evidence. The facts will be known because the evidence will have been led. A conscious decision will have been made not to give evidence. At that stage, both in summary proceedings and solemn proceedings—that is to say, before a judge and jury—the defence will have had the opportunity to make a motion that there is no case to answer.

The provisions of clause 28 raise a different issue from those that are contained in clause 10. There is at least scope for putting the Government to the test of establishing that what they propose in clause 28 is justified. I can say as someone who has prosecuted, but not in recent time, that it was never difficult for the prosecutor to find a form of words that conveyed to the jury precisely the point with which the clause is designed to deal. For example, the prosecutor might say, "Ladies and gentlemen, you might have benefited if you had heard other explanations of what took place, but you have heard only the explanation of the victim." He might make the same comments and then say, "You have heard only from the two police officers who saw what was happening." Such comments are legitimate under the present system. On that footing it may be difficult to maintain as stoutly

[Mr. Campbell]

as some have that what is proposed in clause 28 is damaging and dangerous. Clause 10 is of a different category.

References have been made to miscarriages of justice. Although he is not in his place, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), who conducted a most responsible and informed campaign on behalf of one of his constituents, Mr. Raymond Gilmour. I had the benefit of reading all the public papers that are attached to that case. This is not an occasion for going into its merits, but it is worth reminding ourselves—even those of us who are so impressed by the quality of the Scottish legal system—that cases of that type do arise from time to time, which raises apprehension both inside and outside the legal profession as to whether a just verdict has been achieved.

As I have already said in an intervention, the Lord Justice-General and the Lord Justice Clerk in Scotland have taken different views about the existing statutory provisions that relate to the availability of evidence on appeal and which might have been thought to be available at the time of a trial such as that of Raymond Gilmour. I refer to the matter in passing because it shows that there is no such thing as judicial infallibility. It may even demonstrate in a quite compelling way that if the two senior judges in Scotland are at odds on such an issue, the need for early legislation relating to alleged miscarriages of justice and the availability of evidence is paramount.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred to some solicitors who, he said, persuaded clients to plead not guilty until the last moment. No doubt there are some—I would not suggest that there is none. It is often difficult, however, to persuade an accused person to plead guilty, even if the evidence is overwhelming. In some cases there are difficult questions of law that have to be the subject of careful consideration. In other cases difficult issues arise about the availability of witnesses and whether witnesses will stick with the version of events that they may have given either to the prosecution or to the defence. Late pleas of guilty, damaging though they are to the administration of justice and dissipating of funds and valuable court time, are not necessarily always to be explained by the notion of greedy lawyers seeking to protract proceedings to line their own pockets.

The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) referred to the powers of licensing boards. I declare an interest because I have a particular professional interest. There is scope for some amendment to the law that allows the boards the opportunity, when they decide to suspend a liquor licence, to act at least on an interim basis. Once an appeal has been marked against such a suspension, it should be possible for the board to go to the sheriff to argue that until the appeal is determined the licence should not be allowed to operate. At present, once an appeal is marked, all the previous proceedings are suspended and someone whose licence may have been suspended under section 31 of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 may continue gaily operating his licence until such time as the local sheriff has dealt with the appeal. That is a matter to which further consideration should be given. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley raised the matter because of recent events in Ayr.

There are some things about the Bill that are to be welcomed but there are others that are not entitled to the same reception. The weakness of the Bill is that there does not appear to be any discernible scheme behind it. It carries more than a hint of doing something or anything to meet a tide of public opinion that is increasingly anxious about the nature of criminal activity in Scotland. The Bill is undoubtedly capable of improvement in Committee. If it reaches that stage, I hope that it will receive such improvement.

6.46 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I shall be brief because I know that others wish to speak. I listened with great care to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). His contributions to Bills of this sort are important and welcome. As has been said, I am sure that we all miss the wit and wisdom of my late Friend, Sir Nicholas Fairbairn. Both he and the hon. and learned Gentleman brought valuable hands-on experience to Scottish legal Bills. I do not have that experience but I welcome the Bill for two reasons.

First, I welcome the Bill because on the basis of public confidence there are areas of the law that must be considered fairly regularly so that we can keep pace with public concern. There will be opportunities during our consideration of the Bill—I hope to be able to make use of them—to table amendments on sentencing policy. I am a great believer in deterrent sentencing. That is not the only vehicle to be considered but it is an important one when it comes to recognising and meeting concerns.

It is important to recognise, as the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East has said, that the judiciary is not infallible. Mistakes will occur. We must expect that and so we must have a system that addresses it. We must recognise also that there can be technical malfunctions in the way in which a court is administered and run. I can think of a recent instance where a jury was confused. That confusion led to sentencing problems. That is another issue that may call for amendments.

Secondly, I welcome the Bill because it is designed to tighten bail provisions. There is great concern that those who are given bail offend again. I welcome the fact that we are retaining the not proven verdict. It is a valuable provision in Scotland. If a jury is not satisfied that a case has been proven beyond reasonable doubt but it is not satisfied that the accused is not guilty, the parties can leave court at least knowing that the case has not been proven one way or the other. That is important. I also welcome the fact that we shall consider in Committee the important question of how people can or cannot be drawn into answering questions.

As I said, my speech is very brief because I hope to use the opportunity in Committee—like most Scottish Conservative Members, I expect that I shall have no option but to be in Committee—to table and speak to amendments on important points in the Bill.

6.49 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): As an hon. Member who represents an inner-city constituency, I know only too well and come into regular contact with many of the activities to which hon. Members of all parties have referred, not least the tragic toll of deaths relating to drug taking. There were 95 such deaths in 1994

in the Strathclyde region, many, I am sorry to say, in my constituency. My constituency, like many other inner-city constituencies, also witnessed various other violent activities such as attacks on the person, often unprovoked and, apparently, for no reason. There is also a considerable amount of car crime, burglary, sexual attacks—sadly—and of course the increasingly visible effects of domestic violence, which is prevalent throughout society.

All those crimes in my constituency go hand in hand with many of the effects of an appalling standard of living, to which many of my constituents are condemned. In many cases that standard of living means that my constituents have to put up with appalling housing, which is very badly maintained, frequently damp and badly repaired. Of course increasing numbers of young people are unable even to obtain such housing. There is high unemployment and another sad death toll every winter of old-age pensioners who are unable adequately to heat their accommodation.

All that adds up to a picture of which no Government can be proud. It would be unfair to blame it entirely on the Government, although it would be equally fatuous to suggest that they had no part to play and that they were not, in some respect, responsible. I concede that many of the conditions will continue to exist under a Labour Government, but the question is: how will we respond? One of the ways in which to respond is to ensure that the police are adequately resourced.

An astonishing statistic was revealed in Strathclyde last month, when Leslie Sharp, the much respected chief constable, announced that the full complement of staff for his force had reached some 4,200. That was astonishing because that level was set in 1974, during the previous round of local government reorganisation, when Strathclyde region came into being. In the 20 or more years since the region was established, that level had never been met and there had never been a full complement of police officers, despite the fact that I and other hon. Members who represented the Strathclyde region were often lobbied by Leslie Sharp and his predecessor and, that we, in turn, lobbied Scottish Office Ministers for adequate resources to enable the police to do the job demanded of them. It was, however, a false dawn because this month, after that announcement, the figure has again fallen blow complement. Due to national wastage, retirement and non-filling of vacancies, Leslie Sharp's police force is again below its full complement and he does not have sufficient officers for the many difficult and trying jobs which face them.

It is not simply that Strathclyde regional council has been profligate with its resources. Goodness knows, it is short of resources in so many ways, as the Secretary of State knows well since he has heard myself, other colleagues and my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) specifically speak on local authority funding in recent weeks.

Nor is it sufficient for the Secretary of State to say that the local authority has the resources that it needs to carry out its functions and to give police adequate staff to carry out their job. Patently, they do not have sufficient resources. Of course I welcome and commend falling crime figures, which to a large extent result from increased police activity, but every time that I meet police officers—representing a city-centre constituency, I cover a number of divisions in the city of Glasgow and meet regularly with the police—they consistently return to the question of resources.

One of the questions that we should be asking in this debate is: why does crime continue to flourish? I am aware of the figures which have been quoted, but, none the less, a considerable number of people do very well out of criminal activities, often at the hands of those people who can least afford it. Parents regularly come to my surgeries or write to me in despair asking what can be done; why cannot the police put a stop to crime and why are the local peddlers of drugs on the street corner well known to everyone in the community, yet—apparently—the police are unable to act and arrest them?

I know that the sellers on the street corner are not the major problem; they are the visible aspect only of the problem. None the less, it is difficult to explain to my constituents that the resources to deal with crime in the community are available when, in many cases, petty criminals are well known and appear to flourish and act impudently in their own area.

A major factor to consider in fighting crime is its root causes. I am aware that that argument does not carry much weight with Conservative Members, but the causes of crime are frequently economic or socio-economic. The speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Davidson) highlighted the difficulty that he has encountered in his constituency, which is replicated in—I suspect—hundreds of constituencies, including those of Conservative Members. It is not simply enough to say that people get themselves into such difficulty. Not many trainee chartered accountants or law students or young self-employed people are involved in crime. Nor, indeed, are many apprentice bricklayers or hairdressers indulging in crime, drugs and such activities. Nor is it simply a working-class or middle-class phenomenon. By and large, people indulge in crime because they have little else to do. I am aware that that is a generalisation, but I am sure that hon. Members will agree.

Any democratic and caring society ought to be able to provide the chance to get a decent education, training which will lead to a job, a decent house and the ability to establish a permanent relationship and—one hopes—raise a family in the belief that our children will have a reasonable opportunity to build a life for themselves. Today's society is unable to provide those chances and those opportunities are plainly absent from the lives of too many young people. It is a mere pipe dream for them. As a result, many seek escape through the crime to which I have referred, especially—sadly—relating to drugs. The attendant crime necessary to finance such activity has all sorts of spin-off effects.

I am not offering that dearth of opportunity as an excuse for the lawlessness which is increasingly evident among young people; I am simply suggesting that it is part of the explanation and must be taken into account. We cannot tackle crime without tackling the causes of it. A strong and sustainable economy, which provides training, jobs and hope is much more likely to turn young people away from crime than any amount of police resources or any amount of community activities even though they have, of course, a part to play.

The Bill is about changing the law and not simply about dealing with crime and how to respond to it, important though that is. I hope that the Bill is also about improving the law; moving it forward and making it more relevant

[Mr. Mike Watson]

to the 1990s and beyond the millennium. Like all hon. Members, I recognise the expertise and vast experience of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). He outlined a number of ways in which the Bill could have improved the law of Scotland, but has missed the opportunity to do so.

I shall highlight a specific area in which the law could be improved, which relates to a debate on the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill a year and a week ago this evening.

The debate that stirred up the greatest amount of public interest in respect of that legislation concerned new clause 3 which dealt with the age of consent in relation to homosexual acts in private. That debate produced a change in the law. The age of consent was reduced from 21 to 18 although moves to reduce it to 16 were defeated by a majority of 27 votes. An overwhelming majority of 265 were in favour of decreasing the age to 18 and that is now the law.

The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill offers an opportunity to carry that law forward and, in a sense, to take the next step towards the logical conclusion of the progress in last year's debate. I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not allow me to rehearse the arguments for an equal age of consent for all, but I believe that it is totally illogical to have an age of consent of 16 for heterosexuals and 18 for male homosexuals.

I want to concentrate on the Scottish aspect of that debate because Scottish Members made their views very clear in the debate last year. Fifty-three of the 72 Scottish Members, the hon. Members who have a particular interest in the Bill that we are discussing today, voted in favour of the age of 16, and 17 voted against that age. There have been changes since last year's debate and new Members for constituencies elsewhere in the United Kingdom would affect attitudes towards an age of consent of 16 if the matter were voted upon again. I hope that this Bill will allow us an opportunity to do that.

In 1991, the Crown Office in Scotland instituted a review of the prosecution policy on consenting homosexual acts. At that time, the Crown Office issued a circular to procurators fiscal—circular No. 2025/1—instructing them that in a reported case of sex between men

"where both of the participants are over 16 but one or both are under 18 and the act appears to have been consensual and in private"

procurators fiscal should report the case to the Crown Office for consideration by Crown counsel. Only two cases have been reported in the four years since then. The instruction was reconfirmed in June 1994, but the Crown Office has stated that the review of policy is continuing.

After the passage of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, Outright Scotland—the lesbian, gay and bisexual rights organisation—approached Lothian and Borders police specifically about their policy on pursuing private consenting sexual acts between men over 16. Lothian and Borders police have confirmed publicly that

"such investigations appear nowhere on our list of priorities."

However, they said that if a complaint were received from a member of the public, they would be bound to investigate.

Although the law is not being upheld actively by the police or the Crown Office, young gay men remain at risk of police investigation brought on by a complaint to the police by anyone, be that a neighbour or an unfriendly acquaintance. The current law brands young gay men as second-class citizens from the age of 16 and it acts to discourage many young gay people from seeking the advice and help that they need from their parents, doctors, teachers or the police.

The question of whether there should be an equal age of consent is not simply a matter of equality: it is a matter of human rights and of civil rights. It is wrong, and ultimately unsustainable, that young gay men should be criminalised and stigmatised for doing what their heterosexual friends do perfectly legally—that is, making love with a partner of their choice.

Many of our European Union partners are considerably ahead of us in terms of legislation with regard to the age of consent. Many of us have a great deal of good will towards Ireland, but with the best will in the world we would not categorise Ireland as a liberal country. However, Ireland has an equal age of consent at 17 which is ahead of the United Kingdom.

It is somewhat ironic that the playwright Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years in Reading gaol almost exactly 100 years ago in May 1895, but discrimination against gay men is still effectively legalised. Stonewall carried out a survey of 2,000 lesbians, gay men and bisexuals which found that 8 per cent. had been sacked from their employment, 48 per cent. had been harassed and 68 per cent. were not fully confident enough to talk about their sexuality at work for fear of the consequences. It is appalling that, in 1995, people should be afraid to be open about their sexuality because they fear for their jobs.

As I have said, an age of consent of 18 still criminalises young men when the law claims that it is actually there to protect them. The stark fact is that the law as it stands does not act as a deterrent. As has been demonstrated, there exists among the police neither the will nor the ability to enforce that law effectively.

It should be self-evident that the criminal law should have no role in matters of private morality where consenting adults are concerned. Scots law has often been ahead of its English and Welsh counterparts, as other hon. Members have said. I suggest that it should take the lead again. When this Bill enters Committee, I hope that an amendment will be tabled which will allow the House to vote on the age of consent.

I do not see it as a matter of Scotland having a different age of consent from the rest of the United Kingdom. I see Scotland as simply moving one step ahead because it is clear, on the basis of the vote a year ago, that when the matter comes before the House as it affects England and Wales, as well as Scotland, the vote in favour of 16 will be carried. This Bill offers an opportunity for Scots law to move ahead and to give a lead. I very much hope that such a lead will be taken in Committee.

7.5 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): I would like to give a last salute to Sir Nicholas Fairbairn. This debate would have been a perfect medium for his expertise, experience and wit which could skewer as well as edify at times. We are all the poorer for the loss of his very individual contributions to this particular subject and to other debates in the House.

The Bill is basically a general review of the mechanism through which crime is dealt at judicial level and measures for robbing criminals of the proceeds of their crimes. While I have specific reservations about the Bill, I welcome attempts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Scottish criminal justice system.

It is essential that justice is enhanced through the elimination of waste and inefficiency where that is practicable. Hence the aspects of non-contentious evidence and pre-trial procedure can be improvements, but they are predicated on adequate resources being available. As ever, with this Government, that would leave a question mark over the proposals.

With regard to resources, I noticed that the Law Society of Scotland points out that

"a quantitative estimate of the general resource implications of many of these proposals is to be found in Chapter 14 of the Consultation Paper 'The Review of Criminal Evidence and Criminal Procedure'".

Will the Government make available the information on which that estimate is based? Without the requisite resources, the hopes of the reforms will not be delivered. Will the Minister make clear the financial calculations on which the proposals are predicated?

My reservations are based on my wish to ensure justice and to protect the rights of any accused person to a fair trial. I am concerned about clause 10 and I ask the Government to think again about it. It would allow the fiscal to question an accused at the examination before the sheriff in such a way as to extract a confession of guilt. That transforms the judicial examination into a form of investigative hearing more akin to an inquisitional procedure. That strikes at the very heart of the existing Scottish system and would swing the balance very much against the accused. That is a fundamental sea change in the approach of Scots law.

Admissions at judicial examination would give more power to the prosecution to try to achieve an early conviction. That is part of the cost-cutting exercise implicit in the Bill. The measure would put unjust and undue pressure on the accused at a time when that person has had little or no time to consult the defence agent. That challenges the Scottish legal position of emphasis on the need for the prosecution to prove its case as opposed to the accused having to establish his or her innocence.

Although the pre-trial right to silence is not challenged in the Bill as yet, clause 10 opens the door for future movement in that direction. I am concerned that although the need for comprehensive legislation to tackle the criminal justice system has long been recognised, we have been presented with a piecemeal Bill. The consultation period ended a fortnight before publication of the Bill, leaving little time for the consideration and incorporation of changes influenced by the consultation process—and it shows.

Although some proposals, particularly those put forward by the Scottish Law Commission, make good practical sense, other measures such as clause 10 appear to be a trade-off of civilised justice provisions for cheap political ends, with the danger that no practical benefits will accrue either to the Treasury or to the public.

The Government's proposals will create some practical problems for the system. The already enormous pressures on procurators fiscal can only be exacerbated by the introduction of compulsory intermediate diets in all summary cases and the reintroduction of the failed expedient of first diet in all solemn cases in the sheriff court. When those are added to the other proposed duties, which will also affect the defence, it will be obvious that less and less time will be available for the preparation of cases, which will lead to greater inefficiency and to potential injustice. I should like to hear the Minister address those practical problems.

The Scottish National party certainly welcomes the tightening up of the law regarding the granting of bail in serious cases, but it fears that the bail provisions generally are merely examples of tinkering with the system. If the Government go ahead with clause 10, I shall seek Law Society of Scotland safeguards, for example on the line of questioning which allows the right of the defence solicitor to object and the opportunity for the judge to interrupt, and for further detailed disclosure of the statement of facts and the line of inquiry being used by the prosecution at the judicial examination. I hope to hear the Minister talk about what safeguards will be available to the accused in such cases.

The Government must address the serious problem of the lack of time available for the defence at the time of a judicial inquiry. That matter cannot be glossed over, because it is a practical matter and it is essential to protect the right of the accused.

Clause 28, which relates to the right to silence, is an attack on civil liberties and again challenges the accusatorial nature of the Scottish criminal justice system. Various arms of the legal profession have stated that there is no need to change the right to silence provision, but the Government have ignored them in order to comply with the English law and order agenda.

Sentence discounting is plain injustice. I should like to hear the Minister try to justify it. The sentence should reflect the nature of the crime and the situation of the criminal, and it should not be conditioned by the time that the plea is made. There is an obvious attempt to save money by encouraging early pleading, but it challenges and undermines the basis of sentencing procedure. Why should the admission of guilt entitle a criminal to a lesser sentence than that for someone who exercises the right to go to trial? That suggests the Government's willingness to apply softer sentences to save money with early pleading.

The Government state that the legislation will be costneutral, but I question that. If the provisions, particularly those in respect of intermediate diets, are to work, there will need to be measures to alleviate overworked and understaffed procurator fiscal offices. In addition, the legal aid fund will be required to meet the increase in defence expenses which will result. How does the Minister plan to bolster the procurator fiscal staff and the legal aid fund?

I am concerned also that there is no mention of the rights of victims, although the consultation papers specifically refer to the need to provide for victims' needs. I ask the Minister to address that problem urgently.

There is no provision to address miscarriages of justice, even though, again, the need to address the appeal system in Scotland has long been recognised.

There is merit in many of the proposals to speed up the criminal justice system and make it more efficient. I welcome the proposals to reduce needless attendance at court by police and other witnesses—a much needed reform. I also welcome the fact that criminals will be

[Mr. Andrew Welsh]

deprived of the proceeds of their crimes. Nevertheless, I register my extreme concern about major specific provisions, and I hope that the Minister will address them.

7.13 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): From the day in 1974 when Nicky Fairbairn arrived in the House as the new hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross, and he told us that he was here entirely as a matter of the personal vote that he had got—he scraped in by the thinnest of majorities—he was a friend of mine. We never had a cross word between us. It has stretched our imaginations that it was entirely a matter of the personal vote that had got him here. We thought that it was less than likely that, in their thousands, Conservatives of Perthshire would have preferred to vote for Nicholas Fairbairn than for Sir Alec Douglas-Home.

Be that as it may, even though our imaginations were stretched to capacity, Nicky Fairbairn did many of us great personal kindnesses. I prefer to remember him not for the funny, the bizarre or the outrageous that have been the subject of many obituaries, but for his willingness to give legal advice in difficult personal cases. Many of my colleagues and contemporaries had to go to him for legal advice. His legal advice was often very sound and with great insight. At least three of my West Lothian constituents have considerable cause to be grateful not to me as their Member of Parliament but to Nicholas Fairbairn for the unstinting, free legal advice that he gave people regardless of party. For that and many other reasons, he will be unforgettable.

I ask the Minister to address the question that was posed by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). Why, on this occasion, is it not thought right to have evidence from, say, the Law Society, the Police Federation, the Glasgow Bar Association and many other bodies? The hon. and learned Gentleman is now the only Scottish lawyer among us—that used not to be the case—and many of us need instruction in such matters. Why have the Minister and the Secretary of State not used the opportunity to put into operation the new procedure by which the Committee—this is not a highly partisan measure—can be better informed on obviously difficult issues? I, for one, if I am selected to sit on the Committee, have no intention of stringing out matters, but there is an argument for some serious questioning, particularly of the police and the Law Society. I ask for a reply.

I ask the House to forgive me for raising a matter which might be considered to be a bit local, but, in Linlithgow and in Ayr, it really is extremely unsatisfactory that defence and prosecution witnesses are mixed up together in unsatisfactory buildings. Incidentally, I say as a local that there may be fire risks in the Linlithgow building. I do not say that lightly, because that is the opinion of lawyers as well as myself. In that case—it can be generalised—I ask that new facilities be provided outside my constituency. Hon. Members normally ask that a certain facility should go to the area that they represent. On this occasion, I am absolutely in agreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) that it would be much more sensible to concentrate the whole court procedure, lock stock and barrel, near the police in Livingston.

I know that Ministers will immediately say, "You are asking for more money; where are the resources to come from? You know very well how difficult the whole public expenditure issue is." But they themselves know that I met Jim Keegan, who represents solicitors in the entire Livingston-West Lothian area. Mr. Keegan suggested—expressing, I gather, the unanimous view of the colleagues on whose behalf he spoke—that there was a case for a new court building in Livingston.

A proposition for the financing of such a building by developers has been advanced. I do not wish to detain the House by giving the details, but the proposition should at least be considered. I understand that it is neutral in public expenditure terms, and would not call on Government finances. In fact, it would save a great deal of money: the developers speak of a distinguished building which, heaven knows, the new town could do with, and which could lessen a problem that bothers everyone, as the debate has shown—the squandering of police time. That could represent a considerable saving. At present, policemen are having to travel from Livingston to Linlithgow—incidentally, 90 per cent. of the difficulties occur in the south of the area, not in Linlithgow—and all that travelling time upsets police schedules.

The Lothian and Borders police F division has a civilised habit of inviting local Members of Parliament to lunch each January to talk over problems. I have discussed with them, in detail, the difficulties of police schedules and time off, and how difficult it is to deal with the fact that policemen may suddenly find that—regardless of their rotas—they must attend court. Hon. Members may not consider such practical problems to be the most momentous issue in the world, but they are extremely costly in practice. If the Minister cannot respond in his winding-up speech, I ask the Government at least to write to me about the specific issue of Livingston, possibly in the general context of the Bill's implications.

The Scottish Trades Union Congress has expressed its views on clause 12. Although its suggested amendment will be raised in Committee, I think it important enough to warrant mention now, so I shall set down a marker. The STUC wishes to insert the following words in the clause:

"In all cases, it shall be the duty of the prosecutor to make available to the accused all material relating to the charge or charges against the accused in the possession of the prosecutor; and such material shall include all statements, reports and productions in the possession of the prosecutor whether he intends to found upon them in the prosecution of the accused or not."

In Scotland, the Crown can conceal evidence that could help to clear an accused person. In a Scottish appeal case heard in May 1990, Lord Cowie said:

"there is no obligation on the Crown to disclose any information in their possession which would tend to exculpate the accused".

The Lord Advocate subsequently confirmed that the Crown was under no legal obligation to disclose information to the defence. He stated, however, that

"the overriding principle is that the Crown must always act in the interests of justice . . . The overall aim should be to ensure that the true facts of any case are laid before a judge or jury".

In such an important matter, it is essential for there to be clear and binding rules. We cannot depend on that principle.

I did not raise that issue just because the STUC has raised it; it is at the forefront of my mind. A question that I have tabled, which will receive a written answer on Monday 6 March—question 13N—asks the Secretary of State for Scotland

"what consideration the Crown Office has given to its duty in law to consider and investigate any evidence which tends to exculpate the two Libyans accused of the Lockerbie crime; and if the Crown Office is complying with this legal obligation."

This is not the occasion on which to go into the details of Lockerbie, but I have tabled a number of questions about it.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock Port Glasogw): I have listened to my hon. Friend's views on that issue for many months. I feel that, given that the Minister for Health is to appear before the Scottish Grand Committee in the near future, he should be followed by the Lord Advocate. That would enable my hon. Friend and, indeed, others to ask such questions of him.

Mr. Dalyell: It is extremely desirable for others to ask such questions. We are talking not of a trivial matter, but of the biggest crime against civilians anywhere in the western world since 1945. Its consequences rumble on, affecting major matters of foreign policy in relation to north Africa—let alone the strong views of relatives of the Lockerbie victims. I must tell the Government that those relatives simply will not go away.

When I intervened on the Secretary of State to raise the final issue that I wish to raise in my speech, he told me that if I wanted to ask about the fatal accident inquiry set-up I could do so in Committee. I ask the Government now, however, to consider how such inquiries are viewed by those involved. I think that I have been very naive about the matter for a long time: although there have been constituency complaints, I have always taken the view that the fatal accident inquiry was designed to try to establish the truth. It has come home to me in recent weeks, however, that—in relation to that biggest crime since 1945—whatever else the inquiry was designed to do, it was hardly designed to elicit the truth. In fact, the best that could be said of the lawyers is that they thought it was their job, by hook or by crook, to obtain as much as they could in damages for their clients.

The Government's answers to questions suggest that they think that the fatal accident inquiry was a substitute for the public inquiry promised by Cecil Parkinson, then Secretary of State for Transport, to the British Lockerbie victims—in good faith, in my opinion, but on condition that his colleagues agreed. As we now know, one colleague did not agree. On 15 December, I asked the Prime Minister a question. The whole House laughed when I received no answer; it was a pretty sour, wry laugh, not a ha-ha laugh. I asked, "Why did she do it? Why did Mrs. Thatcher veto her own Transport Secretary?" After all, only one member of that Government was going to tell Cecil Parkinson what to do in relation to his own portfolio.

A question arises in regard to fatal accident inquiries. When a Minister, and only a Minister—a Transport Secretary, or the Prime Minister—is in a position to give certain information, is it right for there to be Speaker's exemption certificates? Only recently has the House become aware of public interest immunity certificates. I asked my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who has vast experience in these matters, whether he had ever heard of a Speaker's exemption certificate. In this context, he had not. Nor had I.

It is a matter of considerable public importance to ask what information was given to the then Speaker, now Lord Weatherill, and to the then Clerk of the House of Commons on which to base the decision whether to give a Speaker's exemption certificate. We are getting into very delicate water in relation to fatal accident inquiries.

The dramatically important fatal accident inquiry into Lockerbie raises the deepest questions of ethics on behalf of the counsel, who in this case were paid by the Government. I want to know why Brian Gill reached a stage at which he told Rev. John Mosey, the father of Helga Mosey who perished at Lockerbie, that he would no longer act for him if Mr. Mosey went on asking—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. The actions of counsel in an inquiry of the nature to which the hon. Gentleman refers go a little beyond the scope of the Bill. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that and return to the Bill.

Mr. Dalyell: It is difficult to ask questions about the actions of counsel, but some of us are profoundly dissatisfied because the matter goes so far as a counsel threatening his client that he will sue him. Dr. Jim Swire is a medical doctor—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying from the Bill in discussing the actions of counsel. If his comments relate to the general principles of the Bill, the hon. Gentleman's comments are acceptable, but to go into the actions of counsel is straying from the Bill.

Mr. Dalyell: I am always obedient to the Chair, but the matter raises deep questions of the ethics of fatal accident inquiries. I do not want to transgress and go out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I put it to you that the Secretary of State has invited me in the debate on the Bill to raise the issue of fatal accident inquiries. I do not know where else in Commons procedure one does it. The matter is certainly relevant to criminal justice. If people think that fatal accident inquiries are a fiasco geared simply to money rather than to the truth, our criminal justice set-up is in the deepest water.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see that you are becoming just a little concerned that I am going too far. I give notice that if I am selected to serve on the Committee which considers the Bill, I will raise the whole question of fatal accident inquiries and what happened, as an example, at the major inquiry on Lockerbie. No fatal accident inquiry in Scottish law was more important than the Lockerbie inquiry. All aspects of it, including the extraordinary behaviour of counsel to clients, are a matter of legitimate parliamentary concern.

7.33 pm

Mr. Phil Gallie (Ayr): I, too, commence by making my own tribute to Sir Nicholas Fairbairn. As a new Member of Parliament, it was quite an experience for me to see Sir Nicholas in action in this Chamber and in Committees. One never knew precisely what he was about to say, but one always recognised that he had deep knowledge; that knowledge could have been put to so much better use for people over the years. I am particularly sad at what I consider to be his early demise. As the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) suggested, he was a kind individual in his own way. He was certainly kind to new Members. Perhaps I knew Sir Nicholas better in the past as someone within my party organisation who came to speak at constituency functions.

[Mr. Phil Gallie]

He was always a very popular speaker. His presentation of any case was tremendous; that was proved in the courts as well as in this place.

I apologise for missing the opening speeches in the debate. As the House may know, I am involved with the armed services parliamentary scheme. A project on that was scheduled for today. I regretted that I was not able to change the schedule when the Bill was placed on the Order Paper. I had not expected that debate on the Bill would come up so quickly, given that we are currently debating the Children (Scotland) Bill in Committee. Nevertheless, I welcome this Bill because it shows the Government's commitment to law and order issues and to doing something about a situation that has been unacceptable in recent times.

I ask the hon. Member for Linlithgow to clarify one point. He seemed to suggest that we should have an investigatory sitting at the beginning of the Committee stage similar to the exercise that we have undertaken on the Children (Scotland) Bill. I believe that that does not require a change in the rules. That facility has always existed. I would be surprised if now every new Scottish Bill had to go through that process. It seems to me that organisations such as the Law Society of Scotland will not be slow in coming forward to give advice to all Members of Parliament as we enter the Committee stage. I am sure that all Members of Parliament will welcome any input from it.

Dr. Godman: The hon. Gentleman will surely acknowledge that the Special Standing Committee which considered the Children (Scotland) Bill gained a great deal of useful information from those who gave oral evidence at its sittings in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The hon. Gentleman is right about Special Standing Committees. For example, that quinquennial legislative event, the Armed Forces Bill, by custom and practice is always considered by a Special Standing Committee.

Mr. Gallie: I thank the hon. Gentleman. He is much more experienced than me. I accept his statement that the establishment of a Special Standing Committee is not an unusual practice. I was suggesting that it should not be the practice for every Bill that comes before the House. I query the need for a Special Standing Committee on the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, but I leave that to others. I should have no objection if that line were ultimately adopted.

Mr. Dalyell: May I respond to the direct question which the hon. Gentleman put to me? I offer a carrot to the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton). We were both members of the Committee that considered the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Bill—that absurd and ridiculous measure, which is becoming more ridiculous, expensive and absurd every day. Had evidence been taken from local government officials and other people, the Under-Secretary would have found that the long hours that others and I spent legitimately and properly reading out briefs from them—because we had to—could have been shortened. If the Government's objective is to spend fewer rather than more hours in Committee, it might be wise to have the hearings at the beginning of the Committee stage. That is an attractive carrot, is it not?

Mr. Gallie: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that considerable intervention. I do not think that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State needs any carrots when he deals with the Bill. I am sure that he will have plenty of information stacked up in his head and in the briefings that he has already brought together on the Bill.

I turn my attention to the position of the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). Recently, I have welcomed some of his hard words on law and order. It seemed to me that, at long last, someone in the Labour party was coming to terms with the requirement to put law and order at the top of the agenda and, on that basis, I compliment him.

Having said that, however, I am totally disappointed with the Opposition's reasoned amendment, which bears the name of the hon. Member for Dumbarton, among others. I should have thought that he would welcome the Bill with open arms. He might not agree with every item in it, but that is why we have Standing Committees. I am sure that he has always found that the Government have had a responsive ear when he and I have pressed them on certain issues. If the Bill is given a Second Reading and gets to Committee, we will have provided a great opportunity to help people in Scotland, but what have we got from the hon. Gentleman? A negative and inaccurate amendment.

The amendment is inaccurate because, as I understand it, there has been an improvement in the crime figures in Scotland during the past year or two. I welcome that improvement and I should have thought that the hon. Member for Dumbarton would do so, too. For example, during the past year recorded crime fell by 8 per cent.—a fall for the second year running—and the clear-up rate increased by 2 per cent. to 34 per cent. Those figures show that the amendment is inaccurate.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: From reading the newspapers at the weekend, I know that the hon. Gentleman has taken a particular interest in drug-related crime. Perhaps he will comment on the fact that the figures for the category that includes such crimes went up by 7 per cent., the figures for the category that includes vandalism and fire raising were up by 5 per cent. and those for crimes of violence were up by 2 per cent. in the last year for which statistics are available.

Mr. Gallie: I acknowledge that drug-related offences have increased considerably, which I very much regret, but that problem is not unique to Scotland. It is a part of the scene world wide, it is spreading and we must deal with it urgently in the short term. That does not mean that there has not been an improvement in crime overall and in aspects of crime that concerned us greatly about three years ago, such as house breaking, and in serious violent crime. The Opposition amendment does us great discredit by not acknowledging those improvements. Once again, I must record my disappointment that the hon. Member for Dumbarton has not decided to put his money where his mouth has been by giving the Bill full backing on Second Reading, albeit while accepting that there might be much debate and argument thereafter.

Although there has been an improvement, I do not believe that all is right with the criminal justice system. I ask the hon. Member for Dumbarton to cast his mind back

to a conference that the Law Society of Scotland set up in Edinburgh just over a year ago. The conference seemed to be self-congratulatory. It included Government spokesmen as well as spokesmen from the bench—there were judges, lawyers, Queen's counsel and advocates, who seemed to believe that all was well with our criminal justice system in Scotland. When one speaks to people in the street, one realises that that is not the case, which brings me back to the reason why we must get the Bill into Committee and get the debate under way urgently.

I applaud a recent survey that suggests that people are more satisfied with solicitors. The other day, a straw poll suggested an 85 per cent. satisfaction level, which is a massive step forward. I congratulate solicitors on achieving such a performance, even though the manner in which the poll was presented and the accuracy of the data beg some scrutiny. The poll shows, however, that the Scottish legal service is getting to grips with some of the issues.

Some of the disillusionment might be due to the fact that people feel that the procurator service does not give full value for money. Perhaps that is an unfair judgment. I feel that the service should explain why certain cases are not taken forward. Having had discussions with the Lord Advocate and the legal fraternity, I recognise some of the reasons why the procurator cannot always explain the thinking behind the decision, but I recognise that when that decision has passed into the public domain it leaves questions that may never be answered in the public's mind and give rise to disquiet.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend will be aware of the disquiet that always exists about prosecutions. In my constituency recently, there was a case in which burglars were caught red-handed in the act, but were not prosecuted. Naturally, that caused great concern, especially to the people who had apprehended the burglars, at some risk to themselves.

Mr. Gallie: Such a situation brings the law into disrepute. I am sure that my hon. Friend cannot justify to his constituents why that should have happened. He and I know that we cannot obtain that sort of information for our constituents, and I thank him for mentioning that case as it helps me to expand my argument. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will give that matter some thought, although I recognise all the difficulties.

Another difficulty is the perceived inconsistency in sentencing. Some clauses seem to deal with that problem. If we can provide some consistency, through guidance to judges and sheriffs, it will do much to improve the attitude of the public to the criminal law and the criminal justice system in Scotland. It is vital that we keep the public on side. Recently, there was a terrible case in Edinburgh when a man lost his life. It appears that it was taken by other residents in his block of flats. He was a child molester. There had been signs of discontent and it seems that the residents took the law into their own hands. That is what I read in the newspapers, in the Edinburgh *Evening News*, and that is my judgment from reading the newspaper articles. That is the sort of situation that we must guard against. People need to feel comfortable with the law and feel that it stands for justice. We must ensure that inconsistencies and illogicalities in sentencing do not occur.

I am especially pleased with the aspects of the Bill that deal with bail. At long last, it seems that the court system will display some sense as far as bail is concerned. I have described instances of people committing four or five offences and being given bail time and time again—in the case to which I refer, held only on remand after the fourth or fifth offence—which brings the law into disrepute and greatly concerns the people at large.

I must register some disquiet about the wording of clause 3, however, which suggests that bail should not be considered if someone has committed an offence while on bail. To commit an offence while on bail suggests that an individual has been proved guilty of that offence. It would be better to change the wording to suggest that, if an individual has been charged with a further offence, rather than has "committed" a further offence, for a second time, he has then offended against bail and, at that point, bail should no longer be allowed.

The Government have introduced many measures to improve matters. Strathclyde police's Operation Blade and the Government support for the Carrying of Knives etc. (Scotland) Act 1993 have helped in recent times. The Government took a great step forward in improving law and order—I take some pride in it—when they gave the prosecutor the right to appeal against perceived lenient sentences. The measure was first promised in our 1992 manifesto and it was commendable that the Government delivered it in 1993.

I am not sure, however, that I agree totally with the legislation on criminal procedure and punishment. I remind my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that we introduced a measure that allowed anyone sentenced to up to four years in prison to have his or her sentence automatically reduced by 50 per cent.; thus, a four-year sentence became a two-year sentence and a three-year sentence became an 18-month sentence. I do not think that the public signed on to that one. I recall mentioning that problem in Committee, but no one else on the Committee backed me. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] It was a shame. I expected better from Opposition Members, but their support was not forthcoming. At that time, I suggested to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that I could have accepted the measure, had the remission been earned. If an individual in prison has behaved well, it may be right to release him or her half way through the sentence, but I did not like the automatic aspect. Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary bear that in mind for the future, even if the matter cannot be dealt with in the Bill?

I am also concerned about juvenile crime, which is creating great havoc, particularly on housing estates where vandalism and under-age drinking are rife. Perhaps those matters could be dealt with in the Children (Scotland) Bill; they certainly do not seem to have been addressed in this Bill. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary may contradict me and say that there is scope to do so in clause 62; if so, I would welcome that.

Another serious omission from the Bill is a measure to combat child alcohol abuse. It is an offence for someone under the age of 18 to buy alcohol, but it is not an offence for a child to obtain alcohol and to drink it at home or in the street. Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary discuss that matter with me later to see whether we can table an amendment to cover that problem? The issue is important to many of my constituents and, I am sure, those of my hon.

[Mr. Gallie]

Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson). I am sure that the problem exists also in Dundee, Midlothian and Paisley.

Mr. McMaster: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the problem of young people drinking in public places. The problem goes back a long way. When I was a councillor, I encouraged an application for a byelaw against that, but each time I ask the Government whether they will do something about it, I am told that local authorities can apply to introduce byelaws. I would prefer the Government to take the action that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Gallie: I cannot distance myself from anything that the hon. Gentleman says.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Can you not?

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman's comments were fair and he gave an honest reading of the current position. The Government have looked to local authorities to use their powers, but many local authorities have failed to take the opportunity to demonstrate to the Government the need to take the matter further and amend the law. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is listening to me tonight and saying, "By jove, that is a jolly good idea. I shall have a word with my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr later and see what we can do about that."

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend may be aware that I took up that matter during the passage of an earlier Bill and the Government assured me that any efforts made, for instance, by Perth and Kinross or Angus district councils to introduce byelaws would be looked on favourably.

Mr. Gallie: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I was not aware of any arrangements that he had made with the Government. Perhaps he and I can have a chat after the debate and see whether we can find a way to take that matter forward.

Mr. McFall: The hon. Gentleman makes a positive point about drinking and young people. He may be aware that, on Friday, I launched an under-age drinking scheme—the proof of age card scheme—in Dumbarton and, if the hon. Gentleman proposes an amendment on that matter, the Opposition would be delighted to support it. The fact that young people can buy alcohol in supermarkets is a problem, and respectable supermarkets sell drinks like TNT. Cannot we sit down in a positive and constructive way and table amendments to the Bill? Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's influence with the Government could bear fruit in this case.

Mr. Gallie: I am not sure whether I have that much influence. None the less, I shall press my hon. Friends to introduce an identity card, which would solve the problem of under-age drinking as well as a range of other problems. Will the Opposition join me in putting pressure on my hon. Friends to introduce a compulsory rather than voluntary identity card? If the hon. Gentleman would care to rise and back me on that, I would welcome it.

Mr. McFall *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Gallie: I am very disappointed in the hon. Gentleman's response. This is an opportunity to achieve what the hon. Gentleman wants, but he stays in his seat and shakes his head. I am disappointed but not surprised.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) discussed the age of consent. I cannot understand how he concluded that there is an overall feeling in the House that we should again reduce the age of consent for consenting males. We voted on that issue not long ago and the motion was negatived. I should have thought that the matter was now over and done with and I do not see why the matter should be injected into the Bill. I acknowledge that it is almost impossible to enforce the law with regard to young boys who carry out such acts behind closed doors. At the same time, it is equally hard through recourse to the law to prevent girls of 14 or 15 from having intercourse. That law is, however, a deterrent and a standard. I do not want standards on the issue to be dropped any further. I should like to think that no one will waste the Committee's time by tabling such an amendment.

I understand that the Bill is also designed to introduce further changes to aggravated trespass. I would like my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to clarify current Scottish law relating to that offence. When we passed the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, I understood that the clause relating to aggravated trespass would also affect Scottish law. I would be disappointed to hear that that was not the case. I am currently trying to persuade the chief constable of Strathclyde region to use that law to deal with events arising from the M77 extension. That legal route has been cleared by the Government and by Strathclyde regional council through democratic means. That work is now being held up and people are unable to do their daily jobs and are prevented from carrying out their honest efforts by others who have no right to occupy the site. The law of aggravated trespass could be used against those people. I had thought that it had already been incorporated into our law and I should like some reassurance on that from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary.

I am sure that all hon. Members would like to welcome many of the provisions in the Bill, but I believe that the proposed changes to the intermediate diet procedure are the key ones. The amount of police time wasted in our courts is criminal. We are always shouting for more resources and more police on the streets. The extended use of the intermediate diet procedure will put policemen back on to the streets and it will save time. Those changes will benefit not only police officers but, more important, people with other jobs, who may otherwise be called to court on occasion up to four times, only to learn that the case has not been brought up. That delay means that those people have lost time at work, their employers have lost the use of their resources and everyone has been inconvenienced. That is not good enough. The extended use of the intermediate diet will certainly help to overcome that problem.

The list of welcome items in the Bill is endless. I notice that it is intended to give the courts the power to forfeit assets gained as a result of criminal activity. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell)

spoke about the drug scene—I believe that forfeiture represents a major means of tackling it. The Select Committee on Scottish Affairs spent considerable time considering the use of that power, for example, in America and the benefits that resulted from it. We called for the legislation governing forfeiture to be strengthened. Our call appears to have been answered in the Bill and I compliment my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary on that.

I should like to draw attention to a recent decision by the European Court of Justice challenging the existing legislation on forfeiture, which is applied in the English courts. I understand that the court made that challenge on a technicality, because the English court had acted retrospectively. I appreciate that the European Court of Justice may have acted logically in that case, but I should hate to think that, at some future date, it will have any right to step in and criticise provisions relating to the forfeiture of assets contained in the Bill, once enacted.

I spoke earlier about sentencing inconsistencies. I understand that provision will be made in the Bill to develop sentencing guidelines, which would be most welcome. Other welcome clauses are also designed to attempt, once again, to stem computer pornography. That would be popular with those in Scotland who are extremely concerned for young people. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will also consider legislating against those who make and sell obscene videos. That problem deserves proper scrutiny. Any steps that the Government took to tighten the law on obscenity would be warmly welcomed by the Scottish public.

I am greatly encouraged by the powers offered to the police to stop and search vehicles, which will help in the fight against terrorism. I hope that the need for that fight has diminished greatly, given recent developments in Northern Ireland, but one never knows what will happen. It is therefore worth while for those police powers to be included in the Bill.

The Opposition may cry out about law and order, but I have looked through the reports in *Hansard* and it is clear that every time there has been a proposal to increase the police's powers to stop and search, the Opposition have voted against it.

Mr. McMaster: The Opposition have always defended civil rights. The hon. Gentleman should recall that when he introduced the Carrying of Knives etc. (Scotland) Bill, we offered support to ensure that, without any loss of civil liberties by the majority, those carrying knives were arrested.

Mr. Gallie: I welcomed the support that the Opposition gave my Bill.

When we talk about civil liberties, we get down to the heart of criminal justice. My idea of civil liberties is that people should be able to live in their homes, free of concern and children should be able to go about the streets without their mothers panicking when they have been out of their sight for more than half an hour. Those are the kind of civil liberties that we must defend.

People should enjoy quality lives by being assured that those people who are prepared to break the law and create misery for others are properly dealt with. I believe that the Bill will certainly do that, which is why I commend it. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, once again, on introducing it so expeditiously.

8.7 pm

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): I should like to take this opportunity to add my comments to those of my colleagues about the late Nicky Fairbairn. This is the first opportunity that I have had in the House to say that I considered him a friend.

In the short time that I have been in the House, Nicky Fairbairn helped me and a constituent, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), with extremely useful legal advice. He went out of his way to help us and that is the side of him that I should like to remember. I should also like to remember the entertaining and witty exchanges that we had on some visits together.

I was complimented by Nicky Fairbairn on two occasions. First, he wrote to me and said that I had made a visit to Brussels "tolerable". I do not know what he meant by that. On another occasion, he told me that he was writing a book and that he had written a chapter all about me. I said that if he said anything nice, I would sue him. He appreciated that very much. I shall certainly miss him very dearly, and I am sure that I am voicing the opinion of many hon. Members here. He was a good, very interesting, intelligent and extremely witty person, and above all a very kind person.

I wish to give my, I hope, constructive support to the law and order measure before us. I say to the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie), that Opposition Members have a responsibility to be constructive in the debate. I should like improvements to be made in the Bill. I hope that the hon. Gentleman realises that we are not voting against the Bill; on the contrary, we are voting for our amendment.

I have with me, and shall quote from, the Scottish Trades Union Congress document that was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow. I agree with what it says, and it is constructive, in my opinion:

> "The contents of the Bill will not improve the delivery of justice in Scotland. Certain important matters have been ignored such as the underfunding of the Procurators Fiscal Service in Scotland, the need to balance the scales of justice so that the defence as well as the prosecution can properly prepare its case and that victims should have enforceable rights.
>
> Additionally, the cumulative effect of the Bill is '. . . expected to be broadly cost neutral with the possibility of some overall net savings in the longer term.' The watchers of and the practitioners in the criminal justice system agree that more money is required to prosecute cases. Any reform which ignores this fundamental problem cannot be successful.
>
> Some clauses place an additional burden on the over-stretched Procurators Fiscal Service. Clause 10 which further limits the right to silence, imposes a duty on the prosecutor to investigate 'to such extent as is reasonably practicable, of any ostensible defence disclosed in the course of the examination'. On the surface this may seem to compensate for the attack on the right to silence but as the Procurators Fiscal Office is so over-stretched, any investigation of an 'ostensible defence' may be minimal."

When we talk to our friends in the police force, we find that one of the most damning things about the behaviour of the procurator fiscal—I hope that the Minister is listening to me—is the dropping of cases. The police go to the lengths of devoting hours, days sometimes, even weeks, to sorting out a case, assembling the evidence and finding witnesses, and hand in the papers to the procurator fiscal's office, only to discover that the case has been dropped, with no reason given, logical or otherwise.

[Mr. Eric Clarke]

Sometimes there are many months of delay between the time when the papers are given to the procurator fiscal and the time when the case is dropped. Witnesses and even victims are sometimes not even informed that the case has been dropped. Justice is ignored in those circumstances. Police time is wasted, and the opinion of the police is obviously ignored, from senior level down to the constable or the person who made the arrest. That problem is part and parcel of the problem of the procurator fiscal service being overloaded and undermanned.

Justice falls victim to another practice—plea bargaining. Plea bargaining obviously means that the person concerned can pick and choose the charges that he agrees he has committed. That is done for the sake of an easy way out and for simplicity, to ensure some movement and to get rid of a problem in the procurator fiscal service, in the opinion of others. Is that justice? Is that the way to deal with it?

What is the result? Morale is low among the police and others involved. Witnesses are amazed. They cannot and do not know what has happened, and the result is cynicism. The question even occurs to them: why try? The reason for that problem boils down to undermanning and underfunding.

I cannot understand why, when decisions are taken in the Crown Office, it need explain to no one, not even to a Member of Parliament—and I have tried. I have written to ask why the Crown Office reached a certain conclusion and why it dropped a case or made a comment, and I have received no explanation. The Crown Office merely quotes the legislation, which provides that it does not need to reply.

I know that the referees in the Scottish Football Association have a great deal of explaining to do because, especially when my team is playing, I do not know what they are doing half the time, and I do not know that they know what they are doing half the time, but I know that they are certainly biased against me.

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: Not so. Never!

Mr. Clarke: Yes, every time. The referees are all oriented towards Glasgow teams. I know that. Everyone knows that in Scotland.

Seriously, I am talking about a different matter. I am talking about people making decisions or deciding not to follow through a case, and saying confidently, "We need explain to no one." I thought, innocently or ignorantly, in my official position as a Member of Parliament, that I could get answers to my questions from the Crown Office, but I asked to no avail.

Mr. McMaster: Does my hon. Friend believe that at least part of the reason for that might be that the Lord Advocate is a Member of the other place and the Solicitor-General is a Member of neither House? In the Scottish Grand Committee, we have been told that although we can question the Minister of State, we cannot question the Law Officers. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) points at the Minister. There is a very important difference between a Minister and a Law Officer. That is why we should be able to question the Law Officers.

Mr. Clarke: I agree partly with what my hon. Friend says.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: If my hon. Friend does not mind, I shall let him in in a minute.

I agree broadly with my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster). I hope that the Minister, because I hope that he has faith in the Scottish Opposition's work, will try to negotiate innovations in the Grand Committee so that we may have the opportunity of bringing those officers before us, and in a friendly manner grill them in the usual way.

Mr. Graham: My hon. Friend should be aware that several Members of Parliament in Scotland have written to the Lord Advocate about serious matters that constituents have drawn to their attention, especially in relation to some cases that have gone ahead and others that have not gone ahead. The replies that we have received are so cryptic as to be meaningless. They are basically telling us, "Keep out of our business; that is the end of it; no more." I find it appalling that Members of Parliament do not receive a full explanation.

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that the Minister takes notice of that, because there is a genuine, sincere feeling among many people who are law officers that no reasonable or even logical explanation is given of why those cases are dropped.

Mr. Gallie: I think that the difficulty goes deeper than the argument that was made by the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster).

Every Member of the House can make representations to the Lord Advocate, and I would suggest that each Member who has those anxieties should do so and have a conversation with the Lord Advocate about the matter. If one were to release details of every case that was not brought to law, it would bring into question the actions of both the perhaps guilty and the not guilty—the innocent victims. It would set a precedent that could well rebound against many other people.

I have the same unease as the hon. Gentleman; I made those arguments in my speech, but there is a balance to be found somewhere and it is not as simple as the hon. Member for Paisley, South suggested.

Mr. Clarke: I accept that it is not a simple position. I have carried out the wishes of the hon. Gentleman and written to the highest officer in the courts in Scotland, but to no avail. I received an explanation, but it was not satisfactory. I am sure that I am voicing the opinion of the majority of hon. Members present. I am not saying that there should be open house and that, on each occasion, we should be told. But it is not right for Law Officers to say merely that it is the law, that is as far as they are prepared to go and they are not accountable to anyone. I do not know whether they are accountable to Ministers—I suppose that they are in a roundabout way, and give them a nod and a wink.

The hon. Member for Ayr mentioned juvenile crime. I am amazed that someone should come to the conclusion that unemployment and poverty equals crime. I have known that all my life. I think that, even without an inquiry, all Opposition Members know that such circumstances obviously bring an increase in crime. If those circumstances are combined with drug addiction—the hon. Gentleman is aware that we investigated that problem in Scotland through the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs—it creates a hopeless situation. In addition, there are the problems of homelessness, inadequate jobs and an inadequate future. In such circumstances, people drown their sorrows in drugs and drink.

Scotland is no different from anywhere else. I liked the comment of the hon. Member for Ayr that it was a worldwide affair. Of course, it is, but we are not in the United Nations, but in the United Kingdom Parliament at Westminster. We are looking after the interests of the people in Scotland and debating that subject. We cannot hide behind the crime statistics of other parts of the world. The problem is on our doorstep and we do not need to go to the United States, although it was useful to study the problems there and in Holland.

When we talk about crime and justice, we must also talk about the environment of those whom we represent, particularly in Scotland. Without adequate housing or jobs or an improved environment, we cannot expect anything other than an increase in crime.

I want a police force that is adequately manned, and given the right equipment and opportunities. But there is an alternative to gaol. There has been no mention of a halfway-house system and greater supervision of petty offenders. Many people who are in gaol should not be there and could be in a halfway house where they could be supervised. Many prisoners are mentally ill and should not be in gaol. The people who run such institutions tell us that. We have an inadequate social service in our communities.

Mr. Gallie: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the mentally ill. Is it not the case that the Bill contains a clause to address that issue? That is another reason why the hon. Gentleman should join us in the Lobby tonight and stand wholeheartedly behind the Bill.

Mr. Clarke: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, but I think that he misunderstands what I am saying. The Bill contains clauses about people who are declared criminally insane. I am talking about people who, due to inadequacies in the system, commit petty crimes and wander the streets, due to the so-called policy of bringing people into the community, without supervision and back-up. The hon. Gentleman should not shake his head—he should go to the prisons and ask how many prisoners are mentally ill. He will be told that, on average, up to one third of prisoners are mentally ill. I am talking not about those who are criminally violent, but about those who are utterly confused, and who should not be in such an institution, but in another one. We would help the authorities by looking after those people properly. That is just one aspect of our criminal justice system.

We cannot ignore the social consequences of our criminal justice system and say that we must have a good criminal justice Bill. I should like harder sentences for some offenders. We must analyse the background and the position. It is easy to judge people from afar. The worst judges are those who are not even present in court, but who comment on specific items. A case may take three or four days, but a decision on whether a person is guilty or not guilty may take five minutes.

The Bill partly achieves what we want, but we also want amendments and improvements which, I hope, will be constructive. I hope that we can achieve something of which we can be proud. The Bill contains many anomalies, which have been stated not only by me, but by those involved in the justice system on a daily basis.

We cannot expect the procurator fiscal service to deal with people equally or fairly if it has inadequate funding and is inadequately manned. We only waste police time by presenting the procurator fiscal service with cases that it has to push to one side because it does not have the time to deal with them. The morale of the police, of others handling the cases and of those who are prepared to act as witnesses leaves much to be desired. I hope that, even if the Minister takes none of my other points on board, he will address that one.

8.26 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I offer my apologies to right hon. and hon. Members for not being present earlier in the debate. My wife was taken ill, and she and I had to spend four hours at Bart's hospital this afternoon. I believe that the message was given to the Minister earlier and to my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench.

Although I paid tribute to Nicky Fairbairn in Friday's European debate, it would be remiss of me not to mention him in my first Scottish debate since his tragically early death. I echo the fine tributes paid to him and add that he always treated me in an extremely civilised and friendly way, even when diametrically opposing my views.

The aim of the legislation is to put more criminals behind bars. I have no objection to that objective provided that such people are convicted in fair and open court proceedings. I disagree with the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie)—the Bill should be consigned to a Special Standing Committee. Not all our Bills should go to such a Special Standing Committee, but it seems likely that, at most, only two members of the Standing Committee considering the Bill will be lawyers: the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), and the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). I shall not be on the Committee, but I think that those without legal training could benefit enormously from being able to cross-examine witnesses at the four sittings of a Special Standing Committee.

Mr. Gallie: I am thinking back on my limited time as a Member of Parliament and to my knowledge that the Committee considering the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Bill contained no accountants—

Mr. McMaster: Or bankrupts.

Mr. Gallie: There were neither bankrupts nor accountants nor insolvency practitioners, but we still managed to debate the Bill for many hours and to obtain advice from elsewhere. It was the same with criminal proceedings and punishment—although perhaps we could

[Mr. Gallie]

have done with some help in that area. I do not think that we should open the floodgates and automatically consign every Bill to a Special Standing Committee.

Dr. Godman: Despite the brilliant intervention by the hon. Member for Ayr, I still disagree. We do not have a Scottish Law Officer—the last one was Mr. Peter Fraser from south Angus, who departed this place in 1987. That is to be regretted in the context of all kinds of legislation that must be scrutinised. I hope that the Minister will agree with my suggestion that the Scottish Grand Committee be given the opportunity to cross-examine the Lord Advocate on a wide range of measures relating to Scottish courts and our legal system. Lord Fraser is to appear before the Committee, so why should not the premier Law Officer from the other place do likewise?

Those who are convicted in the sheriff court or the High Court of violent crimes against the individual should receive condign punishment. I have said that often in this place and during the meetings of the Scottish Grand Committee. Many years ago I served as a military policeman and I saw at first hand the shocking injuries that were inflicted on defenceless women, youngsters and others innocently going about their business.

More recently, as a member of a local prison committee I often interviewed prisoners who were being assessed for release under licence and I felt that some of them had received light sentences in the sheriff court or the High Court. At Saughton in Edinburgh I was regarded by other committee members as something of a hard man because I frequently recommended that the people whom I interviewed should remain in prison for a considerably longer time.

I remember interviewing, over a period of three months, two men who were members of a much bigger gang which ran explosives to Northern Ireland for an extremist group. Thanks to very fine police work, they were caught but I believe that they did not receive sufficient punishment for the dreadful crimes that they were aiding and abetting by running explosives and weaponry to Northern Ireland.

I have no doubt that many of my constituents will welcome the Bill's measures because they are deeply concerned about the violent crimes that have been committed locally. I recently spoke with a fellow ex-shipwright who is now in his seventies. He was known locally as a hard man in his younger days, but he told me that he did not like to go out at night because of the violent characters who roamed around and with whom he could no longer contend. Many elderly people turn up early to my surgeries, which start at 4 pm on Friday, so that they can be safe and secure at home before dark. That is a disgraceful state of affairs.

I refer the Minister to a case which was reported last week in the *Greenock Telegraph* under the headline "Sex fiend sent to Carstairs". Last August a young man abducted two women in the car park of the Tesco supermarket in Greenock and forced them to drive him to a wooded area near Kilmacolm where he subjected them to an unspeakable ordeal. My young violent constituent was sent to Carstairs. Last Thursday, Lord Ross, the Lord Justice-General, said that he was satisfied that

"grounds had been made for a hospital order without time limit".

In the context of the Bill and extant legislation, I ask the Minister: when such a person is consigned to Carstairs, can he be released within a relatively short time if the appropriate medical practitioners deem that he is sane enough to take his place in the community? What does the phrase "without time limit" mean? The act of violence that I have described frightened many of my female constituents of all ages. Is Lord Ross accurate when he says that the sentence is "without time limit" or, following detailed examinations of the young man in three or four years, could three consultant psychiatrists recommend to the Secretary of State that he be released? I believe that a person convicted of crimes of that nature must receive condign punishment. I sometimes despair of our sheriffs and judges who allow people off lightly and I wonder whether the legislation will tighten up the system.

I have not forgotten the case of the young marine in Arbroath who killed his wife and child—the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) will know the details of that case better than I do. Following a trial in the High Court, that young man was released and, when he tried to emigrate to Canada, the Canadian authorities, quite rightly, denied him entry.

Important measures must be taken to deal with bail, but I believe that clauses 1 to 5 should be scrutinised rigorously in Committee. Too many people commit further crimes while on bail and we must tighten up the provisions in that area. If I were a member of the Standing Committee examining the Bill—I hope to escape such service—I would look at that aspect very closely.

The Bill deals sensibly with juries, but I have some reservations—I must be careful about what I say as I recently escaped jury duty on the ground that I am a Member of Parliament. I believe that juries should comprise 15 good men and women.

Clause 15, which refers to the delay in trial proceedings, makes sense. I wonder whether there is a chance to extend that provision to the Republic of Ireland, although I suppose that that would require some international agreement. It constitutes a bolthole for some people and I imagine that it did not feature in the negotiations surrounding the framework document.

I thought initially that some radical measures would be introduced on the protection of complainers in rape cases. However, the legislation refers to "clandestine injuries". Clause 24 states:

"Clause 24 adds clandestine injury and offences under 2B, 2C and 7 of the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 1976 to the sexual offences which attract special restrictions on questioning as to the sexual history or character of a witness".

That phrase is a little high flown—or, as I would say, a little fly blown. As the Minister knows, I have worked to improve the protection given to complainers in rape cases. There is still a good deal of trawling through a woman's sexual history, but perhaps the Minister will repudiate that statement when he speaks. I am deeply disappointed that the Government obdurately refuse to give complainers in rape cases more protection.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Does my hon. Friend agree that clause 28 is the most important part of the Bill? Whoever drafted the Bill cleverly sought two approaches, because clauses 10 and 28 go together. It is probably hoped that clause 10 will be accepted while clause 28 is rejected, but they are really the same. Lawyers are used because their clients feel themselves to

be inarticulate and would be better represented by a legal mind. That is one reason why both clauses 10 and 28 should remain.

Dr. Godman: If my hon. Friend is fortunate to serve as a member of the Committee, he may find it worth while to read the excellent speech of Lord McCluskey in the other place who made interesting observations about those clauses.

I have long argued that complainers in rape cases should be treated as vulnerable witnesses. I say that despite the publicity that attached to a rape case in England that ended last week. Women are subjected to offensive questioning in the witness box. The threat of criminal proceedings deters many women from making a complaint. We do not know how many rapes are committed each year in Scotland or elsewhere.

I readily concede that advances have been made by the courts and police. Strathclyde and other forces have family units, where rape victims are treated a damned sight more sympathetically than in the days when they were left in the clutches of some insensitive police surgeons. Nevertheless, much more could be done.

Some years ago, I tabled in Committee a new clause to a Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill. Had it been accepted, it would have put a stop to all trawling through a complainer's sexual history. A curious combination of Nicky Fairbairn and the then Solicitor-General, Mr. Peter Fraser, demolished my case, to the satisfaction of Conservative Members.

The concept of a vulnerable witness should extend further than children. I know that the Minister, who paid me a compliment not so long ago, played a part in the Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993, which give enhanced protection to child witnesses in sexual and child abuse cases. Section 34 concerns the use of screens to conceal the witness—which, to be honest, is not very effective in most courts. Section 33(1) introduced a commissioner to take the evidence of the child. I offer my respects and compliments to the Minister for that radical measure.

I would like such protection to extend beyond youngsters caught up in terrible circumstances. Why do the Government continue to refuse similar protection to people with learning disabilities? I regularly visit a centre in my constituency, but some of the young fellows there cannot face meeting strangers and will hide when someone enters the room—especially if he has a deep voice like mine. Such cases are rare, but a witness with learning difficulties should be given the same protection as a youngster who has been sexually or physically abused or criminally neglected.

Mr. McFall: Under clause 10, an individual would have to undergo judicial examination 24 to 48 hours after an offence. He or she may ask a lawyer for advice, but the lawyer cannot make representations. Would not that mitigate against a fair trial for individuals with special needs?

Dr. Godman: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intelligent intervention. I sound like my hon. Friend—a deputy head teacher. Clause 10 should be amended in that respect. I would like a new clause, or clause 24 extended to broaden the concept of a vulnerable witness to women complainers in rape cases and to men and women with learning disabilities. They too should be spared the ordeal of giving evidence in open court.

In the next hour or so, by a process of osmosis, the Minister will tell me that few such cases go to court. I do not care if the number is only two or three youngsters over three or four years—they should be protected.

I want the Minister to give an assurance that while this Government remain in office, which I pray will not be long, the status quo on the anonymity of the complainer and the identification of the accused will remain in rape and other sexual assault cases. I just paid the Minister a tribute—de mortuis nihil nisi bonum. I recall Nicky Fairbairn making outrageous statements on the question of anonymity.

The Bill concentrates—some say rightly and properly—on prosecuting criminals, but seems to ignore the interests and needs of victims and witnesses. I have a question for the Minister on clause 50. I apologise if the Secretary of State touched on this matter in my absence. From where are members of the rules council to be drawn? Are they all to be members of the legal establishment, or will there be lay persons on the council?

I have a final word to say about the cross-examination of vulnerable witnesses. About 10 days ago the Minister announced, in a written answer, the installation of closed circuit television systems in a court in each of the sheriffdoms. Will he confirm that the CCTV being installed in the—recently renovated but still leaking—sheriff court in Greenock is a permanent fixture? Local opinion has it that it will be removed as soon as the Paisley sheriff court has been renovated. There may be some disagreement about this with my hon. Friends the Members for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) and for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), but I am doing a bit of special plea bargaining with the Minister. My hon. Friends can always put in similar facilities at Paisley—

Mr. McMaster: That is a deal.

Dr. Godman: Yes, but I am looking for a deal with the Minister—with respect to my old and hon. Friend.

It would seem a shame to pull out this sort of facility once it has been installed. Even if CCTV were installed in a court in each sheriffdom, there would still be far fewer such systems in our courts than south of the border. I believe that nearly 60 English Crown courts now have such facilities: we have very few. There could easily be one in Greenock and one in Paisley—but I am just trying to stay friends with my two hon. Friends.

All these issues are close to my heart. I hope that my old and hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) is listening when I say that I do not anticipate serving on the Standing Committee. Still, I think that the Bill needs detailed, rigorous scrutiny. It certainly needs to be amended—for instance, along the lines I have suggested for the victims of crime.

I have looked at the television system in sheriff court No. 5 in Glasgow, and I think that it works exceedingly well for everyone in the room—although I hope never to be in the dock. It certainly works well for the jury, the sheriff and the judge. Certain witnesses, however, who have to relive the ordeal, say, of a vicious rape, such as my two constituents suffered last August on the Old Kilmacolm road, and who are denied such protection—all

[Dr. Godman]

except child witnesses—should be given anonymity and a great deal more protection. The Bill needs to be changed to reflect the interests of such people.

8.53 pm

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Like all who have spoken in the debate I want to put on record a tribute to the late Sir Nicholas Fairbairn, who was a person no one in the House could miss. All the obituaries that I have read refer to his great range of skills and talents. He was prominent in legal circles in Scotland before he came here. Once here, he was known for his political abilities, which were always seen at their best when he turned on his own side. He was also well known as an artist, and I know from conversations with him that he always described himself, too, as a landscape gardener. Before coming here I was a senior lecturer in horticulture, and I can vouch for the fact that Sir Nicholas was a knowledgeable gardener. This place will be less colourful without him.

I have waited with great enthusiasm to take part in this debate, and I must thank my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke), our Scottish Whip, for giving me so much encouragement to say a few words. I shall therefore say all that I need to say tonight, and leave service on the Committee to others who have not yet had a chance to speak. I apologise in advance for not being able to stay for the wind-ups, owing to other duties not too dissimilar from this one.

All hon. Members who have spoken so far have referred to plea bargaining and the need to organise it better. We all know that there will always be an element of plea bargaining in the courts. The problem at the moment is that all those participating in a case are told to turn up at 9.45 am, then to wait a few hours and go for lunch, and then they are told that the case will not be heard that day because of plea bargaining. Some of the witnesses may be police officers, and as the police tend not to take deployed officers away from their usual duties, police witnesses are often paid for court appearances out of overtime budgets. That means that money that could be spent on all sorts of valuable police work is lost because of time wasted in court.

In Paisley, Divisional Commander Michael Currie and the local procurator fiscal some time ago developed an informal system of informing the police as early as possible if it was likely that an officer would not be required. Of course, officers have to be on standby, but at least they can be doing other work. The latest estimates show that as much as a third of the police overtime budget is spent in this way. It is also a waste of time for witnesses who have taken time off from other duties to appear in court.

This is not a new interest on my part. As long ago as May 1992 I wrote to the Secretary of State about it—and to the Comptroller and Auditor General. As a matter of courtesy I sent a copy to the Scottish Office. I received a reply from Lord Fraser, dated 7 July 1992. In it, he told me that much of my analysis was "facile and unenlightening", and went on to give me all the reasons why legislation of the type that now appears in this Bill could not be put through the House of Commons. I am therefore glad to see that the noble Lord Fraser has since reconsidered—perhaps because the Comptroller and Auditor General commented on the resources wasted in this way. I hope that some sensible arrangements can now be put in place.

The poor layout of courts and a lack of facilities can lead to witnesses on both sides of a case being in the same room at the same time. That can lead to intimidation. The problem is not confined to serious trials; there can be problems in what the courts would regard as routine trials. For example, anti-social behaviour involving neighbours may find itself in court. Those involved will leave the courtroom and then have to live close to one another. The problem will be exacerbated within the community for some time if there is any prospect of intimidation.

I hope that something can be done to ensure that more information and advice is given to victims, and especially the families of victims. A case in my constituency became prominent and many people will remember it well. A young man called Holmes was murdered outside a disco in Paisley. The culmination of events played a part in the introduction and enactment of legislation on knives.

The case went to court, where it was decided that the accused could not be found guilty of the charge. The Holmes family says that it has lost a son and that no one has been punished for the crime. I accept that the issue must be left to the courts. I would not wish to become involved in the detail of the case. The problems surrounding the case became exacerbated, however, because before, during and after the trial the family was provided with little information. When it was provided with information, including meetings with the procurator fiscal, it was inadequate. On one or two occasions, it was inaccurate. That causes great concern. I know that there is a group in Strathclyde that is involved with the families of murder victims and is pushing the case for more information.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) made some important points about miscarriages of justice. The Secretary of State referred to these miscarriages in his opening remarks. He told us that he has set up a committee, which has not yet reported. He explained that he wishes to wait for the committee's conclusions before he makes any legislative suggestions. We understand the reasons for that.

The Secretary of State has recognised that there are miscarriages of justice by accepting an application on behalf of one of my constituents, Raymond Gilmour, for the exercise of the prerogative of mercy. There is evidence in the case—arguably and technically it is not new evidence—that was not available to the defence when the trial took place. Accordingly, it was not led in court. I do not want to prejudge the Secretary of State's involvement in the matter. I merely say that my constituents are grateful that the application was accepted. Obviously the family is anxious that there should be a decision as quickly as possible, but not at the price of an investigation that is not thorough. We must stand back and leave the Secretary of State to exercise his judgment. He must decide how thoroughly the issues must be investigated before he can come to a conclusion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian talked about the offices of procurators fiscal. He made a strong case that these offices are sometimes overworked. I go along with that to some extent. We must be careful, however, to ensure that overwork is not used as an excuse for a macho approach or, in some instances,

incompetence. Those approaches can obviously be found in busy offices but they are to be found also in relatively quiet offices.

I took up the case of procurators fiscal offices in 1992. In a series of cases at Paisley, blunders resulted in alleged drug dealers walking out of court on technicalities. There were instances of writs being served too late or wrongly dated. On occasions they were wrongly dated to be served on a Saturday or Sunday, when the offices of the procurators fiscal were not open. Such errors do not engender great confidence. When they occur and accused persons walk out of court, there is resentment. Those who are dealt with more severely feel that they have been treated unfairly and differently from those whom they perceive to be guilty but who walk free. We are reminded of the hackneyed phrase that not only should justice be done, but be seen to be done. We should ensure that everybody in the courts is dealt with in the same fashion.

I have asked a series of questions on this issue—I asked some as recently as Friday—because I am concerned about when the procurator fiscal decides to refer a case to the Crown for decision. I asked in what circumstances such a referral would occur and, quite honestly, the answers that I have received so far have been unsatisfactory. We need more openness in the Crown office and the procurator fiscal service.

The Bill must be seen in the context of the causes of crime because crime is related to hopelessness. That is not to say that all crimes are related to hopelessness, but hopelessness certainly creates more chance of crime. Every unemployed person is not necessarily a criminal—of course that is not so—but there is a direct link between crime and people, especially young people, who feel that there is no hope for the future.

In that context, the Government are putting forward the Bill as a means of dealing with crime while, at the same time, they are implementing massive and savage cuts in Strathclyde regional council and elsewhere. Cuts in the community education budget and in all sorts of community facilities will inevitably lead to young people having nowhere to go and nothing to do, which is precisely what leads them into crime. I appeal to the Minister to see the matter in context.

Dr. Godman: With regard to the relationship between unemployment and crime, does my hon. Friend agree that many minor offences are committed by unemployed youngsters and that, if they were in work, with all the disciplines that work would impose, they would not commit such minor offences?

Mr. McMaster: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. The general demise of the apprenticeship scheme, which put young people in a work situation and taught them discipline, is also disadvantageous.

Mr. Gallie: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that many of the crimes to which he has referred, such as vandalism, house-breaking and other crimes are, in fact, committed by 14 and 15-year-olds and that those youngsters have an excellent education system to utilise? Why should they be of the same brand as that suggested by the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. McMaster: Young people of 14 and 15 want to be educated for something. They see 17 and 18-year-olds coming out of education to poverty, hopelessness and unemployment, and it does not motivate them. Young people should be given hope for the future. That would do a great deal of good.

We have heard a lot about various types of drugs. In my constituency, the drugs that concern me most are jellies: temazepam. They are meant to be prescribed, yet, not only are young people swallowing them, but they are heating them up and injecting them. Some have had their limbs amputated as a result. Action could be taken swiftly if the Government were to repeat what they did a couple of years ago, which certainly helped for a short time. The Secretary of State should give guidance to every health board and tell every general practitioner in Scotland that temazepam should not be prescribed when there is any other reasonable alternative.

9.8 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): We have had a worthwhile debate in which we have heard many good speeches from hon. Members of all parties. I shall begin by paying my tribute to the late Sir Nicholas Fairbairn. I took the post of shadow home affairs spokesperson without being a lawyer or having expertise, but from the first day Sir Nicholas Fairbairn was very kind and helpful in his remarks. Not once, in a professional way, did he try to take us down. That is clear from the record in *Hansard*. He did take people down on occasion and they felt the sharp edge of his tongue. However, when he realised that there were serious aspects and that people were trying to apply themselves and to learn, he was one of the most sensitive individuals in that regard—

Mr. Foulkes: That was before all the postcards started to arrive.

Mr. McFall: I was about to say "bundle", which is quite appropriate.

The Bill is a bundle of procedural reforms. If it were not for the Law Commission's report being implemented, it would be very thin indeed. The Bill lacks a strategic overview and coherence. It emerges from five consultation papers which the Government entitled "Improving the Delivery of Justice in Scotland". The topics covered were evidence and procedure, criminal legal aid, juries and verdicts and sentencing and appeals. Those four topics were preceded by the White Paper, "Firm and Fair".

Do those topics add up to a Runciman commission, which was a critical analysis of the Royal Commission on justice in respect of England and Wales? I do not believe that they do. Scotland has been short-changed in that respect.

Since the Government came to power, there have been 14 Acts of Parliament for Scotland. They started with the Bail etc. (Scotland) Act 1980 and the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1980 and they carry through to this Bill. However, those Acts did not follow a logical and progressive path. As a result, they do not point the way forward in terms of an approach that is coherent, efficient and effective for the criminal justice system in Scotland.

For example, there is no presage of the criminal courts rules council in the Bill. That provision simply appeared on Report in the House of Lords. If that is such an important element, why was it not in the Bill from the beginning? It seems that the Government are still developing their ideas and that they do not have a coherent whole yet.

[Mr. McFall]

The Bill refers to many measures such as enhancing the intermediate trial diet. However, that is already operational. If my memory serves me correctly, it was recommended by the Lord Justice-General as long ago as 1982, but it was not working properly. I believe that about 12 courts are operating intermediate trial diets today. Will the Minister tell us precisely how many courts are operating that system and how effective they are? Have the Government undertaken a review of the effectiveness of the intermediate trial diet?

The Secretary of State said that a consolidation Act will follow the Bill. That is welcome, but it must be comprehensive. Will we find ourselves some way down the line with yet another criminal justice Bill, as a result of the piecemeal approach, and yet another consolidation Bill? I remember that the Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993 had to be revised. Some of the revision took place in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.

Hon. Members have already referred to judicial examination, the diminishing of the right to silence and the prosecutor's right to comment. Clause 10 relates to judicial examination whereby an accused person is taken before the court at a very early stage in the proceedings, before he even knows the case against him. He will have a copy of the complaint, indictment or petition, but he is then in many ways forced to explain his case. Within 24 hours of being arrested, an individual may be brought before a sheriff to be questioned by a prosecutor. He has a right to consult a solicitor before answering detailed questions about where he was, what he did, and so on. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) referred to individuals with special learning needs. Such individuals might find themselves being pressured by professional people. That further undermines the right to silence. The official Opposition will press the Government on that matter in Committee.

Under such judicial examination, there cannot be many people who are capable of rational thought 24 or 48 hours after a trauma. The general public will view clause 10 as an attempt to make the accused confess. I shall press the Minister on that matter in Committee.

I am concerned also about clause 28, which relates to a prosecutor's right to comment. How far will a prosecutor be allowed to go? What control will be exercised? A prosecutor's forensic abilities may be put into play, and without any restrictions or guidelines being set, he or she can not only intimidate a witness but, in the process, make sure that the prosecution case is won by default. It is a two-way process. I ask the Minister to consider it and to give us some written guidelines. If, in going over the top, he destroys the prosecution case, that is not good for justice, either.

Clause 29 is worth consideration in Committee. It has a certain plea-bargaining element to it, but perhaps it is a wolf in sheep's clothing. It states:

"In determining what sentence to pass on . . . an offender who has pled guilty to an offence, a court may take into account—

(a) the stage in the proceedings . . . at which the offender indicated his intention to plead guilty".

Is not there a chance that an offender will say, "If I plead guilty early, perhaps I will get away with it and get the problem settled very quickly"? There will turn out to be a plea-bargaining element. That matter is worth further consideration in Committee.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have mentioned miscarriages of justice. We welcome the establishment of the Sutherland committee, but we deplore the fact that it will not report until July 1996. We must compare that with the Runciman report in England and Wales. As I mentioned when I intervened on the Secretary of State, the Home Secretary has already announced a miscarriages review authority Bill. Citizens of Scotland will be subject to a different regime from that in England and Wales. Citizens of Scotland will have their right to silence diminished, as a result of the changes, when they appear at court and at judicial examination. Citizens of England and Wales will also have the right to silence removed, but they will have recourse to a miscarriage of justice review body, and Scotland will not. The mismatch of remedies available to citizens of the United Kingdom does nothing for the provision of justice in Scotland.

I ask the Minister to guarantee that, in the event of the Sutherland committee recommending legislation, the Government will give sufficient time to the matter in the lifetime of this Parliament. We need an unequivocal answer from the Minister. This matter is not just an aspect of the legal system. We are talking about a higher level; innocent people's lives are threatened. It is important to turn our attention to that matter.

One of the most ingenious comments in the Bill is that it will be financially neutral. It is hard to guess what the final financial element will be. Civil servants have already studied it. They have tabled plus and minus merits and demerits of aspects of the changes, so there must be a quantitative element. If the Government are not forthcoming with that information, we must ask whether they consider that change is worth while only if the cost is neutral. The calculations on which such expressions are based should be shown. Lord McCluskey in the other place referred to cloud cuckoo land. How can we introduce extra bail duties, which we are happy to endorse, for fiscals and advocate deputes? How can extra preparation be introduced for questioning at judicial examination? How can extra preparatory work for fiscals be introduced, and how can matters be dealt with in the earlier clauses of the Bill? How can extra work be introduced for hearings in relation to insanity cases, and extra responsibilities be conferred in relation to confiscation under part II? It just cannot be done without an increase in the resources available to the fiscal service.

There is a glaring lack of reference to the fiscal service. All practitioners in courts elsewhere say that the underfunding of the procurator fiscal system is the problem. Any defence lawyer who has a case wrapped up will say, in private, that the system is under such pressure that, to an extent, an advantage is given to the defence.

Mr. Stewart: I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman is making an important point. Why are only four Scottish Labour Members sitting behind him?

Mr. McFall: There is a full turnout of Tory Members, but nevertheless only a handful are present. The hon. Gentleman was present at the beginning of the debate, but subsequently decided to leave; when he left, other hon.

Members came in. If he had stayed throughout the debate, he might have based his information on fact rather than fancy.

Mr. Stewart: Where are they, then?

Mr. McFall: My hon. Friends have been in the Chamber at certain stages.

Mr. Stewart: Answer.

Mr. McFall: I think that the Eastwood bruiser is warming up to take over from Sir Nicholas.

The Bill is predicated on the White Paper entitled "Firm and Fair", in which the Secretary of State calls for "our fight against crime". The White Paper stated that the highest priority was to protect the public from crime and criminals. The question is, how efficient have the Government been in that regard since they took power? In 1979, 673,000 crimes and offences were committed; according to the latest estimate, the figure is now over 1 million. Even in the last year, when according to the Government the crime figures have fallen, the number of drug offences and violent crimes has increased. The fact is that the Government have little to present in terms of law and order. They have not been efficient in that regard, which is why Labour's slogan "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" has resonance up and down the land.

Mr. Bill Walker: The hon. Gentleman is bandying around some interesting slogans. Is he suggesting that Labour's proposals will increase the pay of a policeman over and above the real terms increase of 30 per cent. that has already been achieved by the Government? The number of policemen has also risen. How will the hon. Gentleman deal with that, and what will be the cost?

Mr. McFall: It is very simple. Nearly all local authorities in Scotland are Labour controlled and work with the communities and the police. It is the actions on the ground that count, as against the Government's lack of intention. Opposition Members are proud of the way in which good Labour local authorities work with communities and the police; it is a shame that Conservative Members are not.

Let us look at the Conservatives' record on law and order and the courts. The position of the courts has already been mentioned. According to the figures, it is estimated that 250,000 citations are served annually on a total uniformed police strength of 14,000. Each day, 700 police officers attend court to give evidence in criminal cases going to trial, but only one in five gives that evidence. Police evidence accounts for only 2 per cent. of police court duty. The rest is travel and waiting time. So I put it to the Government that if they want to do something about fighting crime and putting police on the streets, they should do something about the scandalous waste of police resources in courts. It has a severe impact on operational duties.

Mr. Gallie: Surely that is precisely what the Bill does. On that basis, why on earth has the hon. Gentleman tabled this stupid amendment?

Mr. McFall: The Bill does nothing of the sort. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we pressed Lord Fraser of Carmyllie to examine the wasting of police time in court. My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) wrote to him. In his reply, the noble Lord said that he found much of my hon. Friend's analysis facile and unenlightening. He said that he was surprised that my hon. Friend did not understand why police officers spent time waiting to give evidence. Let me remind the House that the Public Accounts Commission took the same view as my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South. It found that there was a scandalous waste of police time. It has asked the Government to do something about it. As yet, the waste still takes place in courts.

Only last year, the chief constable of Central region mentioned in his annual report that police in his area wasted 98 per cent. of the time that they spent at court. What do the Government intend to do about the problem? It has gone on for years and years. It requires the Opposition to cry day in and day out for the Government to do something. We congratulate ourselves on the fact that a measure is now in the Bill.

The social context in which the Bill has been introduced is a phenomenal increase in drug-related offences. Between 1989 and 1993 total recorded crime in Scotland rose by 10.1 per cent. Yet drug-related offences leapt by an incredible 1,000 per cent. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) asked earlier, what is the Government's policy on drug enforcement? Drug abuse is one of the greatest social problems facing Scotland today. It is one of the principal causes of crime. The Opposition recognise that the problem of drugs must be tackled if any headway is to be made in the battle against crime, but the Government have stubbornly refused to do that, despite evidence from the Medical Research Council, the World Health Organisation and Greater Glasgow health board. A survey by the board showed that 80 per cent. of those surveyed engaged in crime to service their drugs habit.

The Government can no longer continue pretending that there is no link between drug abuse and deprivation. I should like to see in the Bill measures to assist drugs education so that we can change the agenda, control the supply of drugs and experiment with strategies at the social and community level with voluntary groups and the parents who are involved in the problem to help the people who are regular users not to get into trouble.

Crimes of violence are of particular concern to many people. The latest figures show that crimes of violence have increased. What have the Government done in the light of that? Last year they removed the entitlement to legal aid from a quarter of a million people. They then implemented sheriff court fees. That means that people who take action in sheriff courts are expected to meet the full cost of the sheriff's salary.

Mr. Gallie: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. We are debating the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, not civil law in Scotland. The hon. Gentleman is dealing with civil law matters.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman who is replying to the debate will come back to the substance of the debate.

Mr. McFall: This is an integral part of the issue. The Law Society of Scotland has contacted us on the matter. The Government intend to introduce measures on criminal legal aid similar to those which they introduced on civil legal aid and on criminal injuries compensation.

We all sympathise with the case of Judy, but what have the Government done? They have dismantled the legislation that a Labour Government established in the

[Mr. McFall]

mid-1960s and, as a result, if a police officer aged 30 with two children is killed in the course of duty, his widow will receive £10,000 no matter how financially or psychologically difficult her position, whereas before it was £150,000.

In case the hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) thinks that we are straying again, I wonder whether he would support us in the following case. If a police officer is killed, does he agree that his widow should not merely be given the pitiful sum of £10,000, as would be the case with the criminal injuries compensation scheme? If we table a positive amendment, we can ensure that the tariff scheme is kept for the less severe cases, but we could use the scheme that we had previously for the more severe cases and those that impinge on the families who are left behind. Police officers' widows would then get the sum of money that they rightfully deserve.

Mr. Bill Walker: I want to understand what the hon. Gentleman is offering. Is he saying that he will table a detailed amendment so that the widow of a police constable killed on duty will receive substantial benefit? Will it be a narrow amendment, dealing purely with police constables?

Mr. McFall: Yes, and if we get Conservative support it will be fine. I am saying that the tariff scheme should be abolished at one end of the scale to give us some flexibility. Let us have a tariff scheme at the bottom, but not at the top. The hon. Gentleman has been helpful to his Front Bench as always and I will be delighted if we can follow that path.

The Secretary of State said that the Government were at the forefront on crime, but if they are, they must be standing there watching—they are certainly not doing anything about it, because it is increasing year on year. They talk about the success of crime prevention and say that they are backing the police. Let us ask the police what they think after the Sheehy inquiry. Ask the prison officers what they thought when the Government took away industrial dispute legislation.

Labour is looking for positive measures to encourage the community to work with the police in close co-operation and to support home security schemes, which result in safer neighbourhoods. We want measures to encourage local victim support projects, neighbourhood watch and other community projects. We want measures to implement social strategies and tackle some of the causes of crime, because there is undoubtedly a link between increasing crime and social deprivation. That is the distinguishing mark of the official Opposition compared with the Government on this issue.

We are telling the Government to tackle the causes of crime—poverty, poor housing, poor education, high levels of unemployment and drug abuse. Yes, deal firmly with the perpetrators, but target young offenders to prevent them from becoming hardened criminals and an obligation on the state, then we will have a positive framework on which to work so that the Bill gets its Second Reading.

9.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): Tonight, Members of Parliament from both sides of the House have paid tribute to Sir Nicholas Fairbairn. They have mentioned his great personal kindnesses in offering legal advice, in particular. Many of us will miss him as a friend—not just the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who had been his junior counsel, as indeed have I. I believe that the late John Smith also served in that capacity. We will all miss his puckish sense of humour. Although he did not always agree with the Government, I am certain that he agreed with the bulk of the Bill, and we miss his presence tonight.

The Bill contains many reforms that are critical. I must start by telling the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) that one of the most significant reforms is the introduction of intermediate diets, and the pilot scheme has been remarkably successful. It was carried out in Airdrie and Dundee sheriff courts and the analysis showed that intermediate diets cut unnecessary court attendance in half. Of course, the hon. Gentleman is right—the police presence in courts should be cut and the measure will help to do that.

Courts in Edinburgh, Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy and Dumbarton have introduced the diets, with similar results. The provisions in the Bill are needed to ensure that courts throughout the length and breadth of Scotland can also secure those benefits.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton also asked whether guidelines on prosecutors' comments on the accused's failure to give evidence would be issued. I confirm that the Lord Advocate gave an undertaking in the other House that he would issue guidelines to Crown counsel and procurators fiscal.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) raised the issue of closed circuit television. He is right to say that those television facilities will be extended to every sheriffdom in Scotland. The equipment currently in use in the sheriff court in his constituency will be reviewed and a final decision will be taken in the light of demand.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about those who are sent to Carstairs and how easy it is for someone imprisoned there without a time limit to get out. I would say that it is extremely hard. When I practised in the High Court, we often took the view that if someone was charged with murder and ended up in Carstairs, he was likely to be there much longer than if he went anywhere else. The two major issues are the individual's mental state, which is a matter of clinical judgment, and public safety, which is entirely the responsibility of the Secretary of State, who must be satisfied about that before deciding to release the prisoner. Any such committal is appealable to the sheriff court.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the criminal court rules council. I confirm that it will be drawn largely from professionals who use the court, but the legislation prescribes that one member should have an awareness of the interests of victims of crime and witnesses in criminal proceedings. That person, at least, need not be a legal professional.

Dr. Godman: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: May I answer some other points first?

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East raised the issue of financial consequences of the Bill. We have every reason to be confident in our assessment that

the Bill will cover its cost at worst, because it is full of proposals that will relieve financial burdens on the police, prosecutors and courts. For example, the police will waste less time attending court needlessly and citing witnesses in person. Fiscal fines will be reduced and prosecutors in the courts will be relieved of some of the burdens that they now sustain. There will be savings in compensation paid to witnesses and jurors for attending court, and the cost of sending fine defaulters to prison will be reduced as supervised attendance orders will be used instead. Those and other proposals will probably more than offset the additional burdens but, of course, we shall closely monitor the position in the light of experience.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East asked about cases marked "No proceedings". Like him, I have prosecuted—I was an interim procurator fiscal. It would have been unthinkable for me to have marked any case "No proceedings" on the ground of work load pressure and I am glad to say that I never came across a fiscal who took that action. I can give the hon. and learned Gentleman some figures. The main categories in which no proceedings were taken were insufficient admissible evidence and triviality. In 1993-94, 23 per cent. of cases were marked "No proceedings" because of evidential difficulties, and 29 per cent. because the offence was viewed as trivial. In the period between October 1993 and September 1994, not a single case was marked "No proceedings" for the reason of staff shortage. But I shall make further inquiries into the point which the hon. and learned Gentleman raised.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked about facilities in Linlithgow. I am glad to confirm that those are currently being reviewed in the Linlithgow and Livingston areas. I shall be pleased to ask my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State to write to the hon. Gentleman to bring him up to date on progress. The hon. Gentleman also asked about fatal accident inquiries when those are held to establish when and where death occurred, the cause of death, any reasonable precautions whereby death might have been avoided, and any defect in any system that contributed to the death. We are conscious of the need to pay even greater attention to victims and the Bill contains a number of practical measures, for example, to decrease the number of times that witnesses may have to attend court, to reduce the number of occasions when a trial must be cancelled or adjourned without warning and to remove one restriction on the prosecution's freedom to lead evidence of the accused's previous misconduct in cases where the defence has attacked the victim's character. All those measures are evidence of the Government's commitment to treat victims with courtesy, dignity and compassion and to reduce the trauma of their necessary involvement in the criminal justice system.

Mr. Dalyell: In the Government's view, is it the purpose of a fatal accident inquiry to get the truth or is it designed, as in the case of Lockerbie, to get maximum damages for certain parties and evade the truth? Does the hon. Gentleman think that Ministers and the intelligence services should, where necessary, be called to fatal accident inquiries?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman's questions go somewhat beyond the terms of the Bill, because fatal accident inquiries do not feature in it. Without question, the purpose of those inquiries is to get at the truth, which is what happened at the FAIs at which I was present. No doubt the hon. Gentleman's ingenuity will be such that he will follow up his lines of inquiry elsewhere.

My hon. Friends the Members for Ayr (Mr. Gallie) and for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Robertson) and many other hon. Members wanted to know whether the provisions on bail go far enough. It is the purpose of the Bill to toughen the existing provisions, for example, by enabling the courts to impose double the current custodial penalty on those who offend on bail. Any attempt to reduce offending on bail also depends on minimising the time those awaiting trial spend on bail. The longer the delay in bringing offenders to justice, the greater the risk of their continuing to offend. The measures in the Bill will also therefore assist the courts in dealing with delays and backlogs in the hearing of cases. That will also make an important contribution.

There have been a number of cases of bail abuse and it is absolutely right that we should tighten the law in that connection. The proposal to restrict access to bail in clause 3 is not unique. Section 26 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975 states that bail cannot be granted for the crimes of murder or treason. Those restrictions have existed in statute since 1888. We are extending that restriction further, which we believe to be necessary.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Davidson) spoke about the "Crossey Posse". The problems posed by large numbers of pending cases can best be resolved by better use of courts' resources. Too much time is wasted with late pleas, non-appearance by accused persons and late adjournments. If we can reduce that waste of resources, the courts and the prosecutors will be able to process pending cases much more speedily.

The position of young offenders is uppermost in our mind. We have commissioned a major research study into the children's hearing system, which is being carried out by Stirling and Edinburgh universities. It will focus on decision making within the hearing system and the outcome for the young people who come before it. We have also announced a major development project, which is being undertaken by Barnado's and Central region, to address the problems caused by persistent young offenders, in which we are investing £1 million over five years. We are engaged in a number of other projects, because it is important to tackle the circumstances that give rise to crime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr and the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) spoke about raves. The report by Sheriff Gow was also touched upon. The Scottish Drugs Forum has been commissioned to prepare guidance for local authorities and licensing boards to assist them in advising the organisers of raves on the practical measures they can take to minimise the health and welfare problems which sometimes arise at such events. In consultation with the local authorities and the police interest, consideration is being given to the practicalities of introducing model licensing conditions into licences for raves, possibly dealing with such aspects as stewarding, permitted numbers and searches.

Mr. Gallie: Does my hon. Friend agree that, with respect to Sheriff Gow's findings, the operators basically complied with the guidelines that he refers to already?

[Mr. Gallie]

Does he agree that the real problem is that young people continue to take drugs such as Ecstasy, and that that is the issue that we must tackle?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I appreciate my hon. Friend's argument. Drug misuse is a serious problem in Scotland. We are spending no less than £40 million a year on the various agencies to combat it. We are determined to have a considerable drive, especially with regard to young people, aimed at its prevention, and the drugs task force will have a major part to play in that. There are now new schools drug prevention packages for under-10s and over-14s.

Substitute prescribing also has a role to play in tackling drug misuse. We shall work extremely hard at that subject for a comprehensive response.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) mentioned the homosexual age of consent. The House reduced it for homosexual acts from 21 to 18 and the House expressed a clear preference for a reduction to 18 rather than 16.

Since last November, when the law changed, instructions have been sent to procurators fiscal, saying that they should continue to report to the Crown Office, for consideration by Crown counsel, any case where both participants are over 16 and the act appears to have been consensual and in private but is an offence by reason of the fact that one or both are under 18. Since the issue of that instruction, no cases have been so reported for consideration by Crown counsel. Each case that is reported will be considered on its merits, and a decision will be made whether it is in the public interest that proceedings be taken.

Mr. Watson *rose—*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have nothing more to say about that. The hon. Gentleman is welcome to pursue the matter in Standing Committee, and I look forward to his volunteering for that role.

With regard to clause 8, the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East asked about a joint application to have a juror excused. In those circumstances, both parties will continue to have the right to seek a juror's excusal by showing cause to the court.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East, if I remember correctly, asked why we were not following a similar procedure to the Thomson committee. What was required, in our opinion, was a detailed examination of certain specific areas of concern. One solution that we propose is a continuation or development of Lord Thomson's recommendation—mandatory intermediate diets. Other proposals for a clause dealing with examinations of the facts are Thomson recommendations that were not implemented in 1980. The consultation that preceded the Bill was extremely comprehensive.

I come to the issue of intermediate diets, which I believe will help enormously to speed up the process of justice. The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East asked about temporary sheriffs. There are about 120 temporary sheriffs, who are used to maintain the work of the sheriff courts. That helps when the sheriffs are on holiday or on sick leave or the resident sheriff is absent, for whatever reason.

The judicial strength of the supreme courts and the sheriff courts is kept under constant review, in consultation with the judicial heads of those courts. In recent years, as the work loads of those courts have increased, so have the numbers of judges and sheriffs, and temporary judges and temporary sheriffs make a useful contribution to dealing with the work loads of the courts and to reducing inconvenience to court users.

Scotland now has more judges and more sheriffs than at any previous time in its history.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Can the Minister confirm that there are now more temporary sheriffs than there are those holding permanent commissions? If there is a need for more temporary sheriffs than permanent ones, is that not a clear sign that the work load is sufficient to justify more full-time sheriffs? The Scottish system is based on full-time professional judges. Why are the Government not implementing that?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are now more judges and more permanent sheriffs than ever before. Judicial strengths are kept under constant review. It is notable that, for many types of court business and in many courts, waiting periods are now at or below the target figures.

On the subject of additional evidence, the difference of view between the Lord President of the Court of Session and Lord Justice Clerk has been mentioned, but that does not necessarily mean that the cases involved are at odds. All it means is that the subject will need to be considered by five judges. I should not say anything more as cases referred to the full Bench are sub judice.

It is remarkable that Labour Members have said that the right to silence is being threatened. Distinguished members of the Labour party or members who have been Labour Law Officers—

Mr. Foulkes: Name them.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will. Lord McCluskey said of the right to silence:

"It is deeply patronising to say that that cannot be commented upon. If the judge can comment upon it, as he can—though he should do so with restraint; and those restraints are fairly well known—I do not see any reason in the world why the prosecutor should not say, 'Well, ladies and gentlemen, you have heard the evidence. His fingerprints were found all over the safe. His footprints were found on the carpet and his DNA sample matched that found on the broken window'".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 29 November 1994; Vol. 559, c. 569.]

Madam Speaker: Order. I think that the Minister is quoting from a Member of the upper House who is not a Minister. I think that he knows that he can quote from the upper House only from those who are Ministers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall paraphrase what I was saying. It was considered not unreasonable to mention the facts of incriminating evidence and the fact that the accused who, in the circumstances, was the only person who might know exactly what had happened, refused to do so.

The clause does not remove the right to silence; it allows the prosecutor the right to comment on the fact that a person has sat tight in the witness box. When I was an advocate, if I saw an accused person in a serious criminal case of rape,

murder or assault to severe injury, sitting tight in the accused box, it was usually a sign that he or she was as guilty as sin.

Mr. McFall: I thought that we were talking about justice, until the Minister mentioned his own form of justice. Does he accept that some cases will involve over-zealous prosecutors, and such cases require more guidelines? Does he also accept that an over-zealous prosecutor can do as much harm to the prosecution case as to the accused? There is a vital need for guidelines—will they be forthcoming from the Minister?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I made clear earlier the circumstances in which the Lord Advocate would issue guidelines. It is absolutely clear that it is the prosecutor's job to put the facts before the courts, elicit the facts and leave it to the jury to make up its mind. If he has prepared his case thoroughly and there is a lot of evidence, that will weigh with the jury.

Mr. Welsh: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No, I want to move to my next subject: confiscation and forfeiture.

The Government have been in the forefront in introducing measures to deprive offenders of the profits of crime and property used in crime. The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1987 introduced confiscation of the proceeds of drug trafficking in Scotland and has been extremely succesful. We believe that those new powers will make a huge difference in ensuring that ill-gotten profits from crime are taken away from those who would otherwise benefit from them. They will deprive criminals of assets where crimes such as serious fraud, theft and pornography have given rise to economic benefit. That is an important provision in the Bill.

I turn now to the subject of the not proven verdict. Much has been made of the fact that Sir Walter Scott expressed doubts about the not proven verdict. With the greatest respect to him, Sir Walter did not practise very much, for whatever reason. There is a great difference between the circumstances in Scotland and those in England. The royal commission's remit—to which the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) referred—was confined to England and Wales. It was considering whether not proven should be introduced in a system of juries of 12, with unanimous or 10 to two majority verdicts. The Government have consulted in Scotland on whether not proven should be retained in a system which has juries of 15 and simple majority verdicts and in which the not proven verdict has played its part for 250 years. The overwhelming response was that the not proven verdict should be retained and that is why the Government will not support its abolition. We have consulted about the issue and the overwhelming majority of people are in favour of its retention. Therefore, we will oppose any moves to abolish it.

Mr. George Robertson: I said in my speech that, in view of Scottish legal history, if there was to be any change in the Scottish legal system, it should be decided by a free vote. Will the Minister give a guarantee that Government Back Benchers will be free to vote according to their views and their consciences?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There is no need for a free vote on that issue. The evidence is conclusive that it is in Scotland's interests to retain it.

With regard to the not proven verdict, hon. Members will recall the case of Madeleine Smith who asked her boyfriend to return her love letters and, when he refused to deliver them, she gave him a drink laced with arsenic. The jury could not bear the thought of sentencing that young girl to be hanged so it brought in a verdict of not proven. I suggest that having the option of that extra verdict is very much in Scotland's interests.

To continue the story, Madeleine Smith remarried some years later. However, she quarrelled with her husband, who thought that he saw a glint in her eye, so he took off. It would be much more humanitarian to have a not proven verdict in circumstances where a jury is not 100 per cent. certain—beyond reasonable doubt—of the person's guilt, but where the jury is reasonably certain that the person committed the crime. In 1993, 18 per cent. of those who were acquitted of crimes were found not proven on at least one charge. In the past five years, the not proven verdict has been used in between 18 per cent. and 23 per cent. of acquittal verdicts.

Reference was made to the Sutherland committee. We had to wait until the royal commission released its report and, thereafter, there was no undue delay. We issued a consultation paper in January 1994, the consultation period ended in mid-April and our White Paper appeared in June. Committee members were chosen over the summer and the membership was announced in November 1994. That represents a focused and energetic response to the royal commission's report. I believe that alleged miscarriages of justice will be treated very seriously and the Secretary of State already has substantial powers in that area. Since 1928, six out of the 14 individuals whose cases have been referred back to the Court of Appeal have had their convictions quashed.

Mr. Gallie: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. Opposition Members will agree that he has made an excellent case for supporting the Bill. In the last three minutes of his speech, will he make an impassioned appeal to Opposition Members to withdraw their ridiculous and stupid amendment?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes, I will. Apart from anything else, the amendment refers to rising crime and, as my hon Friend the Member for Ayr knows, crime in Scotland is decreasing in large measure because of the legislation that he introduced to control the carrying of knives. In 1992, there was a small reduction in crime, and there was an 8 per cent. reduction in 1993 and a further 3 per cent. reduction in 1994. There has been a substantial and continuing fall in crimes of dishonesty.

It is important to note that the number of crimes involving firearms have also decreased. The number of victims of homicide has decreased by 15 per cent. My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr performed a great service for Scotland and the House by introducing the tough Carrying of Knives etc. (Scotland) Act 1993 which has helped to decrease the number of knife-related crimes in Strathclyde. Trends in recorded crime are affected by several factors, particularly the willingness of the public to report crimes. Far more are being reported than ever before. The war on crime must be fought relentlessly. The Bill greatly strengthens the system of justice, and will make Scotland a safer place in which to live.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—
The House divided: Ayes 207, Noes 282.

Division No. 86] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Cummings and
Mr. Joe Benton.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*

Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt. Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Salisbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and Mr. Michael Bates.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (SCOTLAND) BILL [*LORDS*] [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Order [19 December],

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any amount payable—

(i) as compensation under Part II of the Act; or

(ii) under paragraph 6 of Schedule 2 to the Act in respect of remuneration or expenses of administrators;

(b) any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State or the Lord Advocate under the Act; and

(c) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act; and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums falling to be paid into the Consolidated Fund under section 203 or 412 of the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1975.—[*Mr. Wells.*]

Question agreed to.

European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993

10.14 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I beg to move,

That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995-96, as updated, for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

This is the second section 5 debate that has been held. As last year, the House is invited to approve the economic and budgetary information to be sent to the European Commission in accordance with the provisions of the treaty. That information is contained in chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", which is usually called the Red Book. At the end of chapter 1 of the Red Book, it is mentioned that those chapters will be used for this purpose and will form the basis of the appropriate submissions.

The House will also know that, following the decision to leave the rate of VAT on domestic fuel and power at 8 per cent., my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced further measures on 8 December 1994 to keep public borrowing on a downward path. The increased rates of duty on alcohol, tobacco and road fuels, together with some reductions in public expenditure, were approved by the House and were incorporated in revised tables. A set of revised Red Book tables was published in due course.

The Red Book, therefore, in its original form and with the revised tables, provides the report to Parliament for section 5 purposes. This evening the House is being asked to approve that that report and those tables be sent to the Commission to discharge our obligations under articles 103 and 104c of the Maastricht treaty. The House is not being asked to approve November's Budget. That has already been done. That was and remains a matter of legitimate controversy, which was and still is being debated as part of other business.

Nevertheless, reading last year's debates, I notice that the Labour party contrived a vote against the motion, although it was never really made clear on that occasion on what grounds it objected to the required information being sent. The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) is—I think—opening the debate for the Labour party—

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman is indicating that he will not open the debate this year, but he certainly did so last year. Indeed, I cannot resist drawing the House's attention to one of the hon. Gentleman's predictions last year, when he said that the balance of payments deficit was

"set to get worse."

That was corrected immediately by my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell), the then Financial Secretary, who pointed out that it was getting better. The hon. Member for Oxford, East nevertheless persisted and said that the balance of payments

"was set to get worse."

He added:

"Time will be the test of who is right on that."—[*Official Report*, 9 February 1994; Vol. 237, c. 400-2.]

Time has been the test. Exports are up by 15 per cent. on a year ago and the current account was in surplus for the last recorded quarter. I hope that whoever opens the debate for the Opposition will show a little more modesty in his or her predictions and also, this year at least, vote to allow the Government's information to be transmitted to the Commission, regardless of whether the Opposition agree with the underlying policy.

In summary, therefore, I invite the House to approve the medium-term economic and budgetary position set out in the Red Book being sent to the European Commission as required under the treaty.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Have my hon. Friend and others in the Treasury been able to consider the fact that the Red Book is produced to the very highest standards of accounting policies and principles in Government accounting, that other countries throughout Europe do not produce their accounts on a similar basis and that many other countries have unfunded pension liabilities of an extraordinarily large nature? Is the Commission able to take our Red Book and use those accounts meaningfully in Europe or, in fact, will it not know what to do with our Red Book in relation to the accounts of other countries?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is right to say that the way in which we present our accounts and Budget projections is a model that we could well commend to other member states. It reflects credit on us that the projections provide an easily understood and comprehensive guide to our tax and spending priorities. I do not know whether the Commission receives similar information of such a high standard from other member states. However, all other member states are required to send similar information to the Commission and, on the basis of that information, the Commission produces a report and draws up an assessment of how the economies of Europe are converging or diverging.

I commend the motion to the House.

10.19 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): I apologise to the House as I am losing my voice. I am sure that hon. Members will be pleased about that because it means inevitably that I shall have to make a shorter speech than I would otherwise have made.

It was interesting that the Minister was prepared to make such a short speech in which he did not say very much. He has moved a motion that is before the House simply because of the magnificent way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) and his colleagues managed, in the debates on the approval of the Maastricht treaty, to put down what was referred to at the time as a ticking time-bomb. As a result of that, the Government were forced to concede a section of the Maastricht Bill, along with others, in respect of which the House has an opportunity to debate information that we subsequently forward to the European Community.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Armstrong: I have hardly started. I do not know what on earth the hon. Gentleman can query at this stage, but I shall certainly give way to him.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. Can she explain why we are having this debate?

Why was the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) so keen for us to have this debate when all the information is set out in the Red Book and it is sent off to the Commission? What is the point of having this debate?

Ms Armstrong: The hon. Gentleman obviously trusts the Government, and exactly what they say, absolutely. As the evening passes, perhaps I can persuade him that that is not the view of the British people. Very few of us, and even the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) who, at one stage, was vice-chairman of the Tory party, know precisely what Government policy is in respect of this and other areas. We do not know the Government's views on convergence. We have to wait until Wednesday to see whether the Prime Minister has any new information for us.

The Prime Minister told us on Friday that he was going to give us the definitive position at long last. Some of us wonder how long that position will last, because we have been told that on numerous occasions before. I wonder whether the position will last until the end of the debate. I wonder even more whether it will last until the end of the Government and whether the Government will last much longer than the debate.

According to the motion, the House will commend the Government's assessment to the Commission "with approval". I have very little sense of approving the Government's policy set out in the Red Book. It is our duty and responsibility as an Opposition to ensure that, on every occasion, the House has an opportunity to examine these issues with much more care than the Minister was minded to show this evening.

These questions are pertinent to our debate tonight, even though we cannot be fully assured of the Government's positions because they change so frequently. Indeed, they change not just because of debates in this House, but because of what is said by Conservative Members here, there and everywhere—wherever they may be.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Armstrong: We heard from the Chief Secretary on one occasion—I think that it was on television one morning—that he would proceed with monetary union virtually over his dead body. One very live body who has been concerned by such debates is trying to intervene.

Mr. Butterfill: Which of the convergence criteria is not satisfied by the information that is set out in the Red Book?

Ms Armstrong: We do not yet know what convergence criteria the Government seek to satisfy and to have laid down. The Prime Minister suggested that he will seek to renegotiate some convergence criteria. It is appropriate to look at not only the convergence criteria that the Prime Minister originally negotiated but precisely the convergence criteria that the Opposition have been urging on the Government for some time, particularly those concerning the nature of the real economy. Nobody else wants me to give way.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will my hon. Friend give way? *[Interruption.]* Does she not find it very revealing that, when there is enormous sensitivity in the country about convergence criteria, there should be a feeling in the Government that the House of Commons does not need to debate the detail and the implications of this highly sensitive and important subject?

Ms Armstrong: I thank my hon. Friend. As usual, she is right and also very supportive in the way that I have come to expect from her over the years.

Here we are, 18 or so months since the passage of the Bill that introduced the Maastricht treaty, yet we are still in the dark about the Government's policy with regard to their future role in Europe. Having upset one group of supporters, will the Prime Minister now side with those whom, just a short time ago, he kicked out of the parliamentary party?

We know that, come what may, we shall not have a serious debate on how we should address the real problems in the economy of Britain, to enable people who have suffered most from the Government's economic policies to prosper. We shall debate the issue in order to ensure that the Government can again secure a majority, having lost the backing of other supporters in the House. The Prime Minister's motives, as ever, are about how he can stitch something together for the benefit of his own party, rather than about how he can tackle the real problems in the economy.

On Wednesday, will the Government support some developments in the real economy for which the Labour party has been arguing, including working towards full employment? Unfortunately, this debate is taking place without our knowing the answer. We are debating Government policy as reflected in the Red Book. From it, we know that there are serious problems in the real economy.

The Budget that we are asked to approve and to send to Europe confirms the Government's determination to press forward with tax increases, which will mean that a typical family will pay £800 a year more in taxes since the Government were elected in 1992. I seem to remember more than one clear statement from the Prime Minister, promising that there would be no tax increases after the election. The British people have learnt just how little they can trust the Prime Minister's word on taxes. Their pressure led to the Government being defeated on the most unfair of their tax increases, the increase in VAT on fuel.

It is interesting to note that the goals in article 2 of the Maastricht treaty include

"sustainable and non-inflationary growth respecting the environment."

The Government had to throw out what they claimed was their "green tax"—not that any of us ever agreed that that was what it was. They had to throw out the measure to impose VAT on fuel, and the Minister has not said tonight how he will satisfy the need to respect the environment.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Lady has been most generous in giving way.

What does the hon. Lady think is the purpose of the proposed landfill tax, if it is not to respect the environment? The same applies to the increase in duties on fuel. Surely those are important environmental measures.

Ms Armstrong: We still have a long way to go before we find out precisely what the Government's intentions are in regard to the landfill tax, and when it will be introduced. As for the fuel tax, I believe that it will partly

[Ms Armstrong]

deter people from using their cars, but it does not begin to deal with the need to control emissions from cars and the use of fuel.

I admit that I am making a rather snide point, in that the Government were defeated on the fuel tax issue; but we must deal with realities, and the reality is that the Government were defeated. It was they who claimed that the imposition of VAT on domestic fuel was a great move towards meeting their commitments. I always doubted that, and the Government's failure to address the issue after their defeat confirms that it was never anything of the sort.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): A noteworthy feature of the interventions so far is that Conservative Members are apparently still very enthusiastic about imposing a 17.5 per cent. VAT rate on fuel. Presumably that tax promise will figure prominently in the Conservative manifesto preceding the next general election.

Ms Armstrong: My hon. Friend is right, but he applies logic to the way in which the Government will proceed; I am not sure that they ever proceed in an honest and logical way when it comes to admitting their taxation intentions to the electorate.

The Budget failed to include measures that would lead to medium and long-term growth. What is trumpeted as success by Conservative Members is soon shown to be extremely fragile. Total investment is still below its level in 1990, before the recession.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Armstrong: Will the hon. Gentleman hold on for a bit? My voice is all right for the moment.

Manufacturing investment in plant and machinery is nearly 30 per cent. below its quarterly level at the start of 1990. British firms must now seek to compete with 30 per cent. less investment per worker than in Germany or France, and 65 per cent. less than in Japan. The Chancellor could and should have done more in his Budget to stimulate investment in industry, and that is the message that we should have given to the European Community.

The Bank of England pointed out in its February report that

"capacity constraints are becoming more widespread in industry . . . This will increase inflationary risks unless productive capacity increases."

Some people may be wondering why we quote the Bank of England today, but its predictions are normally very reliable.

The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee has also raised the problem.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way and giving me the opportunity to give her another little rest. I am a little confused about the position that she is expanding. First, she voted for the Maastricht treaty Bill. That suggested that she approved of the convergence criteria. Now the hon. Lady says that she wants full employment to be an economic policy, although that is not one of the convergence criteria. Then she criticises the Government's tax-raising policies even though they are necessary to meet the convergence criteria. If we did not raise taxes in the way that the Red Book sets out, we would fail in our obligations to meet the convergence criteria. Is the hon. Lady in favour of the convergence criteria or does she think that they are too deflationary?

Ms Armstrong: The hon. Gentleman has always shown confusion. He abstained in the votes on the Maastricht treaty. I did not. He continues to claim to support the Government while opposing them on their central policies. The Labour party has always said that it wants much of the real economy to be tackled in a way that the Government are not doing and that unless that happens, the convergence criteria will not be sustainable. We have made that argument consistently and we shall continue to make it.

The Government simply fail to tackle the real problems in our economy. Those problems will increase precisely because of what the Bank of England talked about—lack of capacity. It is true that in Britain there is a lack of capacity in industry after the recession. Investment is below even what it was before the recession. It is lower now than in 1979.

Mr. Andrew Britton, one of the specialist advisers to the Chancellor, told the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee:

"a lot of the capacity which one might imagine would be there because of the recession has actually been lost".

That was in the Committee's report on the 1994 Budget. In other words, too many firms closed and the capacity for growth is not there. Consequently, Mr. Britton thought that the economy could

"only grow above trend for a couple of years."

Lack of capacity for growth is also reflected in the rising problem of skill shortages. One would have thought that, having initially negotiated the terms of the Maastricht treaty, the Government would at least tackle skill shortages during the recession. But no. The figures on training are frightening. The Red Book reflects real cuts in the training budget. The training statistics bulletin demonstrates graphically that neglect. The numbers of people involved in training in and out of work declined. Most worryingly, the worst figures were among those without any qualifications and among 16 to 24-year-olds. Out of 23 countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Kingdom has the second lowest proportion of 18-year-olds in full-time education. The country with the lowest proportion is Turkey.

In its November inflation report, the Bank of England said:

"At present, skill shortages are not so acute as to pose a major threat of wage inflation . . . there is some evidence of skill shortages and settlements may be edging upwards."

Again, the Bank of England recognises that there are real problems in our economy, which will affect the Government's projections for growth and which already cause real problems in parts of the country. That is another reason why the feelgood factor that people talk about simply is not happening. Living standards are simply not improving to match people's expectations. Having weathered the recession, people believed that they would begin to experience the benefits of having paid so dearly for Government economic policies in the past few years. Far from it: if we include housing costs in the

projections for this year, the average family will lose about £10 per week, so the Budget will cause real problems for real people.

Public sector investment has been cut, as well as private sector investment. The Red Book tells us that it will be cut by 9 per cent., but that will be compensated for—so we are told—by a promise of a £5 billion investment in the private finance initiative. In the past two years, only £0.5 billion has been invested in that initiative and only 12 of the 96 projects announced have got started.

Out of all the Group of Seven countries, only the United States had a lower level of Government investment as a proportion of gross domestic product between 1980 and 1990 than the United Kingdom. The fact that the Government are spending not on investment, but on paying for the costs of unemployment, is what makes the Labour party so angry. When we realise that the percentage of public spending spent on benefit has risen from 22 per cent. to 31 per cent. and many more people are dependent on benefit now than in 1979, we know just how far Government policies have failed.

This debate gives us another opportunity to make the Government face their responsibility for the economy. They have failed the country on the economy and they have failed to ensure that people are able to get off benefit and into work—the Budget gave so little opportunity to push that aspect and to make it work. The jobs that the Government estimate will be created by their return-to-work measures will be more than compensated for by the number lost because of the changes and cuts in public expenditure that they announced.

When the Government get round to investing and using investment as a tool to encourage real growth, we shall be able to have much more confidence in the future of the economy. We do not have that confidence. We do not believe that we can take

"note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in . . . the Financial Statement and Budget Report"

and we will, therefore, divide the House at the end of the debate.

10.42 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I thought that my hon. Friend the Paymaster General was unnecessarily laconic in his opening remarks. He was, of course, following the precedent of his predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage, who spoke for only four minutes in the debate last year. I think that my hon. Friend spoke for about the same time, which was an unusually modest contribution, as we are asked to approve a motion that suggests

"That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in chapters 4, 5 and 6"

of the Red Book.

Normally, when the Government are pleased with their achievements they do not demonstrate such false modesty. If they are being modest tonight, it is perhaps because they have something to hide. If they have something to hide, it is not the technicalities of the motion, which are clear, as much as the inference in them, which is plain because it is set out in statute form in the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

It is not Labour Members who should take pride in the fact that we are having this debate tonight but the minority on the Conservative Benches, who turned the arithmetic round to ensure that, at least for one and a half hours every year, we debate the progress of Her Majesty's Government in meeting the convergence criteria set out in the Maastricht treaty.

As my hon. Friend the Minister alluded to those criteria, it is worth reminding ourselves what they are. He referred to article 103, the first paragraph of which says:

"Member States shall regard their economic policies as a matter of common concern and shall co-ordinate them within the Council".

This is yet further proof of something which we knew all too well—that there has been a steady erosion of sovereignty and a transfer of authority over our economic management, not least in budget deficits and the ratio of Government debt to gross domestic product.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): On this day of all days, when the failure of a relatively small British bank has sent ripples through the entire global economy, is my hon. Friend suggesting that it is easy to isolate our economy from all the other economies?

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend makes a jump in rationality that defies belief. I was sticking to the motion on the Order Paper and the exact reference criteria set down in the treaty: the 3 per cent. PSBR to GDP ratio and the 60 per cent. Government debt to GDP ratio, which are clearly established in the relevant protocol. I did not refer to the global economy or discuss the inter-relationship between one financial centre and another but was dealing with the motion on the Order Paper. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will agree that, in this short debate, that is quite enough.

Mr. Butterfill: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Wilkinson: No I will not give way. The debate is short and other hon. Members want to contribute.

Mr. Butterfill: Frit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. That is not necessary. The other day I deliberately pointed out that good manners seem to be leaving the House. There is no need whatever for insults in these debates. On reflection, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will withdraw that remark.

Mr. Butterfill: I accept that I may have been a little unkind to my hon. Friend, but I had hoped that he would allow an intervention on that specific point.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman withdraw the remark?

Mr. Butterfill: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Wilkinson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Paragraph 3 says:

"In order to ensure closer co-ordination of the economic performances of the Member States, the Council shall on the basis of reports submitted by the Commission monitor economic developments in each of the Member States".

This bears out exactly what I was saying. Inasmuch as the Commission has powers, if those relevant criteria are not met, to impose sanctions on countries that do not fulfil those obligations, I should have thought that it was, at the very least, a democratic requirement that this House should have an opportunity to debate the Government's performance in fulfilling those criteria.

[Mr. Wilkinson]

The Red Book makes it perfectly plain that, in the coming financial year, the United Kingdom will meet exactly the criteria of PSBR to Government debt and, compared with Italy, Spain, Greece and even Belgium, has a far tougher fiscal stance and maintains a far lower ratio of Government borrowing to GDP. The fact that we do so much better, as the Red Book makes clear, shows the difficulty of achieving convergence and the quantity of funds that will have to be disbursed from well-performing economies, such as our own and those of France and Germany, to redress these imbalances of economic performance. Those transfers of resources will be a cost to our people, as we saw during the passage of the European Communities (Finance) Bill in November.

The Government should come clean about the objectives behind the convergence process. They can rightly take pride in reasserting fiscal and budgetary discipline and I share with them wholehearted approval for what they have achieved in that regard to date. The qualities of fiscal and budgetary discipline are meritorious in their own right but not in relation to a process of supervision and, potentially, ultimate control to be exercised by the Commission and then the Council of the European Union. I do not think it appropriate either that the European Parliament should be a reference body to whom the defaulting nation's performance will be reported, as is provided for under the terms of the Maastricht treaty.

That said, I will not disapprove or vote against the motion. The Government, by passing those parts of the treaty, have accepted the objectives of convergence as they relate to economic and monetary union. Although we have a technical derogation by virtue of our opt-out, nevertheless we have accepted the disciplines that are germane to economic and monetary union, regardless of whether they fulfil the circumstances of our economy at any one time. At the moment, they do and I am delighted that we have made such progress. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will answer those points when he replies and that his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will do so at greater length on Wednesday afternoon.

10.51 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): In a sense, that was an extraordinary speech. The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) aspires to some form of splendid isolation, but he concluded his speech by congratulating the Government on being on course for convergence and said, "Please God, let it never happen." That reflects some inconsistency in his argument.

The debate is likely to be an annual event, which probably should be a little depressing to the House. The wording of the motion could have been a little more felicitous, because all that is required is that the Government seek the House's approval to submit progress reports on our economic convergence criteria. Section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, however, also asks for a report on the social and environmental goals set. Although I appreciate that it is not the Treasury's job to set those goals, the motion contains no reference to the Government having any intention to do so.

I remind the House that section 5 stemmed from an amendment tabled by the Labour party, of which the Liberal Democrats did not approve, but which the Government, rather astonishingly, accepted. Having done so, the Government should fulfil the section's terms. They have done two things to make that somewhat difficult. They have shown no regard for the full text of the Act. I am not sure what the implications of their defiance of an Act, which they accepted, amounts to. I suppose it requires someone to take them to court for a judicial review. Where is the social and environmental report, which was required by the Act? Will the Government provide it? Secondly, why are we being asked to note the Government's assessment "with approval", which requires everyone to endorse the Government's economic policy?

Many of us wish the Government to strive to fulfil the spirit of the Maastricht treaty, unlike the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood, but that does not necessarily mean that the Government's policies by definition will eventually lead in that direction. Tearing a few pages out of the Red Book, throwing them down on the Floor of the House and in effect saying, "This is our economic strategy; please support it," does not show willingness to accept the letter or the spirit of the Act.

Interestingly, the Government talk about the opt-out that they have secured and the current success of their convergence criteria but do not appear to come to grips with the fact that our ability to opt in may be seriously questioned, not merely whether we can meet the convergence criteria, which we have not done yet and may still have difficulty in doing. If we met those criteria, the capability of the British economy to cope with the strains that a single currency would provide may bring our ability to opt in into question.

I say that personally and as a representative of a party that wants monetary union but believes that the Government have not really set their mind to the implications with anything like the rigour that is necessary. In those circumstances, we would have welcomed a fuller explanation, not simply of where we were, but of where we were going and the way in which we were going to get there.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): If the hon. Gentleman has those doubts about the economy's capability to fit into monetary union, why, two or three years ago, was the Liberal party chanting, "Move to the narrower bands of the exchange rate mechanism now"?

Mr. Bruce: Had the Government moved to the position that we took at the time that we said, they would not have finished up in a mess. *[Interruption.]* What happened—which also reinforces the case for a politically independent central bank—was that Lord Lawson did the most damaging thing that any Government could do: he joined the exchange rate mechanism at the worst possible moment, at the worst possible exchange rate and for the worst possible reason, which was to obtain a standing ovation at the Conservative party conference the next day. That is no way to run the economy and, sadly, the Government have failed to recognise that a commitment to a single currency—even in principle, never mind with or without an opt-out—requires an extremely rigorous economic policy, which the Government have shown no real application to deliver.

To finish that specific argument, which is only parenthetical but which I wish to make absolutely clear, I should say that it remains the opinion of the Liberal Democrats, and my personal opinion, that Britain should be taking a positive role in the development of closer political and economic union in the European Union and the development of a single currency. There is no doubt that the expertise that we have in the country should be used, but before we have even begun to opt in we have weakened our bargaining position and undermined our ability to shape the rules and regulations under which a single currency will be developed.

As a consequence, there is a real danger that the Government, having left the position open, may find that the British economy is not strong enough to sustain membership of monetary union because they have not applied themselves now. I earnestly hoped that the Minister would explain in much more rigorous terms how we shall ensure that the British economy invests strongly enough, organises strongly enough and accepts the cultural changes necessary to ensure that the choice of opting in and opting out was a real choice, based on a real understanding of the needs of the British economy.

Mr. Butterfill: The hon. Gentleman complains that the Government are not pursuing policies that create strong growth in the economy and are not ensuring rigorous application of fiscal standards. Will he explain why the Liberal party consistently votes for increased public expenditure in almost every Division, yet failed to vote for, and indeed voted against, increases in taxation?

Mr. Bruce: That simply is not true. I remind the hon. Gentleman that it was the Liberal Democrats, and myself in person, who voted against the cost of electricity privatisation and the £7 billion of debt write-off that would have passed through the House on the nod until I spoke against the money resolution. I am not prepared to take lectures from Conservative Members who are selective about when they oppose public expenditure. If the Barings rescue had required public money, Conservative Members might have agreed to it because of their need to support their friends in the City. Their opposition of public expenditure is selective, and I do not accept the justification behind the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: No, I will not. I have given way enough—this is a short debate and I intend to bring my remarks to a close.

The Government, having accepted the amendment to the European Communities (Amendment) Act—an amendment that my party and I did not support, but which the Government accepted from the Opposition—should have recognised that it required more than just a few pages from the Red Book and a vote of confidence in their economic policy. The terms of the Act require a social and environmental report, about which we have heard nothing. We have had no clear sign of whether the Government intend to introduce it.

I want to make it clear to the Minister so that there is no doubt that we do not wish the Government to be placed in a situation where they cannot fulfil their obligations under the Maastricht treaty, which we support. There is a duty on them to make a report to meet their treaty obligations, not simply to invite a motion of confidence in terms that do not address the whole issue.

On a constructive note, if this is be an annual event, it would be extremely helpful if the motion were in terms that required endorsement not of Government policy but of their submission of a report on the progress achieved by the British economy. Had that been so tonight, my party and I would have had no hesitation in supporting the Minister. If the Government take that view in future, the Minister will have my support and that of the Liberal Democrats. It is unfortunate that the motion was tabled with a lack of thought. I hope the Minister will understand that the Act contains terms that have not been addressed but which the Government should take seriously.

11.1 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): At the start of her speech I asked the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong) why we were having this debate and she failed to provide an adequate explanation. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) has explained that the object of the exercise is to see to what extent we are complying with the convergence conditions of the Maastricht treaty. I could not understand the motion when I looked at it because it seemed that we were being asked to approve three chapters in the Red Book, which is effectively part of the Budget—the House debated the Budget for four or five days and approved it some months ago. We are now being asked to approve the very same information that is contained in chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the Red Book.

As my hon. Friend said, and as I now understand, the real object of the exercise is to see to what extent we are complying with the convergence criteria, only two of which are relevant. The first is the level of public sector borrowing and the second is total Government debt as a proportion of gross domestic product. I agree with my hon. Friend that the targets of reducing those two levels were justified on their merits. He was not so happy about the idea that we should try to bring about convergence in the European Union.

Quite apart from the debate about a single currency, the very concept of trying to achieve convergence is justified on its merits. If we manage to get Government borrowing below 3 per cent. in all member states, we will have a considerably greater degree of exchange rate, inflation and interest rates stability than at present. Those things are all worth while per se; they would be guaranteed if we had a single currency, but the very fact that we are moving towards one will bring about much more stable trading conditions in the EU.

I support the concept of convergence criteria. I am not quite as sanguine as my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood is about the progress that we are making. The news release which was published by the Central Statistical Office on 21 February sets out the figures that are to be sent to the Commission; they are not the figures in the Red Book because they have to be adjusted to comply with the European system of integrated accounts. That results in a considerable addition to Government borrowing in terms of the public sector borrowing requirement and shows the following figures, admittedly now historical. The figure for 1992, as a percentage of GDP, is 6.1 per cent. and for the calendar

[Mr. Tim Smith]

year 1993, it is 7.9 per cent. I think that when we get the figures for 1994 we shall see some reduction, but those figures are hardly cause for complacency.

There is not much cause for complacency in the figures for total Government debt as a proportion of GDP. In 1992 Government debt as a proportion of GDP was 41.9 per cent., and it rose to 48.5 per cent. in 1993. That is not far short of a 60 per cent. ceiling. I fully support the Government's determination to reduce the high level of public sector borrowing and to reduce total Government debt as a proportion of GDP over a period of time. The figures in the Red Book show that those objectives will be achieved in four or five years.

I am glad that this information will be sent to the European Commission because there is a very interesting table at the back of the Red Book which shows the history of public spending over the past 30 years. It gives the lie to most people's perceptions of public spending. According to the table, in the past 30 years Governments have reduced the level of public spending in real terms in only four years. In three of those years—1968-69, 1976-77 and 1977-78—a Labour Government were in power.

The last Labour Government were responsible for the largest cumulative reduction in public spending. In 1974-75—their first year in office—they cut public spending from £220 billion, in current values, to £205 billion three years later. This Government have increased public spending in every year except 1988-89. We should ensure not only that we cut public spending as a proportion of gross domestic product—

Mr. Austin Mitchell: And lose the next general election too.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is wrong if he thinks that elections are won by increasing the level of public spending; I do not believe that they are. I believe that a healthy economy is one which spends well below 40 per cent. as a proportion of GDP in the public sector so that more wealth is retained in the private sector to enable the real economy—about which the hon. Member for Durham, North-West claims to be concerned—to grow and to provide real jobs.

The Government aim to reduce public spending to 40 per cent. and below. In the mid-1960s public spending as a percentage of GDP was 36 and 37 per cent. That is the kind of target that we should aim at now.

Mr. Butterfill: When my hon. Friend refers to the cuts in public spending perpetrated by the Labour party, is he thinking particularly of the cuts which the International Monetary Fund ordered it to make to spending on hospitals and the health service generally?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you probably remember when the last Labour Government achieved huge cuts in public spending through massive reductions in capital expenditure. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) is right: the funding programme for hospitals was cut by 20 per cent. in one year as a result of the intervention of the International Monetary Fund and Mr. Johannes Witteveen, who took over the running of the British economy at that time.

Today we are back on track to reduce public spending and public borrowing, which is the key point as far as the Maastricht criteria are concerned. I believe that that reduction is justified on its merits, but I am also glad that we are making progress in complying with our treaty obligations.

11.8 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) does not realise that an economy's ability to bear any level of public spending depends on the health and vigour of that economy. A fast-growing, vigorous economy can bear a much higher proportion of public spending—and would be advised to do so in order to improve the quality of life of most people. It is not the level of public spending as a proportion of GDP—40 per cent., 60 per cent. or whatever it may be—but the underlying strength of the economy that is crucial.

The problem with the convergence criteria that we are discussing tonight is that they are, in effect, deflationary criteria—they are daft and damaging criteria. The nearer the Government come to achieving those criteria, the more they will damage the underlying economic recovery in which the Government take so much pride. The Government were not responsible for that recovery; Mr. George Soros was. Having achieved that, it seems disastrous to clobber the recovery in the way that the Government are, by imposing high interest at double historic rates to fulfil damaging convergence criteria. I am sorry that that was not explained by the Minister, who took pride in the recovery. If he takes pride also in moving nearer to or achieving the convergence criteria, the recovery will be destroyed.

All the criteria are deflationary. It is interesting to hear the Chancellor and members of my Front Bench wishing that there were other convergence criteria, such as real growth, productivity and the underlying strength of the economy. That is fantasy. The convergence criteria in the treaty that must be fulfilled are all deflationary. They all amount to achieving price stability. The more we co-ordinate those criteria in Europe, the more we will co-ordinate deflationary measures that damage our economy.

In the long term, the only way to reduce the public sector deficit is to achieve a rate of growth that generates jobs and brings a return to full employment. That way, more people will be in work to pay more taxes, so more revenue will be generated while less is paid in unemployment and social security benefits. That is the only way to reduce borrowing.

We need this first real burst of sustained growth in the life of this Government. They did not want it but it was forced on them. We need that growth to be boosted. Industry will not invest or expand in the way that the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England are always lecturing about unless industry has a prospect of growth. That means the prospect of sustained competitiveness and lower interest rates.

Every time that the Governor increases interest rates, he damages the economy's prospects and makes investment less likely. He also guarantees that the opportunity for growth that has been thrust on the Government will not be seized.

I am sorry that the Governor's weekend was spoiled by matters that have no bearing on the debate. I wish that he had spoiled more weekends deliberating on the fate of manufacturing companies that have been shedding jobs

and closing. When the Governor is in a working weekend mode, he should contemplate the effect that he has on the recovery by increasing interest rates to today's high level.

Why is the Chancellor increasing taxes and the Governor increasing interest rates and clobbering demand? Perhaps they want to keep the pound at a higher level than it should be for the purposes of competitiveness, to regain some of the ground that the Chancellor and the Governor thought Britain lost by leaving the exchange rate mechanism. Shadowing the deutschmark is to revert to Lawson policies. That is one explanation for the folly. The other is that the only way to attain the convergence criteria is to deflate demand.

Both processes are damaging, and the Government owe the House an explanation for their actions. Why are they strangling their own recovery? Is it to shadow the deutschmark and to show ourselves to be communautaire, or is to attain the insane convergence criteria?

11.13 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): To answer the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), I do not think it possible to make a judgment about the effect of interest rate movements until one or two years later. Only then will we know whether the correct interpretation of the economic data available at the time was made. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman takes the view that there is less risk in an increase in inflation than the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor believe there to be. But only history will show whether we have made the right judgments.

I believe that the Government are right to err on the side of caution. All the evidence suggests that economies that perform the best are those whose authorities take the most rigorous line against inflation. To risk overheating the economy so soon after coming out of a recession would be a sad failure indeed.

The Paymaster General rather disappointed the House this evening. We expect more of him in these debates. It was evident that he did not submit this convergence plan, which is to be sent off to the European Commission, with a great deal of relish. He did not say, "Hurrah! We're on track to get into the single currency." I detected a note of discomfort in his presentation.

The purpose of these debates on the Government's convergence plan is to highlight the fact that we are locked into a progressional timetable. We are fixed into a machine that makes us submit plans towards an objective over which we have little control. I have heard that this timetable is regarded by the Government as artificial. The more we hear of the development of the Government view of the prospect of a single currency, the more distance we detect between that end and the Government's embrace of it.

Whatever the Government's attitude may be, and however determined, towards the end of the convergence period, the Government may be not to participate in a single currency, the fact is that they are stuck on the tracks. They are being driven down the track towards meeting certain objectives—

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): Does this not have a great feeling of déjà vu about it? The timetable is certainly one of the key problems. It may force countries to attempt to converge when their natural instincts, based on the performance of their economies, dictate otherwise. I am reminded of the Schlieffen plan—the great first world war German plan to knock out France. It was based wholly on railway timetables. Many historians now believe that that became the cause of the first world war, because, once started, there was no way to stop the plan being put into effect—and it ended in disaster.

Mr. Jenkin: I have great sympathy with that analogy. To a certain extent, it was the intention of the Maastricht treaty. It was not designed to create an opportunity for economic and monetary union across Europe. That opportunity existed anyway, whatever the treaty arrangements. Businesses can opt to use a single currency. Member states can opt to fix their exchange rates with each other. They can even share a currency—and all without this timetable.

The timetable is, of course, political. It is not an economic weapon; it is a political weapon. The whole of Europe has been put in the straitjacket of an artificial timetable because France and Germany are determined to achieve political union. It is a tool to achieve a political end. We are playing a highly dangerous game if we put the European economies into a straitjacket for political purposes, regardless of the political consequences.

Another benefit has emerged from this debate: I detect a mood of consensus across the Chamber. Not only has the Prime Minister, speaking to the Conservative Way Forward, introduced the possibility of new criteria to qualify Britain's possible participation in a single currency; we have also heard the same idea from the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong). The hon. Lady thinks that levels of employment are important. She shares that opinion with the Governor of the Bank of England.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) told us that he wanted to introduce some extra criteria. He described the economy in Britain as possibly not strong enough to sustain monetary union. Those criteria are not in the Maastricht treaty. The hon. Gentleman is introducing new criteria for monetary union. I detect in the Chamber a consensus that the timetable for economic and monetary union is unrealistic and unreasonable. Perhaps the House should point that out to our European partners, who are more politically obsessed by the objective, and perhaps unreasonably so. They may be in danger of damaging their economies. We see France holding on manically to the franc fort policy, to the detriment of the stability of property and asset prices in France, of employment rates and of growth. We were discussing banking at length, and I am reminded of the nickname of one of France's largest institutions, "Debit" Lyonnais.

What were the risks to which the Governor referred? He was referring to the danger of seeking to impose a uniform monetary policy on several countries in the European Community. We had experience of the risk quite recently. When we were in the exchange rate mechanism we sought to impose the same monetary discipline on several countries in the European Community. What was the result? What might have been an appropriate monetary policy for Germany post-reunification, with all the inflationary effects of funding development in eastern Germany, became a completely inappropriate monetary discipline for the United Kingdom, France and Italy. That

[Mr. Jenkin]

demonstrates more graphically than anything else can the risks of applying a single monetary policy before absolute, complete and permanent convergence has been achieved.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): My hon. Friend has alluded to a great consensus across the Chamber. Perhaps he will briefly think about monetary union within the United Kingdom. As he knows, since 1707 there has been a monetary union of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. Yet the financial and economic conditions in Scotland and the north of England now are different from those in the south of England. The policy that is followed in London may not be appropriate to all parts of the UK. Why is the position not the same on a greater scale throughout Europe?

Mr. Jenkin: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for asking me that question. We have had a single currency in the UK for a long time. It followed political union. The two things go very much hand in hand. There are points at which the monetary policy that is pursued throughout the UK for the benefit of the entire UK is more appropriate for some parts of the country than for others.

During the 1980s, for example, we had strong asset growth in the south and strong development of services, whereas in the north and in Scotland we saw the decline of old-fashioned manufacturing industries, the decline of property prices and wide differentials forming. We coped with economic disparities across the single currency area of the United Kingdom because we have huge fiscal transfers. The Government control about 45 per cent. of the national wealth. Public expenditure in Scotland, for example, is about 18 per cent. higher in the current year than it is in England. In Northern Ireland it is about 40 per cent. higher. At the moment, we are planning a European Community, and a single currency across the European Community, in which the European Union will control resources amounting only to 2.26 per cent. of the Europe-wide gross domestic product. Even in the single currency area of the United States, the Federal Government control some 17 per cent. of American GDP. The only way in which a single currency can be sustained across an area of wide disparities is to have huge, compensating fiscal measures.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: If I may continue, the Treasury did some work on the subject for the European Community during the 1970s. A Mr. MacDougall prepared a report and he reckoned that the very minimum that the European Community would have to levy in taxation to sustain a single currency across Europe would be 7 per cent. of Community GDP. That would increase the European Community budget to some £333 billion at today's prices, which is considerably larger than it is today and would increase our contribution to some £70 billion.

Mr. Devlin *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: If my hon. Friend is prepared to explain that to his constituents, I wish him good luck. Nevertheless, benefits in the current arrangements are considerably cheaper and easier to finance and do not carry the same risks, as demonstrated by the Governor of the Bank of England.

The last question that I want to ask is: who wants this single currency? We are told that business men want it, but I do not think that that is the case. Following a survey, the CBI claimed that a large majority favoured a single currency, yet it remarked in its own survey that only 12 per cent. were enthusiastic about a more federal approach. That would seem to rule out a single currency for a start. More interestingly, only 28 per cent. of the sample said that a single currency was a necessary condition for a single market. Why does the CBI go round telling everybody that business wants a single currency?

Even more interestingly, the authors of an excellent letter in *The Times* on 9 February said:

"even if the natural core of European federalist countries were tied into ecu, by far the larger part of Britain's trade and investment would continue to be conducted outside those countries in a wide variety of national currencies.

Plainly, a single currency is not indispensable to expanding exports".

That letter was signed by luminaries such as Michael Edwardes, Owen Green, Lord Hanson, Stanley Kalms, Christopher Wates, Garry Weston and many, many more.

The fact is that British business is not enthusiastic about a single currency and that only a tiny proportion of our trade relates to the possible hard-core area of a single currency—less than 30 per cent. of our external trade or 8.7 per cent. of our gross domestic product. Why inflict an absurd, foreign-controlled monetary policy on the British economy for the sake of 8.7 per cent. of our gross domestic product?

11.27 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): I have to agree, on one point at least, with my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin): I do not think that there is the remotest chance of anything but a handful of nations meeting the convergence criteria in the Community by 1999, let alone by 1997.

Having said that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to explain why, from a sedentary position, I used the word frit during the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), for which you admonished me. I did not know that it was an unparliamentary expression; it has been used fairly frequently by hon. Members of all parties. I used the word because my hon. Friend was suggesting that under article 103 we were compelled to go down the convergence criteria. That of course is not so. Compulsion would take place only if we were to move to stage 3 of monetary union, which could not take place until after 1997, and probably not until 1999, which would be under article 104 of the treaty. We would have had to have agreed to proceed for there to be any compulsion.

Guidelines have now come from the Council of Ministers and it is informative to consider those guidelines to discover whether hon. Members on both sides of the House can agree that they are entirely desirable. According to the guidelines, the economic objective is sustainable, non-inflationary and employment-creating growth. No one would disagree with that. The guidelines include reduction in unemployment. Does anyone suggest that that is undesirable?

According to the guidelines, there should be a strengthening of economic convergence. If we are in a trading area, it must be desirable to bring some of our

partners up to the level of the more prosperous nations. It is also appropriate to consider the extent to which what is in the Red Book, which we are presenting to the Community, achieves some of those objectives.

With regard to sustainable, non-inflationary and employment-creating growth, we are now seeing non-inflationary growth. We have not had such a long period of low inflation for 25 years. Growth has been continuing for some time now. Indeed, we have a little problem in that growth is perhaps running too far ahead and we have had to correct it to ensure that it is sustainable.

As for reductions in unemployment, if we look at the rest of the Community, unemployment is increasing. Almost uniquely in the United Kingdom, unemployment is decreasing. The only area in which we are perhaps not succeeding is that of the strengthening of economic convergence. As convergence in other states is unlikely to take place, I believe that the timetable for monetary union, as envisaged by the treaty, is way out and extremely unlikely to be achieved.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Butterfill: No, I will not give way to my hon. Friend because he refused to give way to me. Despite being asked several times, my hon. Friend refused to give way to me.

To meet those objectives, the guidelines advocate price and exchange rate stability. Price stability has certainly been achieved. Apart from unfortunate recent events, exchange rates have been unusually stable for some considerable time. With regard to sound public finances, we need only read the Red Book to discover what has happened with regard to reduction of the public sector borrowing requirement. The Labour party said that that was completely unattainable. Labour Members said that the PSBR was likely to continue to grow. They did not believe that we could meet the objectives set out in the Budget two years ago or in last year's Budget. However, not only have those objectives been met, but they have been exceeded.

The guidelines suggest measures such as reducing the indirect costs of labour. Conservative Members would certainly agree with that objective. The guidelines include the completion of the internal market. The internal market was proposed by the Government and a single market is now one of the Government's proud achievements which have benefited our industry. Conservative Members would also agree with more flexible labour markets, although I am not sure whether the Labour party would agree to that. The Commission guidelines also refer to pay moderation. I have not seen much sign of encouragement of pay moderation from the Opposition Benches.

11.33 pm

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I listened very carefully to the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms Armstrong), but I was no clearer at the end of her remarks as to why she was inviting Labour Members to vote against the motion. Of course, she and her party have differences with the Government over economic policy. She gave some rather disjointed examples of what they were, but they were not the subject of today's debate. What we are deciding this evening is not whether we approve the Government's Budget policies; that was settled in last year's Budget. Rather, we are discussing whether we approve the sending of appropriate information in the Red Book to the European Commission, as required by treaty. The hon. Lady did not even touch on whether the Labour party thought that we should do that.

In the few remaining minutes, I shall try to pick up some of the other points that have been raised, in particular the status of the convergence criteria. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) set out the four main headings of low inflation, low long-term interest rates, no excessive deficits and a degree of exchange rate stability. The point has been made several times, most notably by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), that those are good and valid policy aims, regardless of whether they may one day pave the way for monetary union.

It is true also that the United Kingdom is doing particularly well as regards the criteria. Our Budget deficit is coming down fast, and it is expected to be below 3 per cent. of gross domestic product by 1996. Our inflation rate, our interest rates and our general Government debt are also all comfortably within the reference limits set out in the treaty and the associated protocols.

Of course those are tough criteria. In answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), may I say that low inflation and sustainable growth are not easily achieved. The growth rate of 4 per cent., which we achieved last year, combined with low inflation, is something that very few Governments since the second world war have ever glimpsed.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not give way; I am answering some points that he raised, and I have only a few more minutes.

Of course such matters require difficult decisions on taxation. From time to time, it may be necessary to raise interest rates to keep inflation down, but the prize is worth it. I emphasise that those are good policy aims, regardless of whether they are required or recommended as part of the treaty of Rome.

The other point which I wish to emphasise is that the debate is taking place under stage 2 of monetary union, which began more than a year ago. Economic policy and monetary policy throughout that time have remained firmly in national hands. Indeed, that is why it is the Red Book, flowing from our own national Budget, which forms the basis of the information that we are supplying to the Commission.

I tell my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who talked about sanctions and suggested penalties, that they have no part to play in stage 2 of EMU. The only sanction, if one may call it that, that is open to the Commission or to the Council of Ministers is to make recommendations. Indeed, it has been recommended that we should continue to bring down our Budget deficit, which we have every intention of doing.

Another point of which I must remind the House is the copper-bottomed nature of the United Kingdom's protocol to the treaty, which states that the UK is not

"obliged or committed to move to the third stage of Economic and Monetary Union without a separate decision to do so by its government and Parliament".

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

In addition to that, under the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993—the so-called Maastricht Act—notification to the Council of a United Kingdom intention to join stage 3 also requires a prior Act of Parliament.

We have had some railway metaphors. My hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith) introduced into the debate the Schlieffen plan. At the risk of correcting him, may I say that it was the mobilisation of the Russian army at the start of the first world war which required railways and which was so complicated that it could not be stopped. It was A. J. P. Taylor—I know that I am right on this point—who said that the first world war was the culmination of the railway age. Whether in this or in previous debates, we have always been regaled with colourful motoring or railway metaphors about whether we are in danger of missing the train leaving the station or whether we are on the wrong branch line. The truth is, however, that in terms of EMU we can watch the train assembling on the continent and decide at the right moment whether it is in the national interest for us to join it. We are in no sense committed to joining the third stage of monetary union. Doubtless my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will say more about that on Wednesday.

The convergence criteria, on which we touched earlier, do not simply stop at the four headings already described. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has also raised the need to address the deep-seated structural differences in the European economies, and the Governor of the Bank of England has drawn attention to the implications of differences in productivity growth and the need for flexible labour markets. The question whether we can safely relinquish the mechanism of adjustment of nominal exchange rates or whether we should continue to insist on that possibility remains open. I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) not to assume that the entire argument is over, bar the shouting.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) asked about the social and economic goals in article 2 of the treaty. The Red Book sets out the tax and expenditure policies across the board, including a large sum to be spent on social security and the environment. The Budget included not just a new landfill tax but fuel taxes designed in part for us to meet our carbon dioxide reduction commitment. The social and environmental goals are in the Red Book, and will form part of the report that we shall make to the Commission in due course.

The motion is to approve the sending of information to the European Commission, as required by articles 103 and 104c of the treaty. In 1993 the Government gave an assurance that the terms of section 5 of the Maastricht Act would be strictly observed, and that the House's approval was therefore necessary before the sending of the required information; yet this year the Labour party has again contrived a case for voting against the motion, which would entail a breach of the treaty obligations.

We are used to the Labour party's turning somersaults on Europe, but this must constitute a new low. Labour Members show craven subservience to the European Community in regard to big issues when British interests are at stake, but invite the House to break a treaty obligation: they would block the sending of a report that is required. I invite the House to show a good deal more sense than that, and to approve the motion.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 279, Noes 183.

Division No. 87] **[11.43 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard

Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and Mr. Derek Conway.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
McAllion, John
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr. John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*

Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Islton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Warsing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Babara Roche and
Mr. Peter Mandleson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995-96, as updated, for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

Airport Safety

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

11.54 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South-East): May I make it clear from the outset that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) will participate in the debate because the airport under discussion is in his constituency?

I take this opportunity to thank Madam Speaker for granting me this debate on the safety of airports outside the capital. It is not necessarily about regional airports but the category that one might call "feeder airports", into which Coventry airport falls.

I appreciate the fact that the Minister for Transport in London has come along to reply to the debate and I hope that he will answer some of the points that I shall raise. I have corresponded with his Department from time to time. Will he confirm that the Government have made proposals regarding small airports and that it is purely a matter of parliamentary time before those are implemented?

This matter has been a consistent theme over the past 18 months, during which time I have tabled a number of questions regarding problems associated with Coventry airport. I even tabled, and hon. Members signed, an early-day motion in that endeavour. It could be said that it was a bipartisan approach because the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth signed it to demonstrate that I was not trying to hype up a political situation but rather deal with a problem that affects his and my constituencies.

Many residents in those areas have no choice whether they live beside an airport. After the war, council houses were built in Willenhall and the airport was used mainly for pleasure flights, with just one or two heavier aircraft using it a couple of times a month. Over the years, the airport's status has changed, so it must be considered in regulatory terms.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the air crash that happened a few days before Christmas in my constituency, killing three crew members and two handlers. It had a dramatic effect on residents not only in Willenhall but in Baginton and Coventry as a whole. Anyone who visited the scene that day would have been awestruck by the response of the emergency services. Neither the residents of the area nor I could criticise their response, but, as the day developed, the traumatised residents felt frustrated about the fact that, over the years, they had predicted what could happen at that airport. It is not for me to apportion blame. That will be done at another inquiry, the report of which we will probably receive in about six months. Perhaps the Minister will confirm that.

The residents of Willenhall and Baginton, as well as those in other parts of Coventry, have complained for a long time about the frequency of flights, particularly at night; the height of aircraft on their approach to landing; whether aircraft stick to the flight path; the occasional dumping of fuel; and the general problem of aircraft noise.

The problems at the airport have been exacerbated by the export of live animals. As a result of a recent accident, a young lady who lived in my constituency was killed. No doubt we will hear in coming months about what

happened. I was not there and I am not aware of all the facts, so it is not for me to apportion blame, but no doubt all those facts will be established. The export of live animals, particularly at weekends, has aggravated the problems experienced by the residents. A public meeting about them is scheduled for Friday night. The export of those animals has introduced another significant factor—the larger aircraft used for that transport.

Although the controversy surrounding the export of live animals remains unresolved, the cost of policing that trade is expected to run into hundreds of thousands of pounds. Given the precarious state of Warwickshire county council's budget and all its other problems, it could well do without that cost. I will not dwell on that now, but I should be interested to know whether the Government intend to help the county to meet that considerable cost.

Some weeks ago, a public meeting was held which was attended by 500 residents not just from Coventry, but beyond, and organisations representing other residents who were unable to attend. They expressed their concern about the issues I have raised tonight. I accept that the Government have prepared their own proposals about the use of smaller airports, but questions about the size of the aircraft using those airports, the age of the aircraft and the frequency of safety checks—the Government say that they are conducted every three years, as well as being conducted periodically—were unresolved. I do not agree with the Government's approach, because I believe that the number of hours flown should be the key consideration.

It is also important to consider the possible relocation of Coventry airport. All sorts of costs have been bandied about. It would certainly cost a great deal to re-site the runway, but, given the additional factors that have exacerbated the problems at the airport, one hopes that the Government will consider that proposal.

The Government's proposals also did not make it clear who would pay for the noise amelioration schemes. The onus has been put on captains to make on-the-spot safety checks of their aircraft. I am sure that the Minister will elaborate on that further. I hope that I have not taken that matter out of context.

The local authority lacks the ability to refuse operators the use of Coventry airport as long as the freight operator has a proper licence for the use of the airport, although it may be in the public interest for the authority to be able to refuse certain types of freight operators the use of airports such as Coventry. Had the local authority been able to intervene in the issue of air freight transport of calves to the continent, perhaps some of the problems would not have arisen in relation to that airport. Those aspects should be considered by the Secretary of State for Transport or a proper public inquiry so that we can introduce proper regulations.

The Secretary of State has produced the Department's document or its proposals, depending on the way in which one chooses to interpret it. The proposals are:

"Department to commission and consult on guidance to create a national framework to assist preparation of noise amelioration schemes.

Department to encourage aerodromes to review existing noise amelioration measures and their enforcement, and arrangements for local accountability.

Department to open discussions with BAA and local consultative committees about making Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports more responsible and locally accountable for their noise control measures."

Why cannot we do the same thing in relation to airports such as Baginton airport?

"New enabling power for aerodromes to establish and enforce noise control arrangements, including for ground noise.

New power of designation to replace existing sections 5 and 78-80 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982 and replace them with new power for the Secretary of State to have the discretion to compel aerodromes to prepare noise amelioration schemes.

Designated aerodromes to prepare noise amelioration scheme, consult locally and agree it with 'lead' local authority".

Where disputes take place, the Secretary of State will have the power to settle them.

"New powers of enforcement to enable local authorities to take action against designated aerodromes who do not enforce schemes.

'Call-in' power to be available for Secretary of State to approve schemes himself.

These new powers to be applied to all other aerodromes from largest airports to smallest private sites, including those used by helicopters."

In conclusion, it is noticeable that no help has been given to residents outside London, with the possible exception of Birmingham, with noise prevention schemes. The residents in Coventry and the surrounding area hope that the Secretary of State, bearing in mind the representations that Members from both Conservative and Labour parties have made, will announce a date and a time for the debate on his 1993 proposals, so that the House can amend them and vote to make those proposals law.

12.7 am

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I thank the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) for allowing me the courtesy of intervening in the debate. I am grateful to him for the time that he has given me. I also acknowledge the attendance at the debate of my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), and the hon. Member for Coventry—

Mr. Jim Cunningham: North-East.

Mr. Pawsey: I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman. I meant the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth).

Therefore, three Coventry Members and one Warwickshire Member are present for this important Adjournment debate.

Coventry airport, as the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East says, is in my constituency, and has been since boundary changes in 1983. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East spoke with considerable knowledge. That does not surprise me, as I am aware that he is the former leader of Coventry city council and obviously his experience and knowledge has shown through in the debate that he opened this evening.

In the past 10 years, I have experienced, together with hon. Members on both sides of the House, a substantial increase in the number of complaints about the noise and nuisance that has been caused by aircraft flying in and out of Coventry airport.

I must make a special reference to the night flights. For my sins, I happen to live some distance away from Coventry airport, but none the less from time to time I hear the aircraft passing over my roof. At times they seem to be coming through the roof, not over it—although no doubt that is something of an exaggeration. But it is not an exaggeration to say that the number of night flights

[Mr. Pawsey]

has grown substantially over the past few years. Coventry airport is now one of the busiest freight airfields in the United Kingdom.

Part of the problem has been caused by the fact that many houses were built reasonably close to the airport during the years when it was enjoying very little popularity and only a small number of light aircraft were landing on and flying from the strip. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East was right to draw attention to the problems recently caused when an aircraft crashed in his constituency, killing members of the crew and two animal handlers. That was a disaster that could easily have been a catastrophe—had the aircraft been only a few feet lower, it would have landed in a densely populated housing estate at Willenhall, with severe loss of life. It was only by the grace of God that a disaster did not become a catastrophe.

The problem is further worsened by the fact that there are now a substantial number of live animal flights from the airfield. As the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East said, there has already been one fatal accident in which a young woman was killed. The demonstrations and protests continue on the site. I am concerned about the growing risk to public safety. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the high cost to Warwickshire taxpayers of policing the site and I have been advised that the police operations on the site currently cost about £27,000 a day—a substantial sum. The animal flights should be halted before there are further injuries or fatalities.

I am well aware of the consultative committees that have been set up to supervise airfields—there is one at Coventry. But they lack the necessary teeth and do not have sufficient bite. If my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London is unable to say that he would like to strengthen or beef up the consultative committees, perhaps he might say a word about the increased powers that his Department should take on. If we cannot strengthen the consultative committees, we should be looking to introduce legislation to give the Department greater powers to deal with growing aircraft noise and nuisance, and to study the size and type of aircraft using the smaller provincial airports and the number of hours that are being flown.

My constituents suffer acutely from the problem. I have constituents who live in the villages of Baginton and Stoneleigh, and there are many other adjoining villages such as Binley Woods, which are outside my constituency, where residents are also affected. Clearly it is time that proper controls were exercised.

12.13 am

The Minister for Transport in London (Mr. Steve Norris): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Cunningham) for raising the important subject of airport safety. I have noted that all three of his neighbours—the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) and my hon. Friends the Members for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) and for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey)—are here tonight. I appreciate that their presence underlines the importance that the people of Coventry and the parliamentary representatives attach to the issue.

I want to assure the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East that, in safety terms, airports outside London are treated no differently from airports that serve London. I note what he said about the control of airports lying in the hands of local authorities. He mentioned the local authority's frustration at not being able to intervene in determining which flights should use the airport. I hope that he will appreciate that it is important that responsibility for technical and operational safety issues relating to civil aviation safety in the United Kingdom rests with the Civil Aviation Authority.

Under the Air Navigation Order 1989, any aerodrome used by aeroplanes flying for the public transport of passengers or for flying training must be licensed by the CAA. Before the CAA grants a licence for an aerodrome, it needs to be satisfied that the aerodrome is safe for use by aircraft, having regard in particular to the physical characteristics of the aerodrome and its surroundings. It must also be satisfied that the person applying for the licence is competent to ensure that the aerodrome and its airspace are safe for the use of aircraft. In addition, the Civil Aviation Authority helps to safeguard the safety of both aircraft passengers and people on the ground by ensuring that aircraft registered in the United Kingdom are maintained and operated to the highest possible standards.

I understand that the hon. Gentleman's immediate concerns about airport safety, and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth, originate from the recent crash of an Air Algerie aircraft at Coventry airport. As the hon. Gentleman stated correctly, that accident is now the subject of a formal investigation by the air accident investigation branch and, therefore, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on it at this stage. The air accident investigation branch will publish a report of its investigation in due course.

I am sorry that I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a precise date for the release of the report, simply because I do not have that information to hand—I am not sure that the inquiry team would be able to give a final date at this stage. The report will, if appropriate, make safety recommendations based on the lessons learned from the accident.

I appreciate the concern that my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth and the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East expressed about the export of live animals. I hope that both hon. Members will understand that I cannot come to any conclusion this evening on issues which derive from incidents which occurred on the ground at Coventry airport. However, the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East made some important remarks about one very sad incident.

Although I appreciate that the Air Algerie crash on the approach to Coventry airport has caused considerable concern to local residents—and to all of those living in the vicinity of major airports—the reality is that aircraft pose a very small risk to people on the ground. The House may be reassured to know that, since the Civil Aviation Authority started recording data on aviation accidents and incidents in 1976, no one on the ground has been killed or injured in accidents involving aircraft taking off or landing at United Kingdom airports.

Anticipating the topics of discussion at the public meeting which the hon. Gentleman mentioned in his speech, it might be helpful if I confirm that the aircraft involved in the accident at Coventry was foreign registered. That obviously raises some particular questions on which

he touched. As with any foreign aircraft operating in the UK, it was required to comply with the internationally agreed minimum safety standards set out in the annexes to the Chicago convention.

Where we have concerns that a particular foreign aircraft is not complying with those standards, we will continue to arrange for the Civil Aviation Authority to carry out a safety check on that aircraft. For example, in view of concern about the safety of aircraft involved in the transport of livestock from Coventry airport, my Department has taken the additional measure of asking the Civil Aviation Authority to conduct inspections of non-European Economic Area aircraft used for such operations. The inspections are aimed at ensuring that those aircraft are airworthy. My Department will not issued permits for such flights until it is satisfied that the aircraft meet international safety standards.

Because of general concerns about the safety of some foreign aircraft, we welcome recent international activity. In particular, we endorse the US Federal Aviation Administration view that the safety standards laid down by the International Civil Aviation Organisation should be applied as effectively as possible. In all honesty, the ICAO system is the only practical way of ensuring global aviation safety standards, but there is a need to ensure that system operates effectively. I am delighted to report that as a result of our intensive lobbying, the ICAO council has agreed to establish a safety oversight programme. We will maintain our strong interest by participating in ICAO working groups.

We are participating also in the task force set up by the European civil aviation conference to consider further arrangements to improve the overall safety standards of foreign aircraft flying to Europe. That task force's first report is due shortly.

Protection of the public on the ground near the busiest airports—this applies to the constituents of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East and of my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth—is addressed by the Department by the establishment of public safety zones. Those are funnel-shaped areas, extending outwards from the ends of runways, within which development is controlled through the planning system. Experience has shown that, although the risk of an aircraft crash is small, accidents are most likely to occur near the ends of the runways during landing or take-off.

Where public safety zones have been established, the statutory requirement is that local planning authorities are required to consult the Civil Aviation Authority before granting permission for the development of land within a zone. The objective is to limit the number of people who may be in those areas at any one time and so be at greatest risk. If it is considered that a proposed development will increase unduly the number of people at risk, particularly in the part of the zone closest to the runway ends, advice will be given to the planning authority that the development should not be permitted.

Not all airports have public safety zones. The risk generally increases with the amount of traffic. At airports where traffic is relatively light, the risk is considered insufficient to justify zones. Traffic at Coventry airport is currently below the level that triggers establishment of zones. Even had public safety zones been established at Coventry airport, the recent crash would have occurred just outside them.

As I announced to the House on 21 July last year, a review of policy on public safety zones is currently under way. That commenced by updating previous studies of accident data to cover the years 1989 to 1993. Worldwide data are used because, fortunately, UK aircraft accidents are relatively rare. No conclusions have yet been reached, but I shall let the House know the outcome of that review when it has been completed.

The hon. Member for Coventry, North-East and my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth mentioned particular concerns relating to night flights. I understand how difficult it is to balance the economic growth that airports and airport activities generate with the considerable annoyance to local residents caused by flights at night. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House are concerned about that disturbance, and are keen for the Government to bring forward the Bill on the control of aircraft noise that we outlined in the March 1993 report to which my hon. Friend referred.

My noble Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping assured the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East that the only reason for delay in bringing forward a Bill is the pressure of other business. That remains a clear statement of the Government's position. We appreciate local concern that there is a need to apply greater regulation. We continue to believe that represents the right way forward. We will—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 28 February 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

8th Battalion the Light Infantry

1. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of 8th Battalion the Light Infantry.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Nicholas Soames): The 8th Battalion the Light Infantry will begin to re-role as a national defence reconnaissance regiment in the Royal Armoured Corps from 1 April 1995. The battalion looks forward to its new role with enthusiasm.

Mr. O'Brien: Does the Minister accept that the 8th Battalion the Light Infantry is a direct descendant of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, which has a 200-year history in Yorkshire and which is one of the fundamental regiments ever formed in Yorkshire? Does he accept that the proposed change is not in the best interests of that Yorkshire regiment? Will he assure me that the cap badge will not change, and that the role of an infantry division will be maintained?

Twenty-four thousand men were recruited to, and fought in, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in the first world war, in which 10,000 lost their lives, and eight Victoria Crosses were awarded to its men. Will the Minister assure me that that battalion will not be lost to Yorkshire?

Mr. Soames: I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the heirs and inheritors of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, one of the proudest regiments in the British Army. Indeed, many streets in Yorkshire are named after its Victoria Cross winners.

I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the assurances that he wants. The regiment is re-roling and it is looking forward to its new role with enthusiasm. I have a letter from its colonel, informing me how much members of the regiment look forward to their new role.

There is, naturally, anxiety about the new cap badge. Discussions are taking place between the regiment, the director of infantry and the director of the Royal Armoured Corps. It is likely that the new cap badge will incorporate elements of the old 8th Light Infantry badge, reflecting the regiment's heritage, and a Royal Armoured Corps symbol.

All the proposals will be put to the executive committee of the Army board and will ultimately require the final approval of the sovereign.

Mrs. Peacock: My hon. Friend will be aware that we have had one or two discussions on this matter in recent months. The regiment accepts the re-roling, but many of us would like its great tradition, together with the cap badge, to continue.

Mr. Soames: I pay warm tribute to my hon. Friend for her vigorous lobbying of Ministers on behalf of the regiment. I assure her that the regiment will have every opportunity to ensure that it retains its battle honours and its important regimental distinctions, which, rightly, are the source of great pride and pleasure to all the people of Yorkshire.

Attack Helicopters

2. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the position on the future attack helicopter needs of the Royal Air Force; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Roger Freeman): My Department is evaluating tenders to meet the Army's requirement for an attack helicopter. We hope to make a decision on the purchase of that equipment before the summer recess.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. He is well aware that many thousands of my constituents work at British Aerospace Warton, which is one of the bases that is heavily involved in the British Aerospace bid for the attack helicopter. I hope that he will be able to reassure my constituents that British Aerospace's bid will be seriously considered when future provision of RAF attack helicopters is considered, as it is obviously an excellent product.

Mr. Freeman: I can give that assurance. Our four criteria in taking a decision about the attack helicopter are, first, whether the bid meets the operational requirements of the Army Air Corps; secondly, the cost—whether it represents good value for money; thirdly, the impact on the United Kingdom defence industrial base, including employment, for example, at British Aerospace; and, finally, the risks involved in further development.

Mr. Martlew: As the question refers to helicopters for the RAF, will the Minister say whether progress has been made in ordering the utility helicopter for the RAF because it is now nearly a decade since the Government promised to buy it? Is the Minister aware that the job security of employees at Westland in Yeovil depends on his placing an order for the EH101?

Mr. Freeman: That is well understood. We have made substantial progress in negotiations with Westland and Boeing and expect to make an announcement shortly. The importance of an indigenous UK helicopter manufacturing company is of direct relevance, which is why my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has made it plain that our preference is for a mixed fleet order, but not at any cost. We expect to reach a decision soon.

Sir Jim Spicer: Most hon. Members will be reassured by my right hon. Friend's statement that the order will be

decided not on price alone but on the quality of the product. May I make a plea that, if he is looking for a quality product and to ensure employment, he must look to Westland's involvement in an attack helicopter order, which would meet the requirements of the Army extremely well?

Mr. Freeman: Westland's contribution to an order for one of the attack helicopter contenders—the Apache—would be relatively modest compared with the contribution that it would make, for example, to a support helicopter order. The programme for the Merlin version, which is for anti-submarine warfare, is going extremely well and Westland is to be congratulated on its achievements.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Sandy Wilson

3. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will put in the Library copies of the advice that Air Chief Marshal Sir Sandy Wilson received from those responsible for the maintenance of official residences in Her Majesty's Government in relation to his official residence.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I have already placed in the Library a full report on the outcome of investigations into expenditure on official service residences, including the last two residences occupied by Air Chief Marshal Wilson. I do not propose to publish any further documents.

Mr. Dalyell: Perhaps Sir Sandy Wilson has been a victim of the system.

Mr. Rifkind: There is no question of anyone being a victim of the system. All members of the services carry responsibility for their actions, including their judgment. These matters have been investigated fully and I can add nothing to what I have already said.

Mr. Wilkinson: In reaching his decision, did my right hon. and learned Friend take into account the precedent that he would set in forcing that very senior officer to retire prematurely? Was he conscious of the fact that there were no official guidelines against which such expenditure could be judged, and that the Air Chief Marshal had not broken the Queen's regulations or, according to my right hon. and learned Friend, acted improperly? How did my right hon. and learned Friend compare the expenditure on Air house, Rheindahlen and Haymes Garth against the £700,000 spent on the Bois de Mai residence of the chairman of the military committee of NATO or the £400,000 spent on the residence of the Commander Allied Forces North West Europe in High Wycombe?

Mr. Rifkind: As my hon. Friend knows, the properties to which he referred were all the subject of an internal audit, which concluded that there was no cause for substantial concern, except with regard to certain Royal Air Force residences. In that light, further examination was made of those matters. Air Chief Marshal Sir Sandy Wilson decided that he should seek early retirement and I do not disagree with his conclusion. The service that he has given the Royal Air Force, including the continuing service that he will give until he retires this July, will have been of a high order with regard to his operational responsibilities.

Dr. David Clark: Does not the Secretary of State appreciate that the manner in which he scooted out of London on the morning of Sir Sandy Wilson's sacking, thus refusing to make a statement to the House, did neither his great office nor himself any credit? Having spent £100,000 of public money on a consultant's report, will he make the full report available to hon. Members in the House of Commons Library and confirm that Sir Sandy Wilson was not the chief budget holder for Haymes Garth?

Mr. Rifkind: Sir Sandy Wilson was not the chief budget holder for Haymes Garth. However, he was the chief budget holder, with full budgetary responsibility, for Air house—the house that he occupied previously, which also formed part of the investigations.

The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) will be interested to know that the relevant papers to which he referred have been made available to the National Audit Office in the normal manner and, in that sense, we are pursuing procedures that the House understands fully.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the unworthy nature of that reply, I intend to raise this matter on the Adjournment.

NATO

4. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what future role he envisages for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Mr. Rifkind: NATO will remain essential to the defence and security needs of nations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Mr. Cohen: Should there not be a de-emphasising of NATO and its military mentality and a concentration on improving political and economic co-operation with America and with the whole of Europe? Is it not the secret truth that NATO Ministers and generals still think in cold war terms and regard Russia as the enemy? Are we not missing the opportunity, presented by the ending of the cold war, to scrap nuclear weapons? This Sunday marks the 25th anniversary of the signing of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Should we not use that occasion to announce huge cuts in nuclear weapon stockpiles worldwide, including those in Britain?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman, in his usual engaging manner, shows that he totally misunderstands the relevance of NATO when he talks about reducing its military identity. NATO is a military defence alliance. That is its strength and that explains why it is the most successful defence alliance in the history of the world.

We believe that NATO continues to have a crucial role to play in a very unstable Europe. Many countries are seeking to join NATO, which suggests that they believe that it has continuing relevance for the well-being of Europe and the entire western world.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it would help the defence of Europe immensely if France joined NATO's integrated military structure?

Mr. Rifkind: We are pleased that France has recently edged its way back towards fuller involvement in NATO. For example, the French Defence Minister attended last

year's meeting of NATO Defence Ministers in Seville. That represented a small step for mankind, but a great step for France. The French Government and the French people must now determine how much further along that road they wish to go. We will welcome any further integration of France into NATO that they deem appropriate.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: May I ask the Secretary of State about NATO's current role, in particular in the former Yugoslavia? The United Nations has confirmed persistent reports of large transport aircraft operating in Bosnia. Are any of those aircraft from NATO countries and are any of them breaking the arms embargo?

Mr. Rifkind: We are aware of various reports that suggest that there might have been some breaches of the no-fly zone in Bosnia, but there is little hard evidence available of the kind to which the hon. and learned Gentleman refers. However, NATO continues to pay close attention to the matter and it will use the surveillance aircraft available to it to identify any breaches of the no-fly zone.

National Monument (Northern Ireland)

5. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to establish a national monument in Northern Ireland to commemorate those service men and women who have lost their lives serving there.

Mr. Rifkind: The nation owes a great debt of gratitude to the security forces in Northern Ireland; this is already marked in different ways and there are no current plans to establish a national monument.

Mrs. Winterton: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, while peace would be a fitting memorial to the 500 service personnel who have lost their lives in Northern Ireland—and to that end the terrorists should surrender their arms immediately—would not the erection of a national monument in the Province serve as a lasting tribute to them? Furthermore, does he accept that any appeasement of the Irish Republican Army in pursuing a nationalist agenda would betray that sacrifice and would perhaps lead to the break up of the Union and the break out of further sectarian strife?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree very much with the feeling behind my hon. Friend's question. The main purpose of the armed forces and the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the battle against terrorism over 25 years has been to ensure that Northern Ireland's constitutional status can never be changed without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. I believe that they have been totally successful in that endeavour.

In respect of the earlier part of my hon. Friend's question, we take into account the fact that in the past 25 years, in addition to the 648 service men who lost their lives, the Royal Ulster Constabulary suffered 196 fatalities and some 1,846 innocent civilians were killed. Therefore, it would be felt within Northern Ireland that any commemoration of those events should pay equal attention to all who have lost their lives in the struggle against terrorism.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the Minister's tribute to those who have lost their lives in Northern Ireland, but as there is a move to remember the civilian bomb victims of the blitz in London and a national monument to the police who have died in keeping the peace, surely such a memorial could be erected in Northern Ireland. Perhaps the Government could even pledge to maintain not simply the concept of consent, but the Union for which those men gave their lives.

Mr. Rifkind: I am very sensitive to the important points that the hon. Gentleman makes. There are a number of memorials across the Province: for example, the books of remembrance at St. Anne's cathedral in Belfast and the Garrison church in Lisburn. Any further memorials require sensitive consideration and we are open to any constructive proposals that would be welcome to all those concerned.

Gulf War Syndrome

6. **Ms Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on Gulf war syndrome.

Mr. Soames: We continue to investigate the allegations of Gulf war syndrome with scientific rigour, principally through a medical assessment programme that will be subject to independent clinical audit by the Royal College of Physicians. There remains no evidence that those who served in the Gulf conflict are suffering from a mystery illness.

Ms Eagle: Why has the Ministry been so half-hearted and slow in its response to the plight of Gulf war victims who report the appalling symptoms that we now call Gulf war syndrome? When they were called to serve their country, those service men and women were not slow and half-hearted but willing to lay down their lives. Why cannot the Minister and his Department give them the same consideration in their present plight?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Lady is rather overdoing it. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] She is rather overdoing it. As she knows, we approach the matter with a sympathetic and open mind. The soundest method of assessment of all such cases is individual medical examination. We have taken steps to invite all those who think that they are suffering from any illness to come forward for the most rigorous medical examination. Their expenses will be paid, and, if they need to travel, overnight accommodation will be provided for them. So far, only 240 potential claimants have registered their intention to come forward and 105 have been examined. To secure the confidence that the House should rightly have, an independent clinical audit of the work that has been undertaken will be passed to us by the Royal College of Physicians and we shall make it available to the House.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his considered and well-balanced approach to a difficult issue. Does he agree that the only way forward is a proper medical and scientific assessment of the reported symptoms? Does he further agree that the Ministry of Defence is very well-motivated to get behind the understandable emotion and fulfil its long and well-deserved tradition of being a caring and excellent employer?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, whose remarks have added weight, as he himself was in the place of honour. He is quite right to mark down the Ministry of

Defence as an extremely caring and sympathetic employer. The health and welfare of our service men and women is, and always will be, of prime importance to us. I assure my hon. Friend and the whole House that the matter will be approached with great care, great sympathy and an open mind.

Dr. David Clark: Do the Government still believe that the pattern and prevalence of illnesses suffered by Gulf war veterans is no different from that experienced among the 18 to 40 age group of the general population?

Mr. Soames: As the hon. Gentleman knows, some 45,000 troops were deployed in the Gulf and, sadly, it would not be surprising if a number of years thereafter a number of them were suffering from illness of one sort or another. A number of the people who have approached us are ill. They have been examined and, as I have said, to date we have found absolutely no medical or scientific evidence to support the allegation of a specific disease linked to service in the Gulf. Similar research is being conducted in the United Kingdom, France, the United States, Canada and Norway but no link has been found. As I said, we shall continue to approach the matter in an open and sympathetic manner, and we should be grateful if all those who feel that they have been made ill by service in the Gulf would come forward for a medical examination, which we would then subject to clinical audit.

Mr. Robathan: This is a very serious matter. I welcome my hon. Friend's reassurance that all cases are subject to a comprehensive medical examination. He may know that I had to endure these rather—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask a question.

Mr. Robathan: It is just coming.

Madam Speaker: It should have come earlier.

Mr. Robathan: It cometh like the wind.

Is my hon. Friend aware that I endured unpleasant vaccinations for anthrax and, I think, the plague and ate NAPS—nerve agent pre-treatment sets—because I believed conditions meant that they were necessary? Will he confirm that Saddam Hussein in fact had the capability to launch chemical and bacteriological weapons against us? Does he agree that it is a great pity that some hon. Members seem determined for their own purposes to make political or publicity capital out of the issue?

Mr. Soames: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend who is another of the hon. Members who served in the Gulf conflict. He is correct to say that the assessment at the time was that there was such a threat and it would have been criminally negligent if our soldiers and service men and women had not been provided with proper protection against it. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that to the House's attention.

Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment

7. Ms Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down has to conduct a study on the long-term health effects of its experiments on the people involved.

Mr. Freeman: There has been no evidence over the past 40 years to suggest that service volunteers who have participated in studies at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down have suffered any harm to their health. Therefore, we have no plans to conduct a study on the long-term health effects on such volunteers.

Ms Squire: Is the Minister aware that a number of ex-service men, including my constituent, Mr. Harry Hogg, were subject to horrific experiments with biological and chemical substances at Porton Down during the second world war and subsequently? Will he agree personally to investigate Mr. Hogg's case as Porton Down is trying to deny that he was ever there? Will he further agree to demonstrate the caring nature of the Ministry of Defence, as alleged by the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), by establishing an independent study into the long-term health effects and by considering means of compensating those affected?

Mr. Freeman: I shall certainly look at the particular case. I am not familiar with it but, if the hon. Lady will write to me, I shall examine it specifically. About 200 service men a year volunteer at Porton Down to take part in experiments to test not only equipment to be used in war but, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Armed Forces said, chemicals and medicines for use in the event of chemical and biological warfare.

Mr. Key: As the alternative motto of the CBDE is "safety first" and every procedure is subjected to ethical assessment, will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the hundreds of my constituents who work there, saving thousands of lives through their work?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and certainly join him in thanking and congratulating his constituents. I also thank the service men and women who volunteer to take part in experiments at Porton Down. They have helped to ensure the safety of our armed forces.

Mr. Fatchett: Does the Minister realise that his response to this question is as disappointing and mean as that of his fellow Minister in relation to Gulf war syndrome? When there are reports that volunteers at Porton Down have suffered from skin and eye cancer, paralysis, disorders of the ears, nose, kidneys and bladder, is the Minister really saying that it is all chance and spontaneous? Do not the Government owe it to those volunteers to ensure that there is a proper independent medical inquiry into what has happened to them? Those people volunteered not for money but to help their country and their fellow service people. Would not the best answer from the Minister be to agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) and set up that inquiry now?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman is falling below his normal charitable standards. I specifically agreed to look at the case that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Ms Squire) raised. There is no evidence *[Interruption.]* Perhaps it does not commend itself to Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government do pay attention to

the facts presented. There is no evidence that any of those volunteers has suffered long-term damage to their health in the past four decades.

Medical District Hospital Units

8. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce his decision on the locations of the new medical district hospital units.

11. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to rationalise military hospitals.

Mr. Soames: There are no proposals to rationalise military hospitals further to the decision that I announced on 8 December last year to establish a single, tri-service core hospital with at least 375 beds in the United Kingdom at the current Royal Naval hospital at Haslar in Gosport. I expect to make an announcement shortly on the locations of the new Ministry of Defence hospital units.

Mr. Coombs: I recognise the need to reduce the medical capacity of the services as a result of other changes that my hon. Friend and his colleagues have made in recent months, but I hope that he will take this opportunity to pay a warm tribute to the staff of Princess Alexandra hospital at Wroughton for their excellent work over many years not only in caring for RAF personnel but many of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who is in his place. Will my hon. Friend assure me that he will bear in mind, when making his decision about the location of future MDHUs, that the presence of an MDHU in the Swindon area will make it that much easier for the Swindon and Marlborough health trust, which serves north-east Wiltshire, to continue to provide the same excellent service in the future?

Mr. Soames: I am happy to have the opportunity to confirm everything that my hon. Friend has said and to pay tribute to the robust and vigorous lobbying that was undertaken by him and my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) on behalf of the Princess Alexandra hospital at Wroughton. It is an outstanding hospital and has served our military personnel and the wider community very well indeed. As my hon. Friend rightly says, the changes are inevitable and are the result of slimming of the forces, and the requirement to deal with our medical requirements in an assessed operational way for the 1990s. I endorse his views about the Princess Margaret hospital in Swindon. I am not, I am afraid, yet in a position to give him a guarantee on that, but will let him know as soon as we come to a decision.

Mr. Cunningham: Is the Minister satisfied that, in a worst-case scenario—for example, a rapid withdrawal from Bosnia—medical resources would be available, bearing in mind the rapid cuts that have been made in medical services over the past three or four years?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman asks an important question, and I am pleased to be able to give him an absolute assurance that resources would be available. Indeed, none of the alterations and cuts to the services has been made to do anything other than support the front line in all assessed operational scenarios for the 1990s. I am therefore happy to give him whatever undertaking he wishes in respect of a withdrawal from Bosnia should that be necessary.

Sir Michael Grylls: When my hon. Friend considers the siting of MDHUs, will he bear in mind the possibility of siting one at Frimley Park hospital, which is a real centre of medical excellence in Surrey and is ideally suited because it is surrounded by a large number of service establishments?

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Critchley), who has been a doughty champion of Frimley hospital. I am afraid that we have not yet reached a conclusion. As soon as we do so—I note and am fully aware of the excellent facilities at Frimley Park hospital—we will report to the House.

RAF St. Athan

9. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the role of RAF St. Athan and the maintenance of Tornado and other aircraft since 1983.

Mr. Freeman: RAF St. Athan provides overhaul, repair and manufacturing facilities for fixed-wing aircraft of all three services, and many of their mechanical, structural and engine components. Currently, Tornado accounts for around 48 per cent. of RAF St. Athan's work.

Mr. Griffiths: Will the Minister confirm that work done at RAF St. Athan by the company Airwork has cost a minimum of £300 million so far in botched and damaged Tornados? Will the Ministry receive compensation from the Bricom group? Was anyone in the RAF or the Ministry directly responsible for seeing that the work was properly done, and will anyone lose his job or be admonished?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman's estimate of the amount involved is wildly inaccurate. We have not yet costed the amount, and I would not be able to give the hon. Gentleman the figure if we had, because we intend to take legal proceedings against Bricom in connection with the work done by Airwork.

I am glad to say that the damage to the Tornado aircraft that has been identified is being rectified by British Aerospace, the cost being a mere fraction of the sum mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. I am glad to say also that RAF St. Athan won the competition for the fatigue index at No. 25—a quarter of the way through the fatigue life—to repair about 100 of the remaining Tornados. I congratulate the service men and women involved, some of whom are the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

Mr. Mans: In the context of the maintenance and updating of Tornado aircraft, when will the midlife update programme be complete? Will the Minister also tell me, either today or in writing, what plans the RAF has to give the Tornado aircraft a stand-off capability?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) asked me about the F3 fighter aircraft, which are being repaired and maintained. My hon. Friend asks about the ground attack—the bomber version of the Tornado. I am happy to say that the midlife update programme is proceeding, is properly resourced and will extend the life of the aircraft for perhaps 15 or 20 years—

at the end of which time we shall have to consider a future offensive aircraft. I hope very much that we shall be able to collaborate in part with, perhaps, the United States in the design and development of the aircraft.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) laughs, but the procurement of new and very expensive aircraft will require us to collaborate not only with the French and Germans—and as we are doing on Eurofighter—but with the Americans.

Property Improvements

10. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how property improvements are authorised in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: Within prescribed limits, authority to approve expenditure on maintenance and new construction is delegated to budget holders to exercise in accordance with the letter of delegation issued to top level budget holders by the accounting officer.

Mr. Enright: Is not the Secretary of State slightly ashamed about the fact that he threw away £100,000 that could have cured the deficiencies in two housing estates in my constituency, paying KPMG Peat Marwick to produce a report that he subsequently repressed? Is that not a typical Ministry of Defence cover-up?

Mr. Rifkind: On the contrary; the work done by KPMG Peat Marwick was of very high quality, and enabled us to bring a difficult matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the estates at Imphal barracks in York and Strensall barracks in my constituency need no improvement other than a reprieve for Strensall, which faces possible closure, and more use of the accommodation at Imphal? Will he bear in mind the concern of many people throughout Yorkshire, who want us to maintain those facilities and continue the great relationship that York has had with the Army for many years?

Mr. Rifkind: We greatly value York's relationship with the armed forces, and expect it to continue for many generations.

Recruitment Costs

12. **Mr. Spellar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the continuing cost of recruitment to the armed forces while people are being made redundant.

Mr. Soames: Recruitment to the armed forces has continued throughout the force restructuring exercise, "Options for Change", in order to maintain a balanced age and rank structure and to meet shortages in certain branches and trades.

Mr. Spellar: I am not surprised that the Minister did not give the exact figure for the costs. In the last financial year, they amounted to £100 million for recruitment and £500 million for redundancy. Is it not ludicrous to have that imbalance? When will the Government stop this absurd waste of public money?

Mr. Soames: I hate to disappoint the hon. Gentleman but, as usual, he is wrong on everything. It is not £100 million; it is £92 million. *[Interruption.]* I fully realise that £8 million here or there is nothing to the Labour party. Plainly, recruiting remains extremely important to retain the right mix of skills and expertise and a balanced age structure, without which the services would be unable to carry out their job.

As to resettlement and redundancy, the hon. Gentleman should know that 80 per cent. of the people who leave the services are in employment or in other chosen activities within three months of leaving and that 93 per cent. of them are in that position after 15 months. That money is extremely well spent and just goes to show that the armed services provide the best-trained, best-skilled and best-led work force in the land.

Mr. Viggers: In addition to the points that my hon. Friend has made, does he agree that, if recruitment were to stop, it would mean that the training establishments would be unable to maintain their proper efficiency, which demonstrates the ignorance behind the original question?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend is right. The question of the hon. Member for Warley, West (Mr. Spellar) was fatuous and betrayed a lack of knowledge of the position. As I have said, plainly we must retain a constant and steady inflow to ensure that we have a balanced aid structure and a balanced range of skills across the services. I endorse what my hon. Friend says about the service training centres.

Dr. Reid: Is it not amazing that, in other circumstances, when we discuss recruitment, for instance, of managers of privatised utilities, the Government tell us that the only way to recruit the right people is to pay huge wage increases? Why are the armed forces so different? Why, when we need ordinary soldiers and ratings, have the Government cut their remuneration by 15 per cent. in real terms but, when we are awash with generals and brigadiers, increased their salaries by 18 per cent. in real terms? Is it not the same old Tory story: more brass for the top brass and peanuts for the poor bloody infantry?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman has more front than Brighton beach. That is a disgraceful assertion. The Conservative Government have always accepted the recommendations of the Review Body on Armed Forces Pay. They are proud of their record on service pay.

Mr. Brazier: Does my hon. Friend accept that the armed forces are essentially a young organisation, and that even those of us who have expressed reservations about defence cuts fully support the view that, although people leaving the forces must be generously treated, it is essential that we maintain an on-going recruiting programme, bringing young people into the forces? The Government are absolutely right on that.

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his endorsement. He is exactly right. This is all part of maintaining the skills and the broad range of age and experience that is so necessary to a professional army. My hon. Friend is probably aware that well over 30,000 personnel leave the services every year on completion of their engagements or because they have decided to take up civilian employment. Many of those people are under 30.

Royal Naval College, Greenwich

14. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what options he is currently considering for the future use of the Royal Naval college, Greenwich.

Mr. Soames: We are considering a number of options for the future occupancy of the Royal Naval college at Greenwich, if, following consultation, we should decide to form a joint service command and staff college at Camberley. The defence options being examined are for the home for a restructured defence school of languages or for a tri-service chaplains school.

Mr. Wilkinson: My hon. Friend will know that the Royal Air Force chaplains school at Amport house already provides an ideal setting for the Royal Navy as well as for the Royal Air Force. Could not the Royal Naval college at Greenwich be used as a tri-service cadet college, where cadets of all three services could learn military science, discipline and the traditions of each service, before going to their respective establishments?

Mr. Soames: My hon. Friend has asked a popular question and I am happy to assure him that we would not allow any proposal to go forward for Greenwich that was not entirely fitting for the future use of the Royal Naval college. I am delighted to confirm that Amport house remains very much in the frame. I hope that we will be able to reach a conclusion that I know will please him. In any event, he has until 10 March to ensure that his views are put on paper.

Mr. Raynsford: Rather than prejudging the outcome of the consultation supposedly taking place on the location for the new joint service command and staff college, will the Minister recognise that the figures published in the consultation paper are dubious and suspect and that there is a serious case for revising those figures and considering Greenwich as the best and most effective location for the college?

Mr. Soames: The hon. Gentleman is fighting his corner in a robust and vigorous fashion, as he should be. Today I signed a long letter to him which I hope sets out the answers to some of the questions that he has raised. The hon. Gentleman has asked to come to see me to discuss these matters and I shall be pleased to meet him and to hear what he has to say. I would like to straighten out one misapprehension: we have certainly not yet made up our mind and we shall not do so until we have considered all the representations and the consultation is complete.

PRIME MINISTER

Rail Privatisation

Q1. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will assess the impact of rail privatisation on the economy of the Scottish highlands and islands.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): The franchising director will consult on his draft passenger service requirement for ScotRail. I am confident that the outcome will improve the quality of service enjoyed by the passenger.

Mr. Kennedy: Given the Prime Minister's recent visit to Scotland, he will be aware of the widespread concern about the future of rail services, not least the impact that the withdrawal of sleeper services, motorail, the steam engine on the West Highland line, and so on will have on the tourist-oriented economy of the western highlands in particular. Given that degree of concern, will the Prime Minister agree to a meeting at the appropriate time to discuss this matter further?

The Prime Minister: As I said a moment ago, I believe strongly that rail privatisation will improve the service, not least because a privatised service will have access to new sources of funds to increase investment in the rail service.

On the hon. Gentleman's direct question, of course I would be prepared to meet him at an appropriate time, but it might be more helpful in the first instance if he were to meet my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport who will, naturally, try to assist him.

Engagements

Q2. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Dr. Jones: Does the Prime Minister recall that nearly three years ago he told the nation, "Vote Conservative on Thursday, and the recovery starts Friday"? *[Interruption.]* When will the recovery start for all those who have seen their real standard of living decline since then? When will it start for the people I saw in the Selly Oak jobcentre yesterday where skilled factory workers are being offered £150 a week, security guards are being offered £2.40 an hour and care assistants £2.25 an hour? When will they get the feel-good factor?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Lady cares to look at the published figures, she will see that we moved back into growth almost immediately after the last general election, precisely as I had forecast. If she is concerned about what is happening to the economy, she might bear in mind that it is now growing at about 4 per cent. a year, unemployment has fallen by 400,000 in the last year alone, exports have hit record levels in nine out of the last 13 months, investment is rising, manufacturing productivity is rising and, for the first time since records began, the number of people in work in manufacturing industry is rising. Perhaps the hon. Lady will tell her constituents that.

Q3. **Mr. Gallie:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gallie: Does my right hon. Friend recall the speech that he made in Glasgow on Friday night to a cross-section of the Scottish business community? Does he recall that his comments were widely welcomed? Is he aware that the Scottish business community feels that a Scottish Assembly with tax-raising powers will cost productive jobs in Scotland and threaten the Union?

The Prime Minister: I do, indeed, recall speaking to 1,000 Scottish business men in Glasgow on Friday. I am in no doubt that they believe that a tax-raising assembly

in Scotland would not be in the interests of Scottish business, not be in the interests of Scottish prosperity and not be in the interests of future investment in Scotland. That is strongly my view. I believe that it was also theirs.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister share the anger at the latest multi-million pound pay package awarded to heads—*[Interruption.]* Does he share the anger—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must not barrack from sedentary positions.

Mr. Blair: Does the right hon. Gentleman share the anger at the latest multi-million pound pay package awarded to heads of privatised utilities—this time, the National Grid Company—and will he at last act to stop such abuses?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I do find these payments as distasteful as the right hon. Gentleman—as do, I dare say, many other people as well. Where they cannot be justified, I believe that they bring the system into disrepute. I believe that directors have a duty to consider that, and I hope that they will. As the right hon. Gentleman will know, the Greenbury committee is examining those matters. Its recommendations will be addressed, of course, to companies and to shareholders. When its recommendations are available, I shall be ready to consider any proposals that may require legislative back-up. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. This is all very time consuming.

Mr. Blair: But, Madam Speaker, he has the golden share in this company. Why will not he then use it?

The Prime Minister: There are a wide number of issues to be addressed, not just this, and the right hon. Gentleman may find it interesting to examine what they are. First, we must address how best to promote complete and open disclosure of the remuneration of directors—that is necessary so that shareholders can have the full facts—and, secondly, how to ensure that bonuses and share options are firmly based on the performance of the company, and not provided as windfall gains. I believe that that is rightly where the greatest public concern is now concentrated. I believe that that may require stricter criteria for the price at which the shares are issued and the circumstances in which they are exercised. All those matters will need to be examined.

I share the view of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) that it is not the job of Government to substitute their commercial judgment for that of individuals. When we have the judgment that is now being provided, we will examine it with great care.

Mr. Blair: For these privatised utilities, why will not the right hon. Gentleman use the golden share or give the regulator the power? Does he not realise that, until he acts to stop these abuses, he will be seen as a willing partner in a public scandal, where monopoly millionaires are paying themselves monopoly money?

The Prime Minister: People who have listened to these exchanges may suspect that the right hon. Gentleman had prepared that question before he had listened to the earlier answers. If he had listened to the earlier answers, he would have known that there was no point in asking that question.

Mr. Lamont: Is the Prime Minister aware that the remarks of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland over the weekend about decommissioning and the surrender of arms were as welcome as they were necessary? May I encourage the Government to stick to their word on that matter, otherwise the so-called choice that the people of Northern Ireland face will not be a real choice? It will be a choice subject to blackmail, intimidation and abandonment of a community that deserves our support and protection.

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend will know, the community has had our support and protection, with a large number of troops there, for the past quarter of a century. I can tell my right hon. Friend and all right hon. and hon. Members in the House that those British troops will stay there to protect people in Northern Ireland for so long as it is necessary. My right hon. Friend need have no concern but that we will keep to the remarks made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Q4. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Soley: Has the Prime Minister made up his mind yet whether he agrees with his Chancellor that monetary union is not a threat to the nation state?

The Prime Minister: I shall be addressing in detail all the matters that relate to our European position, and the right policies for this country, tomorrow. I shall do that tomorrow, and the hon. Gentleman will then be in no doubt.

Q5. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Gorman: Unless my right hon. Friend has even half a mind to pull Britain out of Europe, could he explain to the House, and more particularly to the fishermen of Britain, how else they are to recover their Dover soles?

The Prime Minister: I think that my hon. Friend will know, since she refers to the common fisheries policy, that there would be many parts of the seas from which British fishermen would be excluded were it not for the provisions of the common fisheries policy. My hon. Friend and the fishing industry may not like every aspect of that policy—I am aware that they do not—but if we were to cut ourselves adrift from Europe in the way that she suggests, not just the fishing industry but a very large part of the commerce and other interests of this country would be put at risk.

Ms Glenda Jackson: As the Prime Minister has already announced one U-turn in his policy, can he confirm or deny reports in today's papers that the Government have abandoned their policy with regard to rail safety with the abandonment of automatic train protection? There has been a firm commitment to ATP by

the Government and previous Secretaries of State since 1985. Can the Prime Minister confirm or deny that it is still part of his Government's policy?

The Prime Minister: On these matters, of course, we act on the advice that we receive from the Health and Safety Commission, as we have frequently been advised to do by hon. Members on both sides of the House. We have received some advice from the commission and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is now considering it.

Q6. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Shaw: Does my right hon. Friend consider that the Belgians have recently exercised border controls in a most effective manner in relation to alleged football hooligans? Will he ensure that he lobbies Belgium hard for support in the European Union so that we can maintain adequate border controls at Dover?

The Prime Minister: I welcome the action taken by the Belgian police to ensure that tonight's game passes off without incident. I hope that the only action will be on the pitch—not off it.

With regard to my hon. Friend's second point, I have said in the past that I am determined to maintain the fair, but necessary, immigration controls at the border that we have at present, and we intend to do so.

Q7. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Livingstone: Does the Prime Minister recall that, about a year ago, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury announced an investigation into the impact of dividend payments on investment, but that was dropped after the intervention of Lord Hanson? Since then, investment as a proportion of gross domestic product in Britain has declined to 14.6 per cent., which is the lowest figure since the first quarter of 1955. Given that the increase in dividends since the Tories came to power is £22 billion, which is money that has been dragged away from investment, is it not time to resuscitate that investigation?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman would do better to see what is actually happening both to manufacturing industry and to wider investment. If he does that, he will see the growth in manufacturing industry and see that industries that were dead or dying are now strong again, and exporting. He will see that British Steel has just increased production at its Llanwern plant by 30 per cent. He will also see a motor industry which was on its knees which will be a net exporter of motor cars before too long, and he will find that this country exports fibre optics, cameras and a whole range of products that were not available some years ago, all as a result of fresh investment in this country.

Mr. Brandreth: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in the city of Chester unemployment has fallen yet again? It is down by 2 per cent. on last month, by 14 per cent. on last year and by 42 per cent on eight years ago. Does he recognise the fact that, as well as inflation being at its lowest level for a generation, in Chester inward investment is at record levels and year-on-year growth is up by 4 per cent., productivity is up by 6 per cent. and exports are up by 14 per cent? To what or to whom does he attribute that encouraging state of affairs?

The Prime Minister: I am indeed encouraged by those statistics, both for Chester and for the rest of the country. It is not simply the growth, or the drop in unemployment, that is welcome. Also welcome is the fact that there is a physical growth in the number of people in employment, as well as a significant drop in the number of people who have been unemployed for a long time. I believe that that development is set to continue, and I imagine that everyone will welcome that fact.

Donaldson Report

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Dr. Brian Mawhinney) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members leaving the Chamber please do so rather quickly now?

Dr. Mawhinney: With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement on the Government's response to the report of Lord Donaldson's inquiry into the prevention of pollution from merchant shipping. The response is published today. Copies have been placed in the Library and are available in the Vote Office. I apologise to you, Madam Speaker, and to the House for the fact that the statement will be slightly longer than is normal, but I am responding to a detailed and significant report.

When Lord Donaldson's report, "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas", was published in May 1994, it was welcomed both within the United Kingdom and internationally. I am pleased to have this opportunity to echo my predecessor in thanking Lord Donaldson and his team for the depth and quality of their report. The Government have already accepted its broad thrust. I now go further. The Government accept 86 of the 103 recommendations. Most of the others are still being considered. There were only four recommendations that we could not accept because we decided that the action proposed was inappropriate. Our response clearly demonstrates that the Government are serious about ship safety and pollution prevention, and are serious about implementing the Donaldson report.

It is essential that those operating sub-standard ships in United Kingdom waters should be clearly identifiable. I am pleased to say that our initiative in publishing monthly lists of such ships detained in United Kingdom ports has been well received by responsible shipowners. The message is clear: sub-standard ships will be detained and information about detentions will be published.

The Government support the report's emphasis on port state control and have acted to ensure that the recommendations on improved targeting of sub-standard ships are considered by the EC and the Paris memorandum of understanding.

We undertook to consider recommendations on providing emergency towing capability. I expect a final report in June from the Coastguard Agency on the feasibility, costs and benefits of the inquiry's proposals. I also announced last December that we had accepted the Donaldson recommendation that two tugs should be stationed in the Dover strait and in the Minches to provide emergency cover this winter. Those tugs are now in place. The trial will also provide operational experience for the agency's final report.

With all-party support, the Merchant Shipping (Salvage and Pollution) Act 1994 is now law. That has allowed us to ratify two international conventions, one on salvage and the other on increased compensation for oil pollution. We are encouraging other states to do likewise.

At a national level, the Act extends the principle of strict liability for oil pollution in United Kingdom waters to cover spills of persistent oil from ships other than oil tankers. The problem now is to ensure that the owners of ships whose bunkers cause damage are able to pay. We are pressing internationally for the extension of compulsory liability insurance and are considering the scope for unilateral action.

We do not want ships to be able to continue to operate anonymously off our coasts. We have been vigorous, therefore, in seeking international agreement on the mandatory fitting of transponders and we shall maintain that pressure at the International Maritime Organisation. Pending agreement on transponders, we also intend to act on Lord Donaldson's recommendation that ships should have recognition marks that are clearly visible, by presenting proposals to the next meeting of the IMO's Maritime Safety Committee.

Since last July, the Marine Safety Agency has been carrying out a programme of inspections of foreign fish factory ships—klondykers—working off the UK. Sub-standard klondykers found in port have been detained and vessels at anchor have been told that deficiencies must be put right. However, the problems and the risks remain.

The Scottish Office has brought forward proposals to improve fisheries management by limiting the number of fish transhipment licences issued to klondykers and by introducing an advance notice period for licence applications from May this year. We are considering a number of options for further action under merchant shipping powers, such as preventing loading or unloading and requiring vessels to leave our waters. They should help to ensure that klondykers meet agreed safety standards and carry adequate insurance. We shall issue a consultation paper shortly, with proposals for possible legislative action, including the extension of our powers of inspection and detention to ships in UK waters not on innocent or transit passage.

The report recommended that a statutory obligation should be placed on ports to provide adequate and convenient waste reception facilities, which should be free at the point of use. Before deciding on the form of legislation, we need to establish the scale of the problem. Those with responsibility for ports should be consulted on specific proposals. Research is already being conducted to address those issues. Results will be available soon and we expect to consult interested parties shortly thereafter.

As part of our initiative against pollution from ships, we shall also bring forward regulations defining our exclusive economic zone, which will extend our jurisdiction over pollution from ships up to 200 miles from our shores. We are considering how best to enhance surveillance and enforcement of that extended area.

The inquiry also made recommendations on responsibility for clean-up operations in harbour areas and on the coast. We shall consult interested parties on those recommendations and on possible courses of action.

We are determined to continue working towards the elimination of poor operational practices on ships. In line with Lord Donaldson's recommendations, we are strongly supporting the IMO revision of the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping Convention, which should be completed in June. We also fully endorse the IMO's international safety management code and are encouraging its widespread use on UK ships in advance of its mandatory introduction in 1998.

The shipping industry has expressed concern about Lord Donaldson's recommendation that shipowners should pay into two funds for port state control

inspections and the UK's standing counter-pollution capacity. We have long supported the "user pays" and "polluter pays" principles, and are keen to explore new options for funding. They need to be consistent with a competitive, as well as a safe fleet. We are clear that there may be problems in seeking to establish UK funds without first seeking regional agreement. We shall work to develop funding proposals and to secure agreement on them with our regional partners, but it would not be right to close the door for ever on a unilateral approach if regional agreement cannot be secured. We intend to consult on possible regional and unilateral approaches.

I have highlighted the key elements of our response to the major issues raised by the Donaldson report. We have accepted and acted upon many more recommendations, as outlined in our detailed response, and we shall continue to take forward initiatives to implement the remaining recommendations. Lord Donaldson's report has set the agenda; we intend to follow it. My Department's Marine Safety and Coastguard Agencies will play a key role in that process. Like all sensible people, we want a safe and pollution-free marine environment.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I pay tribute to the Donaldson committee for the thorough and detailed manner in which it provides a comprehensive agenda for future action. Since only the essence of the 103 recommendations can be dealt with today, does the Secretary of State accept that today's exchanges are no substitute for a full debate?

I should like to say immediately that we welcome the Government's proposals to press for international extension of compulsory liability ins[illegible] to require the fitting of transponders to ensure id[illegible]cation; to bring forward our exclusive economic zo[illegible], to extend our jurisdiction over pollution from ships; and to be ready to consider unilateral action, when regional agreement cannot be reached. What action is the right hon. Gentleman taking, however, to include the Donaldson recommendations in the draft European Union directive on port state control; to get them incorporated in the Paris memorandum of understanding; and to highlight the issues at the North sea conference in June?

On the central issue of enforcement, what action is the Secretary of State taking, via the International Maritime Organisation, to reinforce and extend port state control and, in particular, to increase detentions of unseaworthy ships and ill-trained crews in many more ports, to bring it firmly home to shipowners that it no longer pays to run unsafe ships? Since Donaldson recommends more investigations in port, will the right hon. Gentleman withdraw the 15 per cent. cut in his Department's Marine Safety Agency budget this year, as well as the 7 per cent. cut in the marine accident investigation branch and the 6 per cent. cut in the Coastguard Agency? Are not those cuts wholly incompatible with the right hon. Gentleman's emphasis on safety? In line with Donaldson, should not he be extending the role of the Marine Safety Agency to take over the work of some highly dubious classification societies, whose poor standards the Minister of State severely criticised only two months ago?

Since the certificates of competence issued by some flag states are widely regarded to be spurious, what action is the Secretary of State taking to remove the IMO requirement on port state inspectors to accept without question certificates issued by such flag states? In view of the poor record of flag state control in many cases, will he support the idea of a marine safety corps, whereby developed shipping nations would make surveyors available to developing countries that lacked the necessary expertise?

The right hon. Gentleman referred to emergency towing capability, which we support in principle, but is he aware of Donaldson's key recommendation that masters, officers and crews must be able to communicate properly with each other? How is that compatible with his Department's contracting out the provision of the two emergency tugs under the control of the Coastguard Agency to a company that employs non-English-speaking Croatian crews?

The right hon. Gentleman also referred to klondykers. What action is he taking to link the issue of licences to safety and insurance criteria relating to klondykers? Is not that urgent, since Donaldson spoke of the need for a revised system of licensing to be in place this winter and the Government are manifestly behind time?

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman did not mention the marine environment in high-risk areas, which Donaldson highlights. Since there is a proliferation of such special areas, how does he propose to identify them, and what will be the means of implementation?

The overriding issue of the Donaldson report is safety. Opposition Members continue to worry that the Government's philosophy of deregulation and privatisation, in cutting their own Marine Safety Agency and in delegating major responsibilities to classification societies, which are not truly independent, fails to give the overriding priority to safety that is required.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the welcome that he gave at the beginning of his comments to my announcement about proposals on insurance on transponders and on the exclusive economic zone. He asked about the involvement of the European Union and the IMO in terms of our discussions about port state control, and I can confirm what I said in my statement—that we have already raised those issues in those forums and that we shall pursue them vigorously with our partners in those organisations, because the hon. Gentleman and I recognise that the type of changes that he and I wish to be made need to be implemented internationally, not purely domestically.

On port state control, we shall continue to carry forward the process that we initiated on the detention of ships and the publication of the names of ships that fail to meet our standards, and we shall continue to encourage other countries to follow our lead, so that gradually an understanding will develop that certain ships, and perhaps even certain flags, may give those who operate on the seas, those who wish to transport their goods by sea and those who are asked to insure those goods, pause for thought.

On efficiency savings, we always seek a proper balance between the effective discharge of the paramountcy of safety, to which both the hon. Gentleman and I adhere, and the proper use of taxpayers' money. I should have thought that that was a general principle, a general balance, that he would wish to support. I can assure him that, as we proceed with the implementation of the Donaldson proposals, the Marine Safety Agency and the Coastguard Agency will play a central role.

[Dr. Mawhinney]

The hon. Gentleman asked whether I would consider seeking broader agreement among some flag states to make available to other flag states professionally trained surveyors if they found that helpful. I am willing to consider that suggestion.

I am not sure that I have answered every question that the hon. Gentleman asked. He mentioned klondykers. They cause concern, as I said in my statement, and we shall pursue, not least by a public consultation process, the necessary steps to tackle them as effectively as all Members of the House believe that we should tackle such a threat.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): As president of the Sea Safety Group, United Kingdom, as someone who gave evidence to the Donaldson commission and also as the promoter of the Merchant Shipping (Salvage and Pollution) Act 1994, mentioned by the Secretary of State, I warmly welcome the Government's response to the comprehensive report by Lord Donaldson.

I refer to a local issue in part of my constituency: the Isles of Scilly were the scene of a major disaster—the Torrey Canyon. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that there will be no delay in working on Lord Donaldson's proposal that the Isles of Scilly should be given extra protection, by an exclusion zone or some other means, so that there is no repetition of that dreadful accident or the risk of it happening again?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said. I am sure that the whole House would pay tribute to the role that he played in introducing that important piece of legislation, which, as I said in my statement, enabled us to sign two international conventions. I understand the argument that he makes, legitimately, on behalf of his constituents, and I am happy to give him the assurance that he seeks.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and positive response to Lord Donaldson's recommendations, specifically with regard to transponders insurance, and the recognition that, while international action is best, there must be a willingness to take unilateral action if the international community is too slow to react.

With regard to the publication of a monthly list of defaulting vessels, does the right hon. Gentleman concur that many of those vessels have been classified by highly reputable classification societies? How does he respond to Lord Donaldson's recommendation for tighter control of standards of classification societies?

The Secretary of State's predecessor, the right hon. Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), said that measures would be in place before this season to resolve the klondykers issue. Will he guarantee that, although there will be consultation, measures will be in place before next season?

Finally, does the Secretary of State accept that 85 per cent. of marine accidents are caused by human error, which puts an even greater onus on the need to promote and enforce standards of crewing: in training, language and communication? Given our country's high reputation for that, what measures is his Department taking to stem the decline in the British merchant marine? Specifically, will he withdraw the proposal to remove the present nationality restrictions that apply to masters, chief officers and chief engineers serving on UK vessels?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments, not least because he has particular cause to be distressed on behalf of his constituents as a result of the Braer tragedy, which was part of the prelude to setting up the Donaldson report.

In terms of port state controls, I had noticed, as had others, that some of the ships detained were associated with classification societies. Once a pattern is established, that may be an issue to which we shall have to return, at least for discussion. I understand the hon. Gentleman's gently presented frustration about klondykers. We all share that frustration. When we have an opportunity to take action, we do so. Speaking from memory—I hope that it does not fail me—on one occasion, no fewer than five klondykers were detained in port for various reasons. So I do not want the hon. Gentleman to think that there has been an element of paralysis in dealing with that issue. However, we are constrained in the legal sense and, for that reason, I said that we would consult to see what other powers we might legitimately take, to add to the powers readily available to us.

The hon. Gentleman is right to stress the need for training. I would always wish to ensure that those involved in the dispensing of safety at sea were capable of doing the job, which relates to their ability to be trained to do the job.

Sir Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): May I add my congratulations to the Government on their response to the report, and to Lord Donaldson and his commission on the thorough way in which they looked at the problem of safety at sea? As a former river pilot, may I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to one of the most serious deficiencies of the safety at sea issue? Although it is some 16 years since I last piloted in anger, as it were, I can tell my right hon. Friend that standards of training and the competence of many of the ships that came under my control were a matter of the gravest concern then. I regard it as vital that that aspect is at the forefront of maintaining safety, not just around our coast, but internationally. Will my right hon. Friend pursue those matters with the Marine Safety Agency? Will he ensure that neither coastguard nor piloted services—two important elements in ensuring safety—are further eroded?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments, to which I listened carefully, given the experience on which he draws. I offer him my assurance that we treat the matter of training seriously. He may be encouraged to know that my Department has introduced two schemes: Government assistance for training at a cost of £3.5 million this year; and the development of a certified seafarers scheme at a cost of £1.5 million this year. Since the introduction of the former scheme in 1988, some 2,650 cadets have been recruited for training and no eligible candidate has ever been refused assistance. That is a small measure of our commitment to the matter to which my hon. Friend referred.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Given my belief that tankers should be kept well away from fragile fisheries and from fishing vessels that are going about their traditional activities, I am pleased that the Minister has accepted recommendation

61, which appears on pages 34 and 35 of the report, concerning the use of the deep water route west of Barra, Uist, Harris and Lewis and the intervening islands of the Western Isles.

However, I point out to the Minister that Lord Donaldson recommended originally that the captains of such vessels should be allowed to use the Minch in exceptional weather conditions. I believe that that is wholly wrong. In heavy weather, such ships should stand well clear of such a channel: they are much safer in the deep water. Will the Minister take on board—if he will forgive the pun—my view that those ships should stick to the deep water route and not enter the Minch, even in heavy weather?

Dr. Mawhinney: I recognise the experience and expertise that the hon. Gentleman brings to these matters. I pay tribute to that and to his long-standing interest in the subject. For that reason, if for no other, I shall take careful note of the point that he made.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): My right hon. Friend will realise that the 200-mile extension that he announced today, which requires legislative backing, will be widely welcomed by the tourist resorts that front beaches in the south and south-west and that are up-wind of the prevailing south-westerlies, which bring polluting muck ashore.

Will my right hon. Friend comment on the fact that more than 60 per cent. of the world's shipping traffic plies its trade up and down the channel, yet, if I understand his statement correctly, it will not be covered by the regulations because it will be "in transit"?

I commend to my right hon. Friend's Department the work that Esso has done at its Fawley refinery. For safety reasons, it now makes fast a tug to every oil tanker that enters and leaves the Solent.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments and I certainly note his final point. He is right to point out that the Dover straits are one of the busiest marine thoroughfares in the world. About 600 ships transverse or cross the straits each day and we must ensure that the standards that we have put in place are adhered to rigidly. I give my hon. Friend an undertaking that we will enforce those standards.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): As I represent a coastal constituency and the second busiest ferry port in the United Kingdom, I offer my thanks to Lord Donaldson and I welcome the Secretary of State's response to the report.

Will the international agreement that is being sought on the mandatory fitting of transponders apply to fishing vessels as well as merchant vessels? Could not that be a means of ultimately controlling the likely invasions by our European neighbours into our fishing waters?

Dr. Mawhinney: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not stray into the latter part of his question. He is right to point out the importance of trying to reach international agreement about the fitting of transponders. As I have said, if it proves necessary, we shall look to unilateral action on visual identification. However, it clearly makes more sense to put in place a widespread system that is widely recognised and therefore widely policed in countries other than Britain. We shall continue to do all that we can to persuade our partners to adopt that point of view as quickly as possible.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in conjunction with today's welcome news, his Department will ensure that the English channel remains one of the safest bodies of water in the world and that it will continue to be monitored carefully by the very good and effective coastguard service that is based in Dover? Will he also comment on the fact that the two tugs that he mentioned, which operate out of Dover port, were part of a contractual specification that was unnecessarily tightly drawn, and in consequence, foreign crews are employed and Dover port and harbour board has not had the opportunity to bid for and get that contract? Will he examine whether that contract could be respecified in future so that Dover harbour board could have every opportunity of bidding for the contract and employing British workers from Dover?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am happy to give my hon. Friend the assurance that he sought at the beginning of his question and to thank him for his appreciation of the work of the tugs. He will know that the contract to which he refers applies to this winter season. I am expecting a report—probably in June—from the Coastguard Agency on whether the positioning of those tugs should be made a more permanent feature. Presumably, were that process to take place, the Coastguard Agency would have to generate a new contract. I shall ensure that, prior to the drawing up of the contract, my hon. Friend's comments are drawn to the attention of the chief executive of the agency.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): Does the Secretary of State accept that, while I welcome the moves that he has taken in recommendation 62 in relation to my constituency, there still remains the serious problem of non-accidental discharges of oil in the English channel, the Irish sea and the North sea? The Secretary of State has not accepted recommendation 22, that those areas should be designated special areas where oily wastes are not legally allowed to be discharged from vessels, which would radically improve the beaches and coastlines around the United Kingdom. Will he reconsider his decision not to accept the recommendation now, but only to consider it at this stage?

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman made. I said at the beginning of my statement that we had accepted 86 of the 103 recommendations, we had rejected only four and we were considering the other 13. In that spirit, I shall reflect on what the hon. Gentleman said.

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): Does my hon. Friend accept that his statement will be warmly welcomed by tourist resorts on the south coast, not least Bournemouth, which relies on attracting a great many people to our beaches, producing thousands of jobs? Further to the concerns expressed in the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), can he be more precise as to how tankers that discharge oil off our shores will be better detected in the light of his

[Mr. David Atkinson]

announcement today, and can he tell us whether Donaldson gave any consideration to the development of satellite surveillance technology in that respect?

Dr. Mawhinney: I thank my hon. Friend for the point that he made. I hope that he will be encouraged to know that the current regulations have had a tightening effect on the discharge of oil over the years, so that it now constitutes only 5 per cent. of the waste that ships actually discharge at sea. He is right to point out that we need adequate surveillance arrangements. While I do not recall whether Lord Donaldson strayed into space technology, I know that we are going to stray into increasing the aerial surveillance of shipping by 25 per cent., precisely to meet the point that my hon. Friend raises.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Will the Minister confirm that he expects the industry to pay for these proposals under the "user pays" "polluter pays" principle? Will he state how consultation will take place and over what time scale?

Dr. Mawhinney: There were a variety of proposals in the Donaldson recommendations. Some of them will fall to Government, some to ship operators and some to port operators. We shall set out consultation documents in the normal way and provide adequate time for people to respond. However, I have not pre-determined the exact timetable. It will in part be determined by the speed and efficacy of our preliminary discussions with the industry, to shape the consultation document in the first place.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Is my right hon. Friend aware that mariners of all nations have welcomed the experimental stationing of tugs around our shores during the winter? Is he in a position to form even a preliminary view of the success of that experiment and of the longer-term possibilities of franchising and other contractual arrangements, as laid out in some of Donaldson's recommendations?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right to draw the House's attention to the fact that Lord Donaldson has set not only the national agenda but, in a very real sense, the worldwide agenda. We shall seek to work in that spirit with our partners and to persuade them of the importance of his statements and recommendations.

The tugs have been welcomed and have already been useful. Speaking from memory, I think that they have been involved in monitoring something like 22 incidents since they were put in place. All that experience will help the Coastguard Agency to draw up its proposals to be submitted to me in June, as to whether we should continue that particular exercise.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I am concerned that recommendation 54 still allows the masters of vessels to decide when pilotage will be necessary. Representing the port of Grangemouth, where many of the Forth ports pilots are based, and having been in their company on Friday, I know that they are also concerned about what might happen as a result. They believe that they, as the pilots, know the waters better than the masters, but the masters are not often willing to take them on board. As we know, there is one serious accident every year involving a pilot in European waters and several fatalities. They do a stalwart job. Their complaint concerns the problem of speaking to the masters. I see that recommendation 20 is accepted only in principle, on the basis that the masters should be able to communicate with their officers and some of the officers may be expected to communicate with the crew—

Madam Speaker: Order. We must have a question.

Mr. Connarty: It is a question. The question is: cannot the Government do more in that respect because it seems to me that, by accepting the recommendation in principle, they leave open the possibility of a Tower of Babel situation on board a ship when it gets into trouble, which seems to concern the pilots greatly? If we do not come down hard and say that there must be a communication system that enables the proper running of a ship, there will never be safety in waters when crisis strikes.

Dr. Mawhinney: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point and am not surprised that the pilots would take that view. I hope that he will accept that, when I pay tribute to the work that they do, I do so sincerely, because they provide a professional and substantial contribution to safety around our shores. Equally, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the master of the vessel is in a unique and legally important position. We need to be careful, especially in the House, in seeking to adjudicate between two sets of responsibilities. On the whole, practice suggests to me that the situation is not quite as dire as one might have deduced from the hon. Gentleman's question. However, it is an important issue and it is not one from which we shall turn away.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his positive response to this full report? Will he place particular emphasis on recommendation 9 to encourage environmentally sensitive tankers, especially double-hull ones, in the calculation of port dues and on recommendation 27 to encourage reception facilities to reduce operational pollution at sea? Will he ensure that the Government continue to uphold international law and the rights of innocent passage?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind words. He stresses important issues, and I share his concern and his instinct on all of them.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On 17 May last year, at column 682 of the *Official Report*, I asked whether the proposals of George Livanos, the Greek shipowner, for a worldwide register of every accident were being considered. The Secretary of State's predecessor gave us to understand that they were. What progress has been made on such a register? Will the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), ask whether the Scottish Office is funding for a 10-year period—no less—the ocean floor benthic study of the consequences of what happened to the Braer?

Dr. Mawhinney: On the first question, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will have heard the second question and will no doubt respond, as he has the responsibility.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does the Minister agree that the Donaldson report is a reflection on a maritime disaster some time ago, and that Ministers must look forward if they can, to try to prevent other possible

disasters? In that context, does he agree that there is a problem in the English channel, particularly at present with Meridian Ferries, which employs Polish seafarers, undercutting British seamen? In the event of that situation becoming more explosive, as we already witnessed a fortnight ago, will he intervene to ensure that those Polish seafarers are not paid at about half the rate of British seafarers and, if necessary, replace them with people who would like a job in this country, to avert another crisis in which somebody such as Lord Donaldson would have to intervene later?

Dr. Mawhinney: Companies that are entitled under the law to trade should be permitted to do so. When others use illegal and bully-boy tactics to try to stop them, it is part of the responsibility of the Government, with their partners in the EU, to try to put in place regimes, regulations and conditions under which British companies can trade within the law. That, I would have thought, is a proposal that should have commended itself to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): The Minister will be aware that a serious oil spill in the Solent would have disastrous ecological effects. Will he follow through the spirit of the Donaldson report and look at the dangers of oil pollution in the Solent, particularly from tankers visiting Fawley oil refinery, and give an assurance that he will ensure that the Marine Safety Agency does not allow standards in the tugs operating at that refinery to fall? The recent reletting of the contract led to a cut in manning levels on those tugs and gave rise to widespread local concern. Will he give me an absolute assurance that, in the spirit of the report, safety in the port will not be jeopardised by the commercial pressures coming from the refinery, and that safety levels will be maintained?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that the Marine Safety Agency knows that I place the highest possible emphasis on safety and on taking all foreseeable and appropriate steps to prevent pollution occurring.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): May I welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on the Marine Safety Agency, and the comments of the Secretary of State on the detaining of ships? In that context, I ask him specifically whether he has had any consultations with his hon. Friends in the Home Office about the implications, particularly in the context of incidents such as that on the River Andoni, which is detained in my constituency, in which 50 Nigerian seamen are pawns in a game between the creditors and the owners of the vessel. What steps has the Minister taken to protect the interests of those innocent people?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He will understand that my responsibility as Secretary of State for Transport relates to the safety of the vessel. It does not relate to industrial disputes that may take place between those who are employed on the vessel and the employers. I can certainly assure the hon. Gentleman that my Department remains in close touch with the Home Office on such matters.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 3159) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Question agreed to.

House of Commons (Distribution of Seats)

4.13 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make new provision for the distribution of seats at parliamentary elections.

Such matters are always of keen interest to hon. Members, and the Bill is timely for several reasons, the first of which is a practical matter. Quite simply, with 651 UK constituencies and seven more planned by the Boundary Commission, there are too many Members of Parliament at the Palace of Westminster for the facilities available. Although it is true that new buildings can be provided, they are ever further away. Although many hon. Members are known to be quick on their feet in debate, only accomplished runners such as my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Mr. Coe) are quick enough to get here to the Division Lobbies consistently within eight minutes from offices in the nether regions of Millbank. The time has come to halt and reverse the inexorable growth in the number of Members of Parliament. If the United States Senate can manage with 100 members and the House of Representatives with 435, surely we could manage with fewer than 651.

My Bill is designed to reduce the number of constituencies in the United Kingdom by the application of fair and consistent principles. The opportunity to achieve that now arises, because the Pandora's box of constitutional reform has been opened by the Labour party, with its fear of the Scottish National party. A recent briefing note from the Labour party states, in plain federalist terms, that

"Labour is committed to a Parliament in Scotland within a decentralised and democratic European Union."

I strongly believe that Britain's future in the European Union should be as a unitary nation state, but I think it only fair to those who believe in the Balkanisation of Britain to spell out clearly, in advance, the consequences of Labour's policies in terms of representation at Westminster.

My Bill sets out a formula to do that. It comes in two parts. The first part recognises that the inherent unfairness to England and Northern Ireland of the present arrangements cannot be sustained, irrespective of other constitutional developments. The average constituency in England consists of 69,534 electors; in Northern Ireland the figure is 67,145, but in Wales it is 58,383 and in Scotland it is only 54,741.

That is an arbitrary and outdated judgment, arising from the House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Act 1958 rather than from any reasonable reflection of our times. Before the Act, there was a common electoral quota for the whole United Kingdom; so why do we not return to that eminently sensible arrangement? Are the Scots today so much more difficult to represent that they need a 27 per cent. advantage in the size of their constituencies? I suspect that the Member of Parliament's postbag from Dover is every bit as daunting as that from Dundee, that Falmouth's is as full as Falkirk's and Harrogate's as heavy as Hamilton's.

Can it be, then, that Scottish Members of Parliament are inherently less active than their English counterparts? Perish the thought. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)—who in an earlier manifestation bequeathed us the West Lothian question—is one of the most active Members in the House, and my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) one of the most vocal.

Is it that Scottish constituencies are more geographically challenged than English ones? I feel some sympathy in regard to the travel arrangements of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), and the problems of others who represent diverse island communities should also be recognised. That aside, however, the physical size of Skipton and Ripon, and of Richmond in Yorkshire, is the same as that of most rural seats in Scotland—and how can that argument be stretched to the cities, where the bulk of the population lives?

At the last election Glasgow had a total electorate of 518,716, for which it had 11 constituencies. That is an average per constituency of 47,156. Leeds had a larger electorate, at 529,127, but only eight constituencies, with an average of 66,141 electors. Where is the justice in that? Can it be justified on historic grounds? Should former independent kingdoms be given special consideration? Here I must admit an interest: my constituency, Elmet, is an ancient kingdom. Admittedly it existed for only 60 years in the seventh century, but, as we are constantly hearing, sovereignty is an elusive and enduring concept. On a Scottish model, perhaps we should have two Members of Parliament for Elmet; attractive as the thought may be, however, I do not think that it will commend itself to the House.

My Bill therefore restores the standard electoral quota for all parts of the UK, such as we enjoyed before 1958, without any guaranteed minimum number of seats. In doing that, we should not lose the opportunity to reduce the size of Parliament. I would therefore fix the standard electoral quota for the UK at the largest present individual quota: the English figure of just over 69,000. That would have the effect of reducing the overall number of Members of Parliament from 651 to 629. Henceforth, that should be the maximum number of Members. Future increases in population should increase the standard electoral quota rather than the number of Members.

Under those proposals, the representation of England and Northern Ireland would remain unchanged. Welsh Members would be reduced from 38 to 32, and Scottish Members from 72 to 56. That removes the unfairness in our present arrangements, while providing for equal representation for equal votes.

It is not, however, the end of the matter. The second part of my proposals is an attempt to answer the West Lothian question. An hon. Member, whose strong and logical opposition to a Scottish Parliament I share, asked how, if areas of policy were devolved, he as a Scottish Member at Westminster could

"be party to collective decision making on education in Accrington but be precluded from such matters in Armadale in Scotland, housing in Blackburn, Lancashire, but not Blackburn, West Lothian."

As recently as February 1992, the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) took it further. He said:

"Once we have a Scottish Parliament handling Scottish home affairs in Scotland, it is not possible for me to act as Minister of Health, administering health in England and Wales."

Quite so. The subterfuge of foisting unwanted regional assemblies on England will not make the problem go away.

There is, however, a practical solution for any part of the UK that seeks and is given an elected assembly with legislative and tax-raising powers. It is to raise that region's electoral quota by an appropriate percentage over the standard electoral quota for the UK as a whole. By way of guidance, my Bill proposes that, if the powers of such a devolved Parliament were to cover the whole range of domestic affairs, its electoral quota would be doubled, and pro rata for any lesser devolution of powers. Its duly elected Westminster Members of Parliament would then be fewer in number, but they would be free to vote on all issues and to hold all offices. We should also reduce still further the overall number of Members at Westminster, which would be a step for the better. Of course, we should have to brace ourselves for the loss of some respected colleagues who would wish, no doubt, to make their futures in Scotland.

Some people, however, would argue that the Bill would be unattractive to those who seek devolution. I respond by saying simply that the downside is not of my making. It is inherent in the concept of devolution. There is not a sustainable halfway house between a unitary UK and full independence. People who do not like the destination should not start down the slippery slope.

4.22 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I wish to oppose the Bill. There is no doubt that it is inherently anti-Scottish. As a Scots Member of this Parliament, I represent a Scottish constituency in the Parliament of a multi-national state. With the creation of a legislature in Northern Ireland, that multi-national state will be restructured—I would have thought that that was the inevitable result of the creation of a legislature in one part of the United Kingdom. In that sense alone, the Bill of the hon. Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste) is precipitous. Change will have to take place in a careful way, based on a rigorous analysis of what is likely to happen as a result of the restructuring that follows that brave document—the framework document.

What the hon. Gentleman says about Scottish constituencies does not stand up to examination. In a multi-national state's Parliament, there must be, as it were, a conglomeration of unevenness, and constituencies where there are more electors than in others.

For a whole raft of reasons, which I do not have time to mention now—I am sure that I would earn your displeasure, Madam Speaker, if I attempted to mention them—I object to this ill-advised and unpleasant measure.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 53, Noes 162.

Division No. 88] **[4.24 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Booth, Hartley
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Butcher, John
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartiss, Michael
Congdon, David
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Elletson, Harold
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fry, Sir Peter
Gorst, Sir John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Harris, David
Hawkins, Nick
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Horden, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sth)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lord, Michael
Maitland, Lady Olga
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Stewart, Allan
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Whitney, Ray
Wiggin, Sir Jerry

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. P. Nicholls and
Mr. J. Brazier.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alton, David
Armstrong, Hilary
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Bradley, Keith
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Donohoe, Brian H
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fyfe, Maria
Gallie, Phil
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Janner, Greville
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfedder, Sir James
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
Maddock, Diana

Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Mullin, Chris
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Purchase, Ken
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Tyler, Paul
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wise, Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn and
Mr. Andrew Miller.

Question accordingly negatived.

Points of Order

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to raise through you the situation facing immigration detainees at Campsfield detention centre and, in particular, the case of a young woman from the Ivory Coast who attempted to commit suicide this morning in order to stop herself being removed from this country. Is there any way in which we can insist on a Home Office Minister coming to the House to make a statement about the treatment of nearly 700 people who are in detention having committed no crime and having been charged with no offence?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): The Treasury Bench will have heard the hon. Gentleman. That is certainly not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is it a different point of order?

Mr. Austin-Walker: It relates to the previous point of order—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. With the greatest respect, I have already ruled on that point of order. I pointed out that the Treasury Bench had heard the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and that it was not a matter for the Chair.

Social Security

4.37 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Peter Lilley): I beg to move,

That the draft Statutory Sick Pay Percentage Threshold Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): I understand that with this, it will be convenient to discuss the following motions:

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Fund Payments) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) Amendment Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the Income-related Benefits Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 3) Regulations 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 1807), dated 7th July 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th July, in the last session of Parliament, be revoked.

Mr. Lilley: This is an annual opportunity to examine the detailed orders before the House and to discuss, after some weeks of consideration, the social security statement that I made after the Budget. Some may consider this a rather routine occasion, but I believe that it is a profoundly important debate because it raises issues of immense significance socially, economically and politically.

Socially, the debate is about meeting our commitments to those in greatest need. The Government are fulfilling that obligation by uprating in full, maintaining the value of benefits, focusing help where it can do most good and improving incentives for people to help themselves out of dependency.

The debate is of profound economic importance because social security is central to the control of public spending, borrowing and taxation. Through its effect on incentives, social security influences the dynamism of our labour force.

Finally, the debate is of immense significance politically. The Government have spelt out clearly their long-term strategy for social security. Now is the opportunity for the Opposition to spell out an alternative strategy. Today will provide the crucial test of whether the Labour party is seriously interested in becoming an alternative Government or whether, as I suspect, it is still in its heart wedded to permanent opposition. Parties of government propose; parties of opposition merely oppose. The fact that the shadow spokesman, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), has ducked the debate suggests to me that Labour has nothing to propose.

The Government's strategy is crystal clear—to maintain benefits, to focus help on the neediest, to improve incentives and to encourage self-provision. We are advancing on all those fronts in today's orders. Again, we shall meet our pledges on the level of benefits. All the main social security benefits will be uprated fully in line with prices in four weeks' time. The retirement pension for a couple will increase by £2 a week, and even less well-off pensioner couples with no other means will receive more than £100 a week plus their housing costs. The total cost of the uprating will be about £1.5 billion; that is a measure of our commitment to protecting those most in need.

Last week the Labour party endorsed the Rowntree report, which advocates uprating benefits in line with earnings. That would cost £3.3 billion, so will today's Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), come clean today? Is the Labour party committed to that extra spending, or was it simply trying to gull vulnerable people? I shall happily give way to the hon. Gentleman now if he wishes to set the record straight. I gather that he needs time to think about it.

When I published "The Growth of Social Security" in 1993 social security spending was expected to grow by 3.3 per cent. a year in real terms until the end of the century. Now we expect growth of only 1.3 per cent. a year in real terms over the next three years, and that is expected to be followed by underlying growth of 2.1 per cent. a year until the end of the century. As a result, social security spending at the end of the century is now expected to be about £8 billion lower than we forecast when my long-term review began.

A quarter of that fall is due to the reduction in unemployment that has already occurred. Nearly a quarter is due to other improvements in the outlook. More than half the reduction—about £4 billion a year—is due to savings from policy changes as our reforms take effect. The Labour party has opposed almost every reform that we have introduced, so it is incumbent on the Labour spokesmen today to tell the House where they would find £4 billion to replace the savings, or how they would finance the shortfall.

Those extra costs would be incurred before Labour even started to finance the £7 billion required for the main proposals of the Commission on Social Justice, let alone the untold billions of pounds that it would cost to implement all the proposals in the Rowntree report, which Labour praised last week.

At the start of our long-term review of social security we analysed systematically the main areas of prospective growth. First we identified sickness, invalidity and related benefits—hence the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act and the Statutory Sick Pay Act, both passed in 1994. From April this year, by means of a more objective test of incapacity, the new incapacity benefit will focus help on those genuinely incapable of work.

One of the orders will introduce an improvement flowing from the Statutory Sick Pay Act. From April a new scheme will give all employers help if a large proportion of their work force is off sick at any one time. That will be straightforward to operate, will protect cash flow and will continue to give small businesses the lion's share of the statutory sick pay reimbursement. The new scheme has been welcomed by the Confederation of British Industry, the Forum of Private Business, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Trades Union Congress.

The second major area of growth in spending that we identified was help with housing costs. The amount of support for housing costs through housing benefit has more than doubled in real terms since the benefit was introduced, and is now more than £10 billion a year. That is due not only to increases in rents but to the fact that

[Mr. Lilley]

there was a basic weakness in the system, which we have had to tackle—the open-ended commitment to pay 100 per cent. even of above-average rents.

Last November, therefore, I announced a major reform that will come into effect in October. It is a sensible reform designed to give tenants more interest in the level of rents, thus bringing pressure to bear on unreasonably high rents. We have already begun a process of informal consultation with interested parties.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): If the Secretary of State believes that rents will be reduced by the exercise of pressure, why do the Government not exercise that pressure on landlords? Why does he leave it to tenants, who in many instances are vulnerable, frail and elderly, to attempt to reduce their rents?

Mr. Lilley: It is sensible that there should be a countervailing force so that people have an incentive to make a reasonable choice when faced with two properties, and to choose the less expensive of the two if one of them has a rent above the average for properties of that type in the area. We prefer to leave choice in the hands of individuals—unlike the Labour party, which prefers all choices to be made by bureaucrats and set down by law.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lilley: Of course, I always give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Graham: Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that only this week a report was published about Glasgow, showing that over all the years of Conservative Government there has been an increase of 144 per cent. in the number of people who are ill and claiming benefit? Is he also aware that there are more than 30,000 homeless folk in Scotland who would desperately like to rent a home at a reasonable cost yet who, under the Conservative Government, have no chance of getting a home?

Mr. Lilley: On the contrary, we have taken great steps to increase opportunities for the homeless. The best way to make good use of taxpayers' money is to ensure that it is not spent unnecessarily on the most expensive properties, and on rents above those that the market should require to make sufficient properties available. That is what our reforms are designed to achieve.

We want to ensure that the details are properly discussed before being put into regulations, and my officials have already met representatives from the local authority associations, the Institute of Rent Officers and several other interested groups. Tomorrow we shall formally consult the Social Security Advisory Committee, which we envisage will then go out to wider public consultation.

It is important that the public's views are fed into the detail of the policy, including working up a system to give prospective tenants an idea of how much housing benefit will be payable before they sign up to a particular tenancy.

The costs of support for mortgage interest through income support have already increased rapidly from £31 million in 1978-79 to £1.1 billion last year. The system is manifestly unsatisfactory. It fails to provide comprehensive cover and protection for people who lose their jobs; two thirds of home owners would not qualify for income support to help with their mortgage interest if they became unemployed. Our proposals are self-evidently aimed to improve that position. They will give home owners more comprehensive protection when they have difficulty paying their mortgages.

The Social Security Advisory Committee's consultation document on mortgage interest and income support, issued on 10 February, invites comments from all interested parties. Clearly we shall be interested in the results of that consultation process. We are continuing our discussions with lenders and insurers to ensure that the interface between state and private provision works well.

I am determined wherever possible to make savings without any reduction in the levels of benefits for those most in need. The area of greatest scope for saving with no direct effects on benefit levels is obviously cutting the incidence of fraud. That is why I have made attacking fraud a priority.

Our efforts to detect and stop fraud are already increasingly successful. The Benefits Agency identified and stopped fraud worth £654 million in 1993-94—17 per cent. above its target—and I have no doubt that we shall exceed the target again this year. In April the agency will begin a five-year programme of investment to switch the emphasis away from detecting fraud towards deterring fraud and preventing it from happening in the first place.

Most fraud occurs through false declarations of earnings or circumstances. So the Benefits Agency will make more checks and more home visits, and will make better use of the information already held on our computer systems to help to spot fraud. Over the next three years that should deliver substantial savings of more than £2.5 billion over and above the existing level of fraud savings. We also expect a dramatic reduction in order book and girocheque frauds by automating benefit payments at post offices. But even more important than curbing spending is checking the growth in dependency on welfare. Before my reforms began, the debate was about how to help people who are on benefit. We still aim to do that. But now we have changed the whole focus of the debate towards how to help people come off benefit and into work.

The most effective way of raising the living standards and prospects of unemployed people is by helping them to return to work. The process continues with the package that I announced last November. New measures being introduced this year meet four major objectives.

First, we are continuing to improve benefits so that people have an even greater incentive to return to work. From July 1995, the £10 longer hours premium in family credit will make full-time work more attractive for those working 30 hours or more a week. Those on housing benefit or council tax benefit will receive in full that extra £10, which will not be offset against their housing benefit or council tax liability. We expect that more than 200,000 people will benefit in 1995-96, at a cost of £345 million. In April I shall make significant enhancements to disability working allowance to help more disabled people participate in work.

Secondly, to smooth the transition from benefit to work we shall speed up the payment of family credit from April, so that people in work will get that extra help more quickly. By April 1996 we expect almost all new claims for family credit to be arranged within five working days.

Thirdly, we want to encourage employers to provide more jobs, particularly for people with few skills or who have been unemployed for a long time. Another of the orders encourages employers to take on less skilled people by reducing employers' national insurance contributions for the second year running. This April, employers' contributions will be cut by 0.6 per cent. for all employees earning less than £205 a week. That will help the employers of 6.5 million people at a cost of £235 million.

Fourthly, I am examining ways to help low-paid people in work who do not qualify for family credit because they do not have children. I shall be publishing a consultation document in the spring for a substantial pilot study of an in-work benefit for people without children.

Overall, the measures will help almost 7 million people in the coming financial year at a cost of more than £440 million. That is a significant stage in a package that will build up to a total cost of some £600 million to the taxpayer in outgoings or revenue forgone.

I also take this opportunity to discuss the motion in the name of the Leader of the Opposition that the Income-related Benefit Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 3) Regulations 1994 be revoked. The House will recall that the regulations introduced a habitual residence test into income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit schemes from 1 August last year.

When I announced the habitual residence test, the Opposition's knee-jerk reaction was to oppose it, as they do almost all measures which we introduce to focus benefits on those who are genuinely needy and fully entitled to them. The Opposition said that benefit tourism was a non-problem, and that there were at most 5,000 continental claimants a year. They said that the residence test was anti-European. Today, they appear to be reaffirming their opposition to the regulations.

Experience since the test was introduced has demonstrated that its opponents were wrong on all counts. First, immediately after I announced the test, *Time Out* magazine—not exactly a friend of the Government—set out to debunk the idea of benefit tourism, but instead found vivid evidence of its existence. It described someone called Diego, 26, who came from Barcelona to learn drama, but quickly learnt how to use the system as well. He said:

"I shared a flat with four other Spaniards . . . all of them were on Income Support. I just followed their advice and did the same."

Within a month, he, too, was on income support.

Then there was Frédéric, a 28-year-old Frenchman, described by *Time Out* as

"the stuff of which Peter Lilley's nightmares are made."

I can assure *Time Out* that I do not have nightmares. He said:

"I came to Britain in July 1993 to learn English . . . I am on Income Support—£44 per week—and get my rent—£47.50 per week—paid by Housing Benefit. I also work on the side to earn enough to make a decent living. I know it is absolutely illegal. Not only that but I also get French unemployment and housing benefits. It takes a lot of concentration to dodge both systems at the same time. I am now a specialist and it is almost a full-time activity. I am well placed to compare both systems: the British system is far easier."

It was, but it is not now.

Foreign magazines also began to publish accounts because they could scarcely believe that we had ever allowed this situation to exist. They demonstrated how easy it was for other EC nationals to abuse our system. A Spanish magazine called *Tribuna* describes a holiday in Britain on benefit as

"a brilliant way to travel. You arrive in London one fine day, sign up at an employment office and, suddenly, money and rebates fall at your feet on a regular basis. Young Spaniards did not invent the scam but they are well known as being the most adept at taking advantage of the benefits posing as European emigrants in London."

Most EC countries were ahead of us in preventing such things from coming about. I would condemn any British citizen travelling abroad who tried to abuse any foreign benefits system just as much as I would as anyone who does it to our system. We were at fault in allowing the loophole to exist, and it was right that we closed it when we found that a minority were exploiting it.

The Opposition also stated that there very few people exploiting the system—at most, 5,000. As it has turned out, the number of continental claimants has turned out to be far larger than the Opposition's forecast. One might have expected the numbers to decline following the high-profile announcement that the door was being closed. Yet in the first six months that the test has been in operation, some 6,000 continental claimants of income support have been found to be not habitually resident here. There may be others who are claiming housing benefits.

As a result, total savings from the test are running at £30 million a year, ignoring any deterrent effect which the announcement may have had. We stopped the abuse in time. The Labour party seems to justify its opposition by synthetic concern for British citizens. They display a pseudo-nationalism that fits ill with their original complaints of discrimination. It says that it is all right to hit foreigners, but we must not in any way hit people who can claim British citizenship.

In fact, 88 per cent. of people from abroad who claim British citizenship pass the test, whereas 60 per cent. of continental claimants fail. Of those British citizens who failed, most had virtually no connection with this country. Most people would think it reasonable that they should not be entitled to benefit in this country until they have earned and paid taxes here.

I shall give examples from different parts of the country. An 18-year-old whose family emigrated to New Zealand when he was six came to this country on a return ticket paid by his father to visit his grandparents. He sought benefits, and I think it is right that he should have been refused them.

A 43-year-old who has lived her whole life with her mother in Italy has come to this country for two or three months every year for the past 10 years, and has claimed benefits in the UK. She has never worked in either country, and will no longer be entitled to benefit in this country. Do the Opposition wish to enable people like that to claim benefit?

A 20-year-old woman from the sub-continent who had never been to the United Kingdom until she arrived this year tried to claim benefit. She has never worked, knows no English and her husband lives in Saudi Arabia. Again, it is not obvious to me that we should give benefit to such people. In any case, under European Union rules we would not be entitled to discriminate on the basis of citizenship rather than residence and residence is, therefore, the basis of our test. It is similar to the basis that applies in almost all continental countries, which sensibly operate similar tests.

[Mr. Lilley]

I challenge the Opposition to say whether they think that we should return to a position in which people coming for short stays have open-ended access to claim our benefits, when they have no commitment to this country and pay no taxes here. I believe that the British public back us to the hilt.

To return to my opening arguments, we have our priorities right. We put the interests of those in greatest need first by focusing help on them, maintaining the value of their benefits and enhancing their incentives. We put British taxpayers' interests next, by curbing excessive growth in the cost of social security, and we put their interests above those of foreign claimants, as I explained. Finally, we are putting the interests of honest claimants, who constitute the vast majority, above those of fraudsters who nonetheless cost the British taxpayer large sums of money.

Labour Members seem to oppose all those priorities. We are waiting to see whether they will come up with a coherent alternative strategy today for tackling the problems of social security. I doubt very much whether they will. That is the test that they have to pass. If they fail, the House should pass our measures with acclaim.

5.1 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Opposition social security team to the motions and to respond to the extraordinary performance of the Secretary of State, who seemed determined to talk about many issues that were not before the House, rather than those presented for debate. I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I will stick to the issues before us and will not digress far from matters that are of such note today.

I was going to say in my opening remarks that the Secretary of State had clearly described the purpose of the orders and regulations. Unfortunately, he spent little time describing what we are here to debate. They deal with important matters, however. I shall spend some time on the uprating and re-rating orders, the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 1995 and the Income-related Benefits Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 3) Regulations 1994. The Secretary of State belatedly concentrated on the latter, which we have prayed against—it is more commonly known as the habitual residence test.

Clearly, the uprating of benefits is always welcome, but I must highlight several areas of concern. In particular, some benefits or benefit components will not be increased. As I am sure the Secretary of State is aware, those include: statutory sick pay; statutory maternity pay, which will again be frozen at £52.50; the maternity payment from the regulation-based social fund, which will again be frozen at £100; the capital limits, which will remain unchanged; and the earnings disregards, which will also remain unchanged. Perhaps the Minister could explain why those elements have not been considered for uprating.

Mr. Lilley: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Labour party would operate all those elements? If so, would he like to know the cost and would he commit the Labour party to financing that cost?

Mr. Bradley: As we enter the next election, the Labour party will see how far the Government have shifted on those elements and will find out what the real situation is. We will then develop our policies around the real situation. We will not do so two years before that point.

In relation to the compensatory recovery unit in Glasgow, perhaps the Minister will explain why the limit of £2,500—the cut-off point for recovery of benefit from people who have received a payment, for example, for personal injury—has also not been uprated. There is much disquiet in the House about that, especially about the fact that there is reclamation of benefit at that level. I would be grateful for any views that the Minister may have on the way in which that recovery unit is operating.

Mr. Gyles Brandreth (City of Chester): I honestly do not feel that the hon. Gentleman can have it both ways. He seems to deplore the fact that certain benefits are not being uprated and he is being critical, which is fair enough if that is what he believes, but he does not want to do anything about it. Either he wants the uprating or he does not. If he does, will he be specific about his view of the cost and where that money would be found? I do not think that he can have it both ways, as he is trying to do.

Mr. Bradley: It is always interesting when the hon. Gentleman intervenes. We never get any clarity about the issues that he raises.

I stress that we believe that the limit of £2,500 placed on the compensation recovery unit should be increased. My purpose was to question the Minister on his views on the matter, but I will press on.

Another key concern, which the Secretary of State mentioned in his opening remarks, is the change in housing benefit. We are well aware of the more fundamental review that is taking place. I may have misheard what the Secretary of State said, but it is not the case that there is an open-ended commitment to housing benefit on rents. A mechanism is already in place by which a rent officer can intervene to ensure that a reasonable rent is charged.

More particularly at this stage, we are concerned that the Government have increased the non-dependant deduction. The rate for non-dependants with gross earnings of between £74 and £110.99 is increased from £9 to £10, while the highest deduction for gross earnings of £145 or more is increased from £25 to £30—a 20 per cent. increase. That change will clearly have a significant effect on the housing costs of those groups of people. It could be especially damaging and could affect their ability to retain accommodation.

While on the subject of housing costs, it is important to comment again on the fact that the Government intend to cut income support for mortgage interest payments for people who lose their jobs, as the Secretary of State said. We await that debate with some interest. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman is well aware that there is already widespread opposition to such a measure, significantly among building societies and the Council of Mortgage Lenders. Perhaps even more significantly, many Conservative Back Benchers also oppose it. If the Social Security Advisory Committee also opposes the plans, will the Secretary of State drop them and instead take measures to protect people's homes, rather than to increase the likelihood of repossession?

Two further issues of concern regarding future plans should also be highlighted. First, on the proposed imposition of a ceiling of £875 for funeral expenses from

the social fund, although we would support a proper assessment of the charges made for funerals, it is essential to ensure that the ceiling does not deny the poorest people a dignified funeral. We also want assurances that the ceiling will be uprated and will not be allowed to decline further and, in effect, to wither on the vine.

Finally, on this section, I must highlight the reduced rates of benefit that will be paid under the new incapacity benefit—something on which the Secretary of State commented. The amount of money that claimants who manage to pass the new, stricter test of incapacity receive—I stress that they must pass the test—will be substantially reduced compared with invalidity benefit. On top of that, the new benefit will be taxed, as we know.

I have raised that matter on many occasions on the Floor of the House and in Committee. I make no apology for that, and I shall continue to do so. When that benefit comes into effect, on 13 April 1995, I predict an outcry of similar proportions to that associated with the chaos surrounding the introduction of the Child Support Agency. Once again, I emphasise to Conservative Members that they have been warned about the implications of the new cuts in incapacity benefit as a result of the harsher medical test.

I shall briefly discuss the Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 1995. Perhaps, for this part of the debate, we should call it the memorial debate on the guaranteed minimum pension, because I suspect that this is the last time that that order will be before us.

Although, obviously, we welcome the fact that the minimum pension is to be increased, the current arrangements will be abolished under the Pension Bill currently in another place, and new arrangements substituted. However, I understand that there will not be a similar guarantee of the pension under the new arrangements. Perhaps the Minister will confirm that to the House, because many pensioners wish to ensure that there will be a guarantee in the future arrangements for pensions.

On the new habitual residence test, I shall not fall into the trap of the populism in which the Secretary of State tried to indulge during his opening remarks but shall stick to the issues before us. The Secretary of State's speech was reminiscent of his speech to the Conservative party conference in 1993, when he first expressed his determination to root out benefit tourism.

I emphasise that Labour Members have no quarrel with rooting out benefit tourism, but we are not certain that the measures before us achieve that purpose. The Government's proposals may take a sledgehammer to crack a nut, and the original objective of the habitual residence test may have been achieved at the expense of the welfare of many British and other nationals who have come to or returned to the United Kingdom to settle.

This is not the first attempt to introduce such a test. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) undertook a similar review of the benefits system in the mid-1980s, when he was Secretary of State for Social Security, and there was at that time a similar proposal to introduce a residence test for income support, but that was rejected by the then Minister of State for Social Security. That Minister said:

"we decided that a blanket test would be too rigid, too cumbersome, and perhaps too unfair . . . It could have excluded people such as . . . British citizens returning from abroad, United Kingdom citizens on work contracts returning home".

He also foresaw:

"it could become an administrative nightmare . . . A costly administrative system would also have to be set up to deal with people who failed to qualify for benefit, yet who were in need that we would not, in practice, ignore."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 27 February 1986; c. 537.]

The Minister at that time was the present Prime Minister, and many people would accept the wisdom of his opinion at that time. Some would argue whether it is a Euro-sceptic or a Euro-phobic opinion, but the Secretary of State, whichever way he plays it, should reflect on that opinion in determining his current policies.

More recently, the Social Security Advisory Committee rejected the current plans. It recommended that the Government should not proceed with the introduction of the habitual residence test, on the ground that, although it might provide a solution to the problem of benefit tourism, it would have adverse consequences for many other claimants.

In practice, the test is proving arbitrary, subjective, complex and unfair. As there is no definition of habitual residence, several imprecise and, arguably, inappropriate criteria are used to establish residence. That lack of precision has made the writing of guidance for, and training of, staff extremely difficult.

Many categories of people have been caught by the test. The Secretary of State has alluded to them, but not in the way in which we would present our evidence. Those categories of people include the children of British citizens who were taken abroad by their parents who now wish to return to this country to take up their rightful citizenship; British nationals whose marriages have broken down while living abroad who want to return to Britain; and British nationals who have returned to Britain as a result of economic or political change in the country in which they have been living. In our opinion, none of those categories could be described as "benefit tourism".

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): I bring to my hon. Friend's attention, and that of the House, the case of a constituent of mine, Lisa Capon of Thornton Heath. She is a British subject who, at the age of 16, went to Portugal with her parents and her husband. Six years later—a few weeks ago—she returned to this country, to my constituency, and failed the habitual residence test.

Lisa had a one-way ticket back from Portugal to this country. She is five months pregnant. She could not obtain any social security money; she failed the test. As she does not have a child, although she is pregnant, she could not obtain help from social services.

On Friday evening, on behalf of my constituent, a British citizen, I had to telephone social services' emergency number. After some arm-twisting, I was promised that a food parcel would be given—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions are normally short and succinct. This is a very short debate and the hon. Gentleman has raised a question. I imagine that the spokesman for the Opposition will choose whether to reply to it.

Mr. Bradley: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend presented an example that illustrates the complex situation in which many people find themselves. I argue that the way in which the rules are interpreted and the way in which the criteria are being established mean that many people fall into similar traps.

[Mr. Bradley]

Also affected are those families spread across different continents who make long visits abroad. That is an especially common occurrence in the ethnic minority communities, many individual members of whom may have originally come to the UK as immigrants or whose parents settled here. In Bradford, for example, many welfare rights organisations report many problems arising as a result of the test. Similarly, the Commission for Racial Equality has mentioned many aspects of the administration of the test that cause unease.

Further, the Prime Minister, who was then Minister of State for Social Security, was right to predict the immense administrative problems. Advice agencies report that a great deal of extra work has been caused as a result of the test. The Benefits Agency needs to interview many claimants in circumstances where the habitual residence test is an issue affecting entitlement.

Thousands of cases are under appeal. The Secretary of State mentioned 6,000 cases that fail the habitual residence test. I should be grateful if he would say how many of those cases are currently under appeal.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): In view of the critique that the hon. Gentleman advanced, does he wish the habitual residence test to be abolished?

Mr. Bradley: If the hon. Gentleman will remain calm for a moment, I am sure that, by the end of my contribution, he will know what our position is.

The extra burden on offices is illustrated by the figures for interviews in one district office alone in the month of September; 934 people were interviewed, of whom 638 were refused benefit. The delays for appeal hearings are also in part a reflection of the numbers affected. It is commonplace for claimants to be forced to wait as long as six months before their cases are heard. For example, in the north Surrey area, appeals tribunals are now hearing cases that were appealed in August and September 1994.

I pay tribute to the invaluable work of the Child Poverty Action Group and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. Those organisations inform me that they understand that approximately two thirds of decisions to refuse benefit that are taken at local offices are overturned on appeal. That suggests that staff have not been properly trained, the guidance is faulty or it is simply bad law. Will the Secretary of State, or the Under-Secretary in winding up, comment on the position regarding refusals and appeals?

At the same time, claimants must wait a long time before a hearing without financial support, as in the example given by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks), and may not be entitled even to urgent case payments because of their discretionary nature.

When rejecting a presence test in 1986, the then Minister of State for Social Security, the current Prime Minister, questioned whether such a scheme would produce net savings for the Treasury. It would be useful to know today precisely what the savings are, if any, taking account of the cost of the additional staff time spent on habitual resident test work. From my visits to local Benefits Agency offices, I know that an enormous amount of staff time is involved in that work at the expense of other essential work that Benefits Agency staff undertake.

There is not time this afternoon to go into all the legal complexities of the test. Suffice it to say that I understand that the validity of the legislation is being challenged under domestic and European law. We await the outcome of those considerations with interest. Nor is there time to go into the many case studies which have been presented to us, representing a range of problems that have been presented at hon. Members' advice bureaux.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Is there time to tell us whether the hon. Gentleman would repeal the rule?

Mr. Bradley: I have been in the House long enough to have learnt not to give way to the hon. Gentleman, as he always makes rather limited interventions.

A range of complex cases that have been brought before us need careful consideration. However, it is clear from parliamentary answers that there is great uncertainty about who is being refused and for what reason, what the current situation on appeals is and precisely how much money is saved by that measure. We also know that great hardship is caused. In a reply dated 23 January 1995 to a letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), the Secretary of State said:

> "The Department is monitoring the effect of the habitual residents test on British Citizens. However, because habitual residence is assessed on the basis of a variety of factors, it is not possible to be categorical about the reasons for being turned down".

We share that view. The test should be thoroughly reviewed in the light of—

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bradley: No, I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman can make his own speech.

Mr. Heald: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Heald: It is, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Motion No. 6 on the Order Paper says:

> "That the Income-related Benefits Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 3) Regulations 1994 . . . be revoked."

Is it therefore in order for the hon. Gentleman, far from asking for the regulations to be revoked, simply to say that they should be reviewed?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is entirely in order for hon. Members to take any viewpoint that they choose. It depends on their view at the time. It is certainly not a matter for the Chair, and the hon. Gentleman knows that full well.

Mr. Heald: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the case of Pepper *v.* Hart in the House of Lords—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not terribly interested in what took place in the House of Lords this afternoon. We have a debate before us and I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would resume his seat.

Mr. Bradley: The whole system should be thoroughly reviewed. The Government should take it away from the House and come back with a sensible system that does not involve all the contradictions and complexities that I have highlighted. That is why we shall vote against the orders.

5.23 pm

Sir Nicholas Scott (Chelsea): I stand before the House as an unreformed addict, having spent seven years hooked entirely on social security. I have had a bare seven months off the habit and feel constrained to come back today to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his colleagues on the orders and regulations which he has placed before the House and which we are discussing. They enshrine a proper disciplined and constructive approach and a caring package for the future of social security for the coming years.

Social security is never an easy issue. Anyone who must come to grips with the conflicting measures within the social security system knows how difficult it is to reconcile those differing positions and pressures. It may be an easy matter for those who sit on the Opposition Benches, and I hope that Labour Members will continue to sit on them for a long time to come. I genuinely congratulate my right hon. Friend and his team on their work. I see that the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) is quitting the scene. I do not wish to detain him unnecessarily. I understand the dilemma that his team must face. I am sure that he and his hon. Friends have all sorts of genuine concerns that they would like to express and grievances that they want to redress, but the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor will not allow them to say anything positive, or enter into a commitment, in terms of future social security expenditure.

Opposition Members can meet the devoted and hardworking group of people from the lobby outside the House, who have all sorts of genuine concerns in which they believe and who can come and discuss their concerns with Opposition Members. But Opposition Members can give them no commitments because the shadow Chancellor and Leader of the Opposition will not allow them to do so. They come before the House and laud and praise the work of the Commission for Social Justice, but cannot commit themselves to any of the ideas that it has put forward because the shadow Chancellor and Leader of the Opposition will not let them.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): It is a pleasure to have the right hon. Gentleman in the Chamber agreeing with the Government, when he so manifestly did not agree with them for so long when he was in office. He properly points to the dilemmas that face any Opposition, and no doubt any Government over whom the Treasury looms so large. He mentioned unhappiness; is he entirely happy about the changes represented by the new incapacity benefit?

Sir Nicholas Scott: I shall deal with many of those matters, including incapacity benefit, in a moment or two.

I should have thought that, having been so long on that side of the House, the Opposition would by now have found some device whereby they could commit themselves to something when they discuss those matters, even though they are under the constraints that I mentioned. At present, however, the House and the country as a whole have no idea of the social security policies that Labour Members would pursue, were they by any mischance to find themselves in government. Nor have we any idea of the costs of pursuing the policies that they have in mind. In essence, they are hiding behind some sort of political yashmak, denying that the public, despite their entreaties and desires, would like to see what goods are hidden behind it. It is about time that they begin to reveal what is on offer to people before they spend much more time criticising the constructive way in which my right hon. Friend and his team have been tackling social security problems.

Let us imagine for a moment that the hon. Member for Garscadden were given his dream and were holding the reins of power over social security. Let us enjoy the fantasy for a moment and imagine what would happen if he took over responsibility for the largest policy centre in Government. Could he cast aside his party's opposition to our sustained and responsible policy of cost containment and affordability, thus dashing the hopes and expectations of many of those in the lobby outside whom, with a nod and a whisper, a wink here and a gesture there, he has been able to persuade how different life would be under a Labour Government? If the hon. Member for Garscadden were to bow to the articulate, intelligent, persuasive, highly motivated and genuine lobby outside—who would expect him to find extra money to spend on social security—we would end up with runaway expenditure and high rates of inflation. We would be broke and subject once more to the whims and the mercies of the International Monetary Fund.

The hon. Gentleman has a real problem. He is a Scotsman and perhaps his problem is set out more clearly in what I suppose we might refer to, even in this theatre, as the Scottish play. Macbeth is challenged by his wife who says:

> "Art Thou afeared
> To be the same in thine own act and valour
> As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
> Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,"—

the hon. Gentleman can tell us what that might be—

> "And live a coward in thine own esteem,
> Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would'.
> Like the poor cat i' the adage?"

No one would accuse the hon. Gentleman or his team of cowardice, but I think that they should show the House and the country a little more nerve and candour in order to enable the electorate better to judge their intentions.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his colleagues on their notable achievement this year in sustaining the Government's commitment to uprate all the main benefits in line with inflation; yet the growth in expenditure on social security has been reduced substantially this year, and that trend will continue for the next three years.

I think that we all understand the two main reasons for that reduction. The first concerns the Government's achievements in producing low inflation and lower unemployment. Inflation is now at an historically low level that we have not seen since the early 1960s. I believe that the Government deserve immense credit for that achievement. Unemployment has been reduced by 555,000 since its peak in 1992 and it is still decreasing. Those two factors, in themselves, are good for people and for the health of society, but they also provide a background against which we can examine our social security needs.

Secondly, I believe that my right hon. Friend would acknowledge that he has built on the foundation which was laid by his predecessor, who adopted a sensible, sustained and rigorous approach to social security expenditure. I remember that when I arrived back from

[Sir Nicholas Scott]

Northern Ireland I was told by a senior officer of the then Department of Health and Social Security that I had a privilege unique in Government except for Treasury Ministers: I could introduce a Bill every single year. I must admit that that blessing was somewhat mixed in its application.

Over the years, billions of pounds of taxpayers' money has been saved while the Government have retained a defensible, compassionate and caring social security system. Nothing stands still in social security: if social security changes, society adapts and changes also, and the social security system must then adapt to meet those changed habits and needs. We can never say that we have the answer to meet the plethora of needs that exist in any advanced industrialised society.

As a Minister with responsibilities in the social security area, I witnessed the growth in certain aspects of social security, such as housing benefit and invalidity benefit, for quite inexplicable reasons which could not be justified by any real change in people's circumstances. It simply became fashionable to apply for certain benefits and, inevitably, it became necessary for Government to draw back and tighten the criteria of eligibility for entitlement to those benefits. That is a never-ending challenge for those who are responsible for social security in this country. We must keep provision up to date: we must meet new needs while ensuring that we continue to meet the needs of those who are in genuine distress.

I am disappointed at the low take-up of the disability working allowance. It was introduced at the same time as the disability living allowance, which has been a conspicuous success. I believe that DWA has failed to be successful in part because many disabled people who would like to work and who wish to give work a chance believe that, if they try it and fail, they will not be able to go back on to their pre-existing benefits.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot), know that that is not so. However, if we could present a cast-iron, copper-bottomed guarantee that people will be able to return to their pre-existing benefits, we might be able to encourage them to take up the opportunities that are proffered by the disability working allowance.

My right hon. Friend addressed the issue of pensions very carefully in his Mais lecture. He pointed out that half the benefit expenditure is spent on the elderly in our community and that in the next century the imbalance will become even greater. As the population balance alters, there will be problems not only with the public provision of state pensions but with private provision of pensions.

We must look at other ways of encouraging the growth of personal pensions. Their growth to date has been welcome and has proved useful. We should not make a rush judgment, but it would be sensible to consider the possibility of compulsory private pension provision in the future. That may sound like a strange concept, but I believe that many people who have made proper provision for their own retirement are resentful that they must pay, through their taxation, for those who have made no such provision. That resentment will grow among the elderly and those of working age as the pressures on the cost of retirement income increase as we move into the next century. We must consider that dilemma and begin to address it.

The price of success and responsibility in social security in any advanced country is eternal vigilance. Without it, demand can become unsustainable. A number of advanced countries have been faced with unsustainable demand and, panic stricken, have had to resile from the commitments into which they entered. It is correct for my right hon. Friend and his team to look ahead and plan for the future of social security in the next century. As I have said, society is not static; it is dynamic and volatile.

It is very easy for particular areas of expenditure to escalate out of control, and we must ensure that that does not occur. The old special payments scheme was replaced by the social fund, which proved to be a much better controlled system of meeting exceptional need. The housing benefit and invalidity benefit have had many problems. Although the new incapacity benefit will have the teething problems that are associated with any change to the system, I believe that it is a much more sensible and responsible way of tackling the needs of incapacity in our society. Mortgage interest must be examined also.

Those of us who are in charge of events should continue to proceed one step at a time. We must continue to seek a more affordable, sustainable and a better social security system than we have even now. Today's orders and regulations represent a very important step in that direction.

5.39 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): There is a strong theatrical tradition that it is desperately unlucky to quote from the Scottish play in any theatre where that play is not actually being performed. However, the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) is in a better position than I am to know what is really going on in the Cabinet, so perhaps, in his case, lightening will not strike twice.

Let me return the Secretary of State briefly to housing benefit. He was most courteous in allowing my intervention and I took on board his point about providing citizens with choice, but many of my more elderly constituents are being denied the only choice—indeed, right—that they value, and that is the certainty that they will be allowed to live out their days in what has been their home for a considerable number of years. They are consistently concerned about year-on-year rent increases and they are in no position to look for an alternative place to live. They have no possibility of arguing the rent down with their landlords and it causes them real distress.

Mr. Lilley: Let me make it clear to the hon. Lady—I hope that it will be reassurance for her obvious concerns for her constituents—that there is no intention of applying the measure retrospectively to people already established and claiming housing benefit. It applies to new claims for housing benefit. It is obviously much easier for someone newly claiming housing benefit and having to choose where to live to decide between different premises. Those who are already retired and on housing benefit will not suddenly be deprived of a portion of their housing benefit and be required to move elsewhere.

Ms Jackson: Will the Secretary of State clarify that a little further? Does he mean that if the landlord of those

who are, and have been, in receipt of housing benefit for a number of years chooses to raise their rent year-on-year, their housing benefit will still be met in full?

Mr. Lilley: Subject to the rent not being in excess of a reasonable market rent, yes, it will.

Ms Jackson: With respect to the Secretary of State, that is absolutely the nub of the problem and precisely the reason why so many of my constituents are justifiably afraid.

There has been an increase in the number of people who buy up properties and wish their sitting tenants to leave. They want to turn them out. They wish perhaps to modernise the properties that they have bought and they believe that there will be a higher return on their investment if they can reduce the number of flats in a house of comparatively multiple occupation. Therefore, an increasing number of my constituents who are elderly and who have lived in the same properties for a considerable number of years are undoubtedly being pressured by their landlords. In many instances, a landlord can evict tenants who have lived in a property for many years only when they can no longer pay the rent.

Will the Secretary of State discuss with the Secretary of State for the Environment the possibility of reintroducing some fair rents scheme? I understand that there has been no positive response to the idea, but the problem is causing real hardship and I believe that it will affect an even larger number of people.

At the moment, people are having to choose between taking a job or losing their homes and I cannot believe that the Government actually wish that to happen. In the light of the year-on-year increases in rent over the past few years, the issue really should be examined again and I would be grateful if the Secretary of State could do that.

I am grateful to have been called in the debate and I am even more grateful that the habitual residence test is part of our deliberations tonight, not least on the level of obtaining some information, as I hope that we shall. Whenever I have tabled a written question to the Department of Social Security—for example, on the number of British citizens who are awaiting the results of their appeals under the test, the number of citizens of former Commonwealth countries who have applied for the test, the number of British families who are affected by the habitual residence test, the ages of children within those families and the ages of individuals who have been asked to undertake the test—the reply that I have consistently received is that no such figures are kept centrally and the cost of providing them would be prohibitive.

I find that an absolutely extraordinary response, given that, when the Secretary of State introduced what I believe to be genuinely nasty legislation in what I would also argue was an singularly nasty little speech, we were told that the habitual residence test was being introduced to close a loophole against benefits tourists attempting to perpetrate fraud against British taxpayers. However, a detailed letter that the Secretary of State sent in response to an inquiry from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), contained the following sentence:

"Although immigration status has always been relevant to Income Support entitlement, the nationality of claimants from European Economic Area (EEA) states is not recorded, hence the absence of hard data."

In the speech that introduced the habitual residence test, which the Secretary of State delivered at the Conservative party conference in 1993, he depicted a crooks' tour, and the nationals whom he proceeded to insult were the citizens of Germany, France and Italy, yet it would seem that there is actually no hard evidence to support what I regard as an extremely damaging piece of legislation.

Setting aside the issues of European Union nationals who are being caught by the habitual residence tests and looking instead at benefit tourism, which was my understanding of why the test was introduced in the first place, I would be grateful to know, as I am sure would every right hon. and hon. Member, how a young British citizen, who, regrettably, at the age of 19 moved from education to the dole queue was denied any claim upon the benefits system because she was deemed to have to undergo the habitual residence test. To regard a move from education to unemployment as a tour or a journey seems absurd in the extreme.

Another example is one of my constituents, a woman in her late 40s who is a freelance journalist. She found it impossible to obtain employment in Britain, the country of her birth, so at the age of 30 she moved to Greece, where for 13 years she was successful in obtaining employment as a freelance journalist. Due to her own ill health and that of an elderly relative, she found it necessary to return to Britain. In the interim, her elderly relative died. She had already sold such property as she had in Greece—it was very small in quantity—and she arrived in Britain with no living relatives, admittedly not having lived here for 13 years, and had to undergo the habitual residence test. She was left with absolutely no means of support, given that it is taking the Benefits Agency offices in my part of north London anything up to three months to process an application and an appeal. In one absolutely shocking case involving a young pregnant woman, it took five months before any answer came.

We are denying British citizens any rights whatsoever. It is not simply the right to obtain sustenance from the benefits system; it is a denial of the most basic civil rights and liberties that people can be born British citizens, attempt—as the Government are always urging our citizens to do—to maintain themselves by employment, find that employment abroad and yet, when they return to Britain, be denied their rightful places as British citizens.

I shall deal briefly with another case in my constituency involving a citizen of the European Union who has lived and worked in this country for at least five years. Because of a downturn in his employment, he applied to the Benefits Agency. Not only did the agency insist that he undergo the habitual residence test but it asked him to produce his passport. That seems to be a gross abuse of the agency's responsibilities, and I urge the Secretary of State to re-examine what the test is supposedly doing for the citizens of this country.

I should be grateful to see the hard evidence that proves that the taxpayer is being saved money and equally grateful to see that which proves that the particular group of people that the test is seemingly targeting are exercising gross fraud on the citizens of this country.

I realise that time is short so I shall conclude by giving details of two further cases in my constituency, both involving young women. Indeed, the test impacts especially harshly on women, and that is certainly so in the two instances that I shall outline now. Both cases involve women who, for a variety of reasons, which are

[Ms Jackson]

no business of the House and into which we have no right to inquire, ended up abroad but in failing marriages. In one case, the woman, who is a British citizen and has a small child, had to return to this country because of the severe domestic violence that she was suffering at the hands of her now estranged husband. The other woman had to return because of a breakdown of relations between her in-laws.

In both instances, the women returned to their own country: one returned with a very small child and one was five months pregnant. They both had to undergo the habitual residence test and were denied any support for a considerable time. It was only the generosity and kindliness of friends that sustained them until the appeals found for them.

I do not know whether it was at the same Conservative party conference that the Secretary of State delivered the speech to which I referred, but I distinctly remember the Prime Minister speaking of his desire for people to be able to hand on what was their own to their own. I believe that he was referring to property rather than to citizens' rights but I think that British parents would find it deeply shocking—I know I do—if, via this nasty little test, the great gift of British citizenship and all that it entails were to be denied to their children and grandchildren.

5.52 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Worcester): I begin by apologising to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the House for the fact that I shall not be able to stay long after I have made my speech as I have a long-standing engagement elsewhere. I pay tribute to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) which he made with the elegance and compassion that are characteristic of his whole political career.

Let me put my remarks in context. The House is aware that it is estimated that the social security system will cost some £84 billion for the current year which, I am told, works out at about £15 per working person per day. That is a huge sum of money. Even after the reforms that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has put in place, it is planned that in real terms the social security budget should grow by some 2.1 per cent. a year in future. That is a huge rate of growth on a huge sum of money, and it is important that we bear that in mind as we consider all the many difficult choices that Ministers have to make.

The central question is whether it is right that the bulk of social security benefits should be uplifted only by price inflation, not linked to earnings, as the recent report of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation sought to suggest. It might help the House if I quoted the JRF summary. It states:

"More people became dependent on benefits like Income Support as a result of both higher unemployment and demographic factors."

I think that we can accept that. It continued:

"The income gap widened between those dependent on benefits and those with earnings."

We can also accept that as a factual statement. It then went on to state:

"Since the early 1980s, benefit levels have generally been linked to prices, so that the incomes of those dependent on benefits have fallen behind the working population."

It now becomes more tendentious by stating:

"Those remaining dependent on price-linked benefits have little or no stake in the prosperity of the country, since rising real incomes in general have no effect on their own standard of living."

Here, I believe, the foundation is straying into dangerous territory. It concludes:

"While the priority has to be to ensure that, where possible, people do not remain dependent on benefits, there will remain groups who do so. In such cases, indefinite price indexation is not adequate, and their benefits should increase by more than inflation at times when living standards in general are rising."

Superficially, that seems a plausible analysis, but the foundation's inquiry has missed one crucial point, which is that the incomes of the poorest members of our society depend not only on cash benefits from the state but on a range of benefits in kind that they receive from the state. In this respect, the poorest members of society do disproportionately well.

What are these benefits in kind, these social transfers funded by the taxpayer? I am thinking of things such as the national health service, education, housing and public transport subsidies, welfare milk and free school meals. All these must be taken into account when working out the real net incomes of every member of society. There have been huge increases in benefits in kind during the lifetime of this Government. When judging whether price indexation is the appropriate measure for setting social security benefits, we must take them all into account.

I am glad that the Social Market Foundation has studied the matter in detail. A recent report by Andrew Cooper and Roderick Nye sheds a great deal of light on the subject. They conclude that

"in 1993 the poorest fifth of UK households gained an estimated £3,610 from state benefits in kind, £1,530 more than the wealthiest fifth . . . By ignoring benefits in kind the Inquiry"—

the JRF study—

"paints an incomplete picture about the way Britain's poorest are faring. By confining itself to cash benefits and income the Report's conclusion is little more than a function of the linkage of benefits to prices instead of earnings, a change offset by the increase in real spending of public services represented by benefits in kind."

They state that the inquiry's failure to include this in its calculations

"can only be sustained by ignoring what is currently 48.3 per cent. of the final income of Britain's poorest households."

Nearly half their income is from benefits in kind. They continue:

"the Inquiry is borne out of a consensus which regards maintaining and increasing expenditure on public services like education and the NHS as vital to preserving living standards, yet when the most comprehensive study of its kind into Income and Wealth is conducted these figures are excluded."

By excluding such important considerations, the central finding of the JRF inquiry—that benefits should be linked to earnings rather than prices—has been invalidated.

Health expenditure has risen from 4.7 per cent. of gross domestic product when the Conservatives came to power to 6 per cent. of GDP now. That is a huge increase which disproportionately benefits the poorest members of society. Education expenditure, which is at present the subject of much controversy, has risen by 50 per cent. per pupil in real terms since the Government took office. These factors must be weighed in the balance when we consider the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1995.

I accept that there are problems with poverty, as the JRF report said. They are often heavily localised and, I believe, best addressed by local regeneration measures. The work of English Partnerships, for example, is crucial in this respect. I accept that inequality in our society has increased, but, unlike the JRF inquiry, I do not accept that that is automatically a bad thing. Some measure of inequality is essential as an engine of economic growth and enterprise.

I believe that, theoretically, indexation to prices alone might have an adverse impact on the incomes of the poorest, but, looking at the broader picture, that is clearly not the case. The problem of growing inequality in our society and the problems of the poorest 10 per cent. about which the pessimistic talk a great deal are in reality nothing like as great as has been suggested, which is why I believe that it is absolutely right for the Government to stick to the principle of price indexation for the vast range of social security benefits.

I should like to reinforce the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea about the impact of targeting, particularly on the thrifty elderly. It sounds very good and reassuring, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his opening remarks, that we must focus help on the most needy, and I agree that we do, but we must recognise that the practical effect of focusing that help can all too often be to remove from benefit entitlement those who are only marginally better off than people in receipt of benefit. That leads to very real resentment, particularly among elderly people in my constituency who are not in receipt of benefits, who have made some modest provision for their old age, but who find that the couple next door, who have made no such provision, are the beneficiaries of all these state benefits. We cannot duck that issue for much longer and it is one to which I hope that my right hon. Friend will give greater attention.

On housing benefit, I believe that it is wrong to subsidise both bricks and mortar and people. If we subsidise people alone and allow rents for all forms of housing tenure to rise to something nearer market levels, it lets the market work. It will bring about the revival of the private rented sector, and that is happening thanks to the assured tenancy scheme, which all Conservative Members wish to see continue.

Housing benefit has trebled since 1979 to some £10 billion today, so it is fully understandable why the Treasury should be so concerned. I welcome the reforms that are part of the packages recently announced by my right hon. Friend. That we should have some limit on what rents in a particular area should be eligible for housing benefit seems entirely reasonable to me, as does the idea that in a household in which people are working the person in receipt of housing benefit should have a corresponding reduction in that benefit. If we cut the subsidy to the Housing Corporations and, more generally, housing benefit—which we are not currently doing—the result could be a loss of confidence in the financial institutions that go into partnership with the housing associations to fund housing, that money will be there in future to fund social housing for rent. I urge my right hon. Friend to look carefully at pressure from the Treasury for a more broad-based reduction in housing benefit if at the same time there are reductions in the subsidy to housing corporations, because that could have an unfortunate impact on the housing association movement in this country.

The broad issues being discussed by the House today are right and proper. The Government are right to insist on linkage only to prices, not earnings, and I commend the orders to the House.

6.1 pm

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): There is a great deal for us to debate this evening. I feel that this is an awkward way to debate the orders. As my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said at the same time last year, it is an inconvenient mix and match of orders. It is difficult to give proper consideration to them all, but it is even worse today, because there are six orders before us. The Government might be quite happy to stifle debate, particularly on the sensitive issue of the habitual residence test, and avoid debate when the order was laid before the House and became law, but we are here today to debate whether we should revoke that order. I believe that we should, as I shall explain later.

The order dealing with habitual residence tests has been tacked on to the end of five other orders, and we must get through all of them by 7 o'clock tonight. I shall deal with one order in particular—the reduction of class 2 national insurance contributions for share fishermen. That is welcome, of course, but it will not compensate for all the problems that British fishermen currently have, not least with the Spanish fishermen being allowed to fish in the Irish box.

It is right that we should debate the rise in benefits in line with inflation, but I believe that the debate should be widened. We should be talking about a fundamental review of the whole benefits system. We should be talking about trying to protect people from poverty and getting people back into work. The Government, under the reforms banner—I believe that it is a banner—are hacking away at benefit expenditure, which is storing up problems for us in the long term. All these measures should be looked at in the light of that fact.

In the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Fund Payments) Order, for instance, the amount paid into that fund in 1995-96 must not exceed 10 per cent. of the benefits expenditure. That is a reduction of £2 billion on what the Treasury was able to spend last year to top up national insurance contributions. That is partly due to the rise in national insurance contributions and the fact that benefit payments have decreased. I would welcome that if it was for the real reason of getting more people back into employment, but that is not the main issue here. The Government are trying to save money by cutting benefits. I believe that they excel in short-term planning—looking towards the next election and no further. What they are trying to do, as in all other departments, is cut benefit expenditure so that they can buy votes with tax cuts at the next election. I do not believe that the British electorate will be bought at the expense of the most vulnerable in society.

We must look at the report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation about the gap between the rich and poor. Poverty damages people's health. It will increase the bill to the taxpayer; the more ill people are, the more the taxpayer must pay. The creation of an underclass costs money, through an increase in crime. I believe that the

[Ms Liz Lynne]

Secretary of State for Social Security acknowledged that fact when he spoke in Northern Ireland a few months ago. He talked about the gap between the rich and poor and about the unemployed. He linked it to a rise in crime. It will have a knock-on effect for the taxpayer—through higher prices not only for the police and the prison service but for insurance premiums, as crime rates go up.

The most recent report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said that the tax and benefits system does not bolster the married state. The Government talk about the family all the time. I firmly believe, as I am sure do hon. Members on both sides of the House, that a stable family—and I mean a stable family—is the best way to bring up children, but the Government are letting the family down. One has only to look at that report to know that that is true. There will be a tremendous knock-on effect for the stability of the country in the future.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Lady tell us in which way the decision of the Liberal party conference to provide for the prescription of contraceptives to under-age children bolsters the family?

Ms Lynne: I really wish that I had not given way to such a stupid remark. We are talking about social security uprating. Perhaps if the hon. Gentleman is called, he can make his points in his own way.

The Secretary of State should be addressing all aspects of benefits and should not just talk about benefit tourists, scroungers and fraud, although I want to get rid of fraud as much as he probably does. He must examine the more difficult arguments as well. It is all very fine for him to get a standing ovation at the Conservative party conference when he talks about wiping out fraud. I would like to see him get a standing ovation at that conference by talking about investment in people. I doubt very much whether he would get one, or indeed whether he would even talk about it.

I welcome the chance that the orders have given us to debate benefits. We must use the benefits system to lift people out of poverty. They are usually there through no fault of their own. We must ensure that they can make a worthwhile contribution to society in future. But that requires bold planning. We need to bring in some bold measures. I would like to see a proper, full benefit transfer scheme to get people back into work. I would like to see a low-income benefit. I make no apology for mentioning it again, but I would like to merge income support and family credit so that people are always better off in work and do not lose benefits pound for pound. I would like to see a top-up element to the basic state pension—it has gone down in real terms since the Government came into power—in line with income support, and for that top-up element to be linked to earnings.

Mr. Heald: The hon. Lady—like the Rowntree report—seems to advocate raising the level of benefits above that of price inflation. Will she cost that? What is the Liberal policy, and by what amount should the benefits be uprated?

Ms Lynne: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening, he would know that I was proposing the restructuring of the benefits system and the introduction of a benefit transfer scheme. I was proposing the merging of benefits. I cannot talk about the possibility of uprating income support and family credit, for instance, given that we want to merge the two schemes into a single low-income benefit. That is the way in which we can return people to work.

The debate gives us a great opportunity to examine the Government's strategy. In fact, I do not believe that they have a strategy to improve the benefits system. Although I welcome the introduction of a measure on statutory sick pay to remove the burden from small businesses, its effect is very small in comparison with the impact of the Statutory Sick Pay Act 1994 on small businesses throughout the country. I doubt whether many small businesses are currently congratulating the Government.

The Government are trying to pretend that they are giving more than they are. Similarly, they stated that under the Act small employers would be given a rebate if an employee was off sick for more than four weeks; they failed to add that the majority of employees return to work before the four weeks are up. Nevertheless, the order that we are discussing will help small businesses if, for instance, a large number of employees are off work with flu. I welcome that, but it should have been in the Act.

Employees have suffered discrimination under the current statutory sick pay arrangements. Now that firms must pay 100 per cent. of the bill, employers are looking for people with better sickness records. That is understandable, but it is not acceptable. Employers have dismissed staff who have worked for them for under two years because of their sickness records; citizens' advice bureaux have a list of problems connected with the Statutory Sick Pay Act, but the order contains no proposals to help the people concerned.

As I have said, I welcome the small amount of help that has been given, but I feel that we should consider wider issues. I was sad to note that maternity benefit and the funeral grant have been left out of the uprating of the social fund; I was particularly sad about the funeral grant.

In 1986, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major)—who has already been quoted—said that the habitual residence test would be an administrative nightmare. I entirely agree: indeed, it is already beginning to be an administrative nightmare. The Secretary of State mentioned benefits to tourists in his speech at the Conservative party conference, and that is why the order was laid. The right hon. Gentleman even acted against the advice of the Social Security Advisory Committee.

The problem with the test is that it does not define habitual residence for the purpose of the order, and there will therefore be appeals in many cases. Many such cases are being won, but in the mean time the people involved are denied benefit because the Government say that they will appeal again. I very much doubt that they will pay interest if the next appeal is won.

I have encountered several such cases in my constituency. One of my constituents has worked in this country for some time, but when his father became very ill in Pakistan he went off to look after him. It took just over a year for the father to die. The son returned to this country, began to work again and paid his national insurance and tax contributions. Then his mother was taken ill. As there were no other relatives to look after her, he had to return to Pakistan to nurse her and take care of all her affairs. She subsequently died.

The man has just returned to this country. He came to my surgery last week in a terrible state, because he was receiving no money. He has nothing to live on. This is a

man who was working in this country, and paying tax and national insurance. Now he is living off friends: he is desperate. I am sure that, if the Secretary of State or the Minister had seen him in my surgery, they would have realised that he was a genuine case. He is a British citizen, and has worked in this country.

In the speech to which I referred earlier, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon said that people should be able to obtain money from the social fund if they were turned down for income support, housing benefit or a rebate for poll tax—which has now become council tax—or if they failed the habitual residence test. My constituent could not obtain money from the social fund; he has no money at all.

The right hon. Member for Huntingdon—who, of course, is now the Prime Minister—went on to say:

"What is clear from all our habits and history is that when people are in desperate need it has never been the fashion in this country—nor would it be the wish of my hon. Friends—not to provide assistance that is sorely needed."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 27 February 1986; c. 537.]

Things may have changed; things may have moved on. But that is still an excellent argument against the test.

The main problems have been experienced by British nationals, although the order was designed to catch foreigners. I do not want people to come here and claim benefit to which they are not entitled, but the legislation is affecting British citizens who, having gone abroad to work on contract for perhaps a couple of years, return to find that they cannot claim anything.

Another example is the person who lives abroad with a spouse who subsequently dies. It is usually the wife who returns to be near the family; that wife is not allowed to claim benefit. She is refused under the habitual residence test. A constituent of mine is in that position. Her husband is dead, she has two children and she cannot claim any support.

In the first three months of the operation of the test, 2,086 British nationals were denied benefit. We are not talking about foreigners; we are talking about British nationals. The money is means tested, so the revocation of the order would not benefit those with considerable resources. It is those with nothing—those experiencing real hardship—who would benefit.

The Child Poverty Action Group has drawn attention to the case of a British woman who went to Spain. It was the usual story: she married, and then went to Spain to live with her husband. He left her, and she came back to this country with two children aged seven and 10. Her husband had left her with no money, and she had nowhere to live in Spain, so she returned to this country. She could not obtain income support, because she could not prove that she was habitually resident here. She, too, has no money. How on earth is she supposed to support her two children?

I do not see how the Government can fail to accept that a number of people have suffered acute hardship. That number does not run into many thousands now, but if we do not revoke the order it could increase dramatically. I only wish that the nice words of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon meant something today. Surely, now that he is Prime Minister, he should have more influence; he should read again what he said in his speech about the habitual residence test. The Secretary of State and the Minister should also take note of what the Prime Minister said then.

What savings will the Government make? I do not think that the savings could compare with the misery that the Government are creating for some British families. I hope that they will revoke the order, because it is targeting the wrong people. It must be scrapped because, otherwise, people will live in abject poverty. We must also consider restructuring the whole benefit system, otherwise we will have not only a two-tier health service, but a two-tier wealth service, which will tear the country apart.

6.19 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): This—and any—debate on public spending must start from the basic proposition: what can the country afford? After all, every penny that is paid in benefit ultimately comes out of the taxpayer's pocket. We have been able to uprate these benefits fully against inflation because the economy is being run properly. A large amount of money—£1.5 billion—is involved. In no shape or form is that a small or trifling sum; yet as the economy is being run properly, by the end of this century about £8.5 billion less than had been anticipated will be spent. That is the effect of the recovery which has resulted from the Government's policy.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) said, the sums involved are so huge that one can hardly get a grip on them until one bears in mind that they represent £15 for every working person for every working day. The fact that the country can afford largesse on that scale, paid for by the taxpayer, is a remarkable achievement and it is due in no small measure to the Government's actions. Some people look across the channel—although I do not—harking to the European model and thinking that things might be better over there. It is significant that in the past two years Germany has had to restrict the uprating of benefits to 2 per cent. No pretension exists there that it would be possible to link benefits to the inflation level.

The Government's record speaks for itself. These uprating orders speak for themselves and they are a remarkable achievement. In a sense, the debate need go no further than that. One might honestly have wondered why the orders could not simply have gone through on the nod, perhaps with just a short speech or two to compliment the Government on their achievement. That would have been a waste of an opportunity. After about 14 years in the House, I still retain a complete lack of cynicism. I thought that we knew where the Government stood on this, but that it would be a useful and fair opportunity to hear what the Labour party would do to improve the position. The debate would even give it the opportunity to say, "Thank you and sorry". I thought that we could come along and hear what Labour's alternatives are.

It may be the passing of the years and defects in hearing, which can affect us all, but I did not hear anything from the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley), the Labour Front-Bench spokesman, to give me the merest hint of what we might expect from a Labour Government. One must go back into history to the last Labour Government to get any clue about what might be in store. Let us consider what might be in store in terms of public expenditure and on the basis of the model of the last Labour Government. It was not a question of coming to the House in a calm and moderate way and saying, "These are the things that we can afford.

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

We can afford uprating in accordance with the level of inflation". Oh no, there was a telephone call from the International Monetary Fund calling the Chancellor of the Exchequer back from an airport. That is the way things were done in the old days.

Anyone who doubts that can refresh their memory by reading the Rowntree report which, as we heard again from my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester, is not particularly perfect but which reminds us that the wages of the lowest-paid men fell between 1975 and 1978 and that it was only under a Conservative Government that in due course their wages increased. That fall did not occur because of a defect of compassion among Labour members or because they were insouciant. They were simply incompetent: they could not run an economy capable of generating the tax revenue which turns compassion into something realistic and tangible.

The Labour party's policy on benefit is a bit like its policy on interest rates. That is the nearest that one can get to a definition of it. Whatever interest rates are at any given time, the Labour party says that they should be 2 per cent. lower. On benefits it says, "We are not quite sure what our policy is, but whatever it is it will be better than that of the Conservative party."

When the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) was given the opportunity to talk about this, he said in the *New Statesman and Society* of 15 July 1994:

"I do not think it is sensible for Labour to write tax and spending policies now."

Really? It might not be sensible to give them in detail, but perhaps just a little hint, a taster or an indication of what might be on offer should be given. The only indication that I have been able to find is an apparent commitment that the upper rate of tax might go up to 50 per cent. So far so good. Is that an aspect of compassion? Not really. The figures have been quoted time and again.

The figures were revealed first by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who does know something about social security matters. In 1986, he was the first to table a parliamentary question which revealed that when tax rates are reduced the total amount of tax paid to the Exchequer by the richest people in the land increases. So if one is in the business of generating more tax income to spend on people who should benefit, one achieves that by lower and not higher tax rates. The one piece of policy that I have been able to glean from the Labour party—that the upper rate of tax might go up to 50 per cent.—will satisfy the neo-Stalinist tendency in the Labour party, but it will not produce any more money. An opportunity has been lost today to find out the Labour party's attitude to that.

What are people looking for in the orders? First, they are looking for a sense of fairness. The point about the habitual residence qualification has been referred to on a number of occasions. I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Withington and responded to him in the most charming way. I asked whether he would revoke the order. When I saw that he was running out of time, I thought that I had to help him and that he should not run of time without answering that question. In my usual kind-hearted way, I stood up and reminded the hon. Gentleman that time was running short and that he would have to answer that question—but he did not do so. In the end, the closest he could get to an answer was to say that he was very unhappy about the definition of the order, but he was not quite sure whether he would revoke it or not.

For a legislator to complain about a lack of definition to get out of answering a straight question is intellectually dishonest. We can always change the definitions in the House. We needed to hear from the Labour party today whether it had a contribution to make to changing the definition, which preserves the principle of a habitual residence qualification.

I know the vice at which the order is being aimed, and so do my constituents. I find it bizarre to hear Opposition Members say that the present definition is so unfair. I will tell hon. Members some of the criteria that are brought into play in deciding whether a person has a habitual residence qualification. I will cite just three. The criteria include showing a genuine commitment to living and working in the United Kingdom, a previous record of work or contributions to the UK, and answering questions such as why they came to the UK, whether they have a home elsewhere, and what their intentions are as to residence.

There does not seem to be anything too draconian in those criteria. There is ample opportunity to say, "I was born in this country and I was working here. Then I went abroad, but I had a family crisis over there and the job fell through, so here I am back in this country."

Ms Lynne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nicholls: If the hon. Lady will allow me, I will not give way because time is short.

The possibility exists within those definitions to produce a sense of fairness. If something else is necessary in the light of experience of Conservative and perhaps Labour members, let the definition be considered again. But the concerns of my constituents about benefit tourism will not be answered by the Labour party turning around and saying either, "We simply do not agree with the concept" or, "We cannot quite bring ourselves to do that, so we shall carp endlessly about the definition without saying whether we intend to revoke the order or not."

Any system of benefits and the acceptance of these orders rely on the support of and acceptance by the taxpayer that the Government are properly disbursing the money that the taxpayer contributes. It is directly relevant to consider cases such as the one mentioned in the House some two weeks ago involving the famous Watters family with five children and receiving the equivalent in benefits of £25,000 in pre-tax income. That has done incredible damage to acceptance of the social security system. It is difficult to exaggerate the effect that that has on traditional family views. People in the neighbourhood say to themselves, "I could not begin to earn half that amount, but if I was on benefit I could." That causes outrage among the public and must be dealt with.

If any Members are in doubt about the way in which the benefits system is sometimes seen by ordinary members of the public, they could do no better than consider a letter that I have received today from a pensioner in Plympton, which is not in my constituency—*[Interruption.]* Interestingly, the person concerned wrote to me with this debate in mind. I shall not quote the whole letter, although it would certainly bear quotation. It says:

"It is very disturbing that whilst extra charges and taxes can be imposed on us so easily, there is no . . . correction made to the reckless and unjustifiable distribution of taxpayers' money. The

various agencies are given more and more, flout the principles of the guidelines under which they are supposed to work, take more and more for their own benefit and look for bizarre ways of spending—such as six 'helpers' taking one offender on holiday, sending criminals on safari trips—again with an adequate number of minders. Every day one can read in the papers about the squandering of money on legal aid. Politicians agree it is wrong, taxpayers are appalled but nothing is done to stop it." *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. There are too many seated interventions. If the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) is hoping to catch my eye later, I hope that he will bear in mind my dislike of such interventions.

Mr. Nicholls: We must address the fact that people in this country feel that those are considerations which sometimes influence our debate a great deal more than they should. In the end, whether we like it or not, the benefits of which the House disposes are paid for by people who overwhelmingly are basic rate taxpayers. The money has to come from their pockets. If the benefits system is to be credible, the middle classes must believe that it is running properly and that it is looking after those who cannot look after themselves.

We can compare the contributions that we have heard today from Opposition Members with the measured way in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was able to introduce these upratings. If the middle classes want to know that they have a Government capable of working out what the country can afford and focusing funds on those on whom they should be focused, there is no doubt that they should hope for the continuation of a Conservative regime and not what has been represented from the Opposition Benches.

6.31 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): There is an air of unreality about the debate. The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) was carrying on as though those living on benefits were living the life of Riley. He totally ignored the fact that he has been loyally, if not slavishly, supporting a Government who for the past 15 years have presided over an increase in the wealth of the richest 10 per cent. by about 62 per cent., a decrease in the living standards of the poorest 10 per cent. by at least 17 per cent., an increase in homelessness, an increase in the number living on below average earnings from 5 million to 14 million, an increase in the number of children living in poverty households from 1.4 million to more than 4 million while at the same time the Government have been selling off all our publicly owned utilities at knock-down prices—giving them away—encouraging shareholders to make a great deal of money out of them initially and allowing chief executives to have take-home pay of hundreds of thousands of pounds per year. The Government have created the misery, divisions and horrors that exist in our society today.

These orders simply confirm the trend that has gone on for the past 15 years. The Government talk as if they are handing out gifts to the poorest people in our society. In fact, they have presided over a reduction in wage levels for the poorest and an increase in salaries for the very richest. They talk as though pensions were the greatest burden on our society. They should take a look around and meet those struggling to survive on the state pension and any other state benefits to which they are entitled, particularly older women pensioners who have no access to an occupational pension scheme, no access to any savings and who rely on the pension, income support and housing benefit to get by.

The hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) has, gladly, left us. He said that we should take into account all the other benefits to which people are entitled, such as the public transport subsidy. The very poorest cannot even afford the subsidised bus fares that are on offer. Before Conservative Members start to talk, as they do, about the use of the national health service and other things, they should study the reports and see who gains the most from the NHS and who gains the most from the state education system. It tends to be the most articulate middle classes in our community rather than the very poorest who do best out of those services. Those issues need to be addressed.

Conservative Members talk about the need to curtail and control housing benefit expenditure. I can provide a simple answer as to why housing benefit expenditure has increased. There are two reasons: first, unemployment has increased, so eligibility for housing benefit has gone up; secondly, rents have gone sky high, encouraged by a Government hell bent on deregulation. The housing benefit helps not the individual but the landlord, whether it be a private landlord, a housing association or a local authority.

The Government say that there is the option of private rented accommodation. Last week I was talking to an unemployed man of no fixed abode. He moves from friend to friend and relative to relative, getting a night's kip here and a night's kip there. He cannot get a council house because he is a single person with no dependants. He asked me for advice. I asked him what he had tried and he told me that he had tried everywhere. I said, "What about private rented accommodation? You will get housing benefit to pay for a bedsit or a small flat." He said, "That may be so, but find me a landlord who will let me move in without putting down a deposit of at least a month's rent, if not three month's rent, and who will give me the money for that?" That is the reality of the housing benefit rules.

Conservative Members decry anyone who looks seriously into the issues of poverty in our society. They decry the Rowntree report and anyone who talks about poverty.

Mr. Heald: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Corbyn: No, there is not enough time.

The Government decry anyone who tries seriously to examine poverty in Britain. The Government have presided over a massive growth in poverty. They are encouraging and creating poverty in our society. Then they claim that unemployment is falling and that everyone is better off. It is true that the unemployment figures indicate that it is falling, but it is also true that the number of people denied benefit is increasing and the number of people living with no real support is increasing very rapidly.

The debate should be much longer because this is an important and serious subject. The central thrust of the Government's intentions is to reduce the overall cost of social security. They are trying to do it by privatisation and by decreasing the level of the state pension so that people in middle age are forced to take out a portable private pension scheme, however insecure that might be,

[Mr. Corbyn]

so as to provide something for themselves when they reach retirement age. To create that false market for the private pension scheme—the Secretary of State admitted it to the Select Committee—they are subsidising the national insurance fund. The Government are prepared to back up private investment and to create this false market while doing nothing about the serious problems of the waste of human resources, human life and human expectations as a result of the increase in poverty in Britain.

We need an attack on poverty in Britain. We need a real welfare state. Our welfare state is not safe in the hands of the ideological monsters on the Government Benches who are hell bent on destroying it.

6.36 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I take up a point raised by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). Nobody would wish to quarrel with the objective of seeking policies that are designed to tackle problems of poverty. The important difference between us is that Conservatives believe that such policies need to be based on a thorough analysis of where those problems derive from, how they can be tackled effectively and at what cost and from whom such costs should be met.

I want to raise a point of detail as well as some more general points of principle. That point is the cash limit placed on funeral expenses, which was referred to by the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley). I understand and support the reasons behind the change in the Government's policy, but I bring to the attention of my right hon. and hon. Friends the concern of some funeral directors that increased church fees for ecclesiastical funerals may, in some circumstances, make it difficult for them to meet the cap imposed by the Department of Social Security. There are always difficulties in deciding whether a system should be discretionary or based on a formula, but I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will bear that point in mind.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott) and my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) talked in some detail about the demographic and social changes that will shape the debate about social security over the next couple of decades. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester alluded to the continuing cost of social security. We are talking about a system where expenditure has increased sevenfold since the initiation of the welfare state in the late 1940s and early 1950s. If one tracks through recent Treasury Red Books the underlying pattern of non-cyclical social security expenditure, one sees a continuing upward pattern—£49 billion in 1989-90, just over £70 billion in the current financial year and an estimate of £79.5 billion in 1997-98.

I welcome the news from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the projected growth in non-cyclical underlying spending is to be reduced, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester pointed out, underlying growth of 2.1 per cent. year on year rests on the ability of our economy to generate the wealth which is needed to pay for that increase. It is in that context that we have to take account of the demographic changes—the growing number of elderly people relative to a shrinking population at working age and the changes in family structure—which affect levels of income support, family credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Obviously, the most important way in which to cut social security spending is to encourage employment. I am less cynical than the hon. Member for Islington, North about progress in that direction. I particularly welcome the elements in my right hon. Friend's package of measures which are designed to encourage people to go back to work, such as the back-to-work bonus, cuts in employers' national insurance contributions and changes to the regulations which make it easier for an unemployed person to try a new form of employment without necessarily putting at risk his future entitlement to benefit if that trial employment does not work out. I welcome those measures and would like such efforts to continue.

The relationship between family policy and the social security system is worth several days' debate in its own right. All I would say is that it is not a problem that we alone confront. The Germans, for example, require adult children to contribute towards the upkeep of very elderly relatives who require residential care. The Government cannot be indifferent to the costs which broken relationships and broken families force on the benefit system. In their differing ways, the most recent report of the Rowntree trust, the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Archbishop of York have all said that we must look carefully at the impact of tax and the benefit system on family life. As a country, we must get the balance right between family responsibility and state responsibility. That objective admirably suits the political approach of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

6.42 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I am once again appalled that further poverty is being inflicted on our folk, although I welcome the meagre increases that the Minister has announced. Those increases do not, however, go far enough and do not deal with the tragic poverty and suffering in Britain. I was amazed that the Minister capped the funeral benefit at £875, when the professionals are clearly telling him that £1,200 is needed for a poverty funeral. Let us be honest. We will be talking about bin-bag burials in Britain if the Government continue their policy. They are not listening to the people who perform the burials. What a tragic situation we have in Britain when people in poverty cannot bury their folk with dignity. A wee bit of support from the Government should be encouraged. Yes, Minister, I believe that you are creating a bin-bag burial policy—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has again forgotten that he needs to address me rather than the Minister directly.

Mr. Graham: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am trying to make a fast speech.

The hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) mentioned housing benefit. Yes, it has trebled—but why? It has trebled because rents have increased in Britain and in Scotland, especially under the quango Scottish Homes run by this Government, which has constantly increased its rent every year by 10 per cent. or four times the rate of inflation. Indeed, it has increased its rent by three times the rate of inflation this year. Housing benefit has gone through the roof because the Government do not have a

decent housing policy that gives folk with low incomes the right to a reasonable living standard, a home and a roof. Housing benefit has tripled because of the Government's bad housing policy.

If the Minister goes about Britain, he will see car boot sales and thank God for them because they provide many goods at low cost which the Government's policies do not allow folk to purchase in the shops. Car boot sales provide one of the best social benefits that this country has seen for many years. Who would have believed that? That is the economy that the Government are forcing on the people of Great Britain.

An article in the *Evening Times* describes Britain as

"A land fit for Dinkies".

When I was a kid, dinkies were motor cars but, in this case, they are people who survive only if they have a double income and no kids. The article also says that even Spain is no longer taking people from Britain who have a basic pension because they are too poor.

The article points out the social benefit protection per head in Luxembourg, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, France, Belgium, Italy, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Greece. Does the Minister know where we come on that list? We come seventh. It is unbelievable that the great, wealthy nation of Great Britain has lowered its people to a basic income that is seven times lower than that in many other countries. Let us take the highest figure. Benefits in Luxembourg are £5,000 per head. What does Britain provide? Its figure is £3,163.

The Government are pathetic. In no way are they looking after the needs of the people whom they have made poor. They have done nothing to help the low-paid climb to the upper echelons of living standards—a rightly deserved move. They have allowed themselves to be driven by a low-wage economy. It is time that the Government supported the social chapter in Europe. That is the way forward to ensure that our folk have a decent, basic, minimum wage, with which they can hold their heads up high and pay for their purchases, as we are all entitled to do. Once again, the Minister has got it wrong. He is well-known as the Minister of misery.

6.47 pm

Mr. Bradley: It has been a thoughtful and, at times, fiery debate, if all too short. I shall be brief because I spoke for a considerable time when I opened the debate and I want to give as much time as possible to the Minister so that he may respond to the many questions raised.

I commend one or two speeches, especially the thoughtful—as always—speech made by the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott). I was disappointed with his conclusion on the introduction of incapacity benefit. In Committee, I thought that he was moving the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill through the House with a heavy heart. Clearly, I misinterpreted that—the right hon. Gentleman is now fully signed up to its implications. I shall watch with interest when those implications come to fruition.

I hope that the Minister will consider in some detail the many cases of genuine concern that hon. Members have brought to the attention of the House, which cannot be described as benefit tourism, to ensure that, as there is no definition of the habitual residence test, the interpretation of the criteria does not in any way undermine claimants.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) made his usual interesting speech. I thought that it was a bit rich for him to commend the Government on efficiency when, in one day, they spent more than £7 billion on the debacle of the exchange rate mechanism. The Labour party will clearly be voting to revoke the habitual residence test.

Will the Minister specifically consider the issues that I raised on uprating, especially the compensation recovery unit, and the concerns that have been expressed by hon. Members from all parties about the social fund and funeral costs? Most importantly, I hope that the Minister will give us all the details that we are seeking about how the habitual residence test is operating in practice. How many people have been refused? How many of those who have been refused have appealed? How many appeals have been successful? What has been the administration cost of the habitual residence test? What has been the net saving through the denial of income support as compared with the cost of administration of the habitual residence test?

Until we have those assurances, that information and the information that we seek consistently through parliamentary questions, so as to discover what is happening in the real world, from which in many ways the Secretary of State's contribution today seemed remote, we shall continue to vote against the orders on the habitual residence test.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. James Arbuthnot): I am afraid that several questions will remain unanswered this evening because I do not have much time to respond to the debate. I shall try to write to hon. Members in respect of any questions that remain outstanding.

It is the custom to say that a debate has been interesting. In this case, that is perfectly true. We have been sitting on the edges of our seats waiting to hear what the Labour party would propose instead of the uprating orders. Sadly, we were deafened by silence.

In that regard, my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) made a telling point. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Sir N. Scott), in a deeply considered and compassionate analysis of the problems that we face, also made the point in a way that left the Labour party more silent than it normally is. Would Labour reverse our mortgage interest provisions? The answer was silence. Would Labour reverse our changes to housing benefit? The answer was more silence.

For such a talkative Opposition, they have very little to say when it really matters. The hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) asked me about uprating, and referred to statutory maternity pay. He was right to say that it is not being uprated in April; that is because it was uprated last October by 7.5 per cent. However, he was silent about what he would do about it. He was asked whether, if he were in power, he would have uprated those payments. We shall never know the answer.

The hon. Member for Withington made several other points, one of which was about non-dependant deductions. He suggested that they were too high. It is reasonable to

[Mr. James Arbuthnot]

expect the highest earning adult non-dependants to make a significant contribution towards their housing costs. Even so, the highest non-dependant deduction of £30 is a lot less than the average market rent and the council tax that he or she could expect to pay if living as a tenant elsewhere.

There were other interesting contributions to the debate. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) made several points. She said that pensions had not kept pace with inflation. They have. She said that there should not be a reduction in the Treasury top-up to the national insurance fund. However, the point is that national insurance contributions are not going up this year, contrary to what the hon. Lady said. Employers' contributions are going down and the economy is improving. That is why more people are in work and earning more. That means more income to the fund from national insurance contributions.

We are here today to ratify the orders which will give effect to another full benefits uprating. Our approach is to use the taxpayers' money in the most effective way. That means targeting on the people who need most help; for example, the extra £1.2 billion a year since 1988 to poorer pensioners. That gave rise to the very important point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea and by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff)—that targeting can be resented by those who have just missed being in the target group. That problem is inherent in any benefit system unless we pay benefits to everyone. The key point is to improve pensioners' income overall, and that is happening dramatically under this Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) made a very good point about the size of social security spending which takes up one eighth of gross domestic product. As a result of our reforms, we expect that to reduce over the longer term and that is being achieved in large part by the reduction that we have already seen through tighter control of abuse in the benefits system, by bearing down on fraud in respect of incapacity and sickness benefits.

I want now to deal with the Opposition motion to revoke the habitual residence test. Britain's reputation among young Europeans is one of a good place to spend a summer holiday. How right they are. We welcome each and every one of them, but we ask that they pay their way. The Department's postbag from the British public was sending a very strong message indeed. The public are simply not prepared to support people who have no connection with, or commitment to, this country.

In that regard, I am thinking of the 36-year-old German woman who, in her first visit to this country, arrived in the United Kingdom on 16 January to look for work. She says that she was told in Germany that she should be able to claim benefits. Opposition Members have made great play of the plight of British citizens denied benefit because they could not fulfil the conditions of the test. The reality is rather different. In reality, they are strangers to the United Kingdom and certainly strangers to pay-as-you-earn.

Take, for example, the 28-year-old woman, who has lived in Nigeria for the past 20 years and had a job there until leaving for the United Kingdom. She has an eight-month-old child. She has left her husband who remains in Nigeria. Or one can take the 22-year-old Canadian-born woman, of British parentage, visiting Edinburgh with the intention of then backpacking around Europe—

Mr. Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No, I do not have time.

They are very welcome, but not at our expense. The hon. Members for Withington and for Rochdale made play of the fact that a different test was rejected by the Prime Minister in 1986. That test applied after only 12 months and it was a test which would have been in breach of European Community law.

Mr. Bradley: Will the Minister give way now?

Mr. Arbuthnot: No, the hon. Gentleman has had two goes. I am trying to fit everything into the 10 minutes left to me.

The test rejected by the Prime Minister in 1986 was rightly rejected for those reasons. Our test limits benefits to those people with a definite commitment to living and working in this country. In that respect, we have come into line with other European countries.

Mr. Bradley: Give way.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have made it plain that I am not going to give way.

We have removed a burden from the British taxpayer. Taxpayers will not have to subsidise people who have no close ties with the United Kingdom and who have not made a recent financial contribution to the United Kingdom—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Withington is trying to ask me questions from a sedentary position. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge pointed out, his position on that measure was nothing short of extraordinary. In one and the same breath he seemed to support it, to want to review it and to want to revoke it.

In the face of our well thought out and positive measures, let us consider what is on offer from the Labour party. Those who voted for Labour at the last election will be sadly disappointed by what they have heard today. The Labour party manifesto promised that Labour would uprate the pension in line with prices, but we heard not a squeak about that today. How timid the Labour party has become.

In a television interview a few days ago, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) tried to be brave. He said:

"I think that the present level of income support is inadequate."

When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked whether, if Labour were in power, the hon. Member for Garscadden would raise it, the hon. Gentleman did a three-point turn. He said, "No, no, no." That was quicker than Labour's U-turn on education policies because at least Labour's education policies lasted a full day; this one hardly lasted full minute. We know why the Labour party refuses to produce any policies; it is because Labour policies always cost vast amounts of other people's money. Labour spokesmen are aware that if they say anything at all their words will be costed, so they have spent the entire debate saying nothing, at great length.

The Labour party set up a Commission on Social Justice, but it is scared to accept the £7 billion price tag. Now Labour Members will have to make a decision. It will be hard for them but they must have a go. They will

have to decide whether to vote in favour of more money for pensioners. Many people might think that that would be an easy decision, but history tells us otherwise. This time last year, Labour Members of Parliament made the historic decision to vote against the pension increase. Will they do that again this year? I would not put anything past them; but I must be fair—not all Labour Members voted against.

Mr. Bradley *indicated assent.*

Mr. Arbuthnot: The hon. Gentleman confirms that. The Labour Front-Bench spokesmen did not vote against the pension increase—because they did not vote at all.

It being Seven o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [24 February].*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Statutory Sick Pay Percentage Threshold Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour.*

Resolved,

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Fund Payments) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) Amendment Regulations 1995, which were laid before this House on 13th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Willetts.]*

Motion made, and Question put,

That the Income-related Benefits Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 3) Regulations 1994 (S.I., 1994, No. 1807), dated 7th July 1994, a copy of which was laid before this House on 11th July, in the last session of Parliament, be revoked.—*[Mr. Bradley.]*

The House divided: Ayes 246, Noes 287.

Division No. 89] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dalis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
Macdonald, Calum
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
MacShane, Denis
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Olner, Bill
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John

Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Joe Benton and
Mrs. Barbara Roche.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shire)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Gryffs, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*

Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly negatived.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Before we move on to motion Nos. 7 and 8, I must tell the House that Madam Speaker has decided that there should be a limit of 10 minutes on Back-Bench Members' speeches. Although that limit does not apply to the speeches of Front-Bench Members, I hope that they will be distinguished more for their quality than for their quantity.

Local Government

7.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert B. Jones): I beg to move,

That the draft North Yorkshire (District of York) (Structural and Boundary Changes) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th February, be approved.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): I understand that, with this, it will be convenient to discuss the following motion:

That the draft Humberside (Structural Chance) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th February, be approved.

Mr. Jones: With modifications, the orders implement the recommendations of the Local Government Commission for the future structure of local government in North Yorkshire and Humberside. I hope that it will be helpful to the House if I take the principal issues relating to the orders in the following order: first, details of the proposed new structure in both areas; then boundaries, powers and functions; electoral arrangements; and staffing, planning and ceremonial arrangements.

From 1 April 1996, the City of York will be a unitary authority on extended boundaries, which will incorporate parts of the districts of Ryedale, Selby and Harrogate. I shall return to the details of the boundary changes in due course. The remainder of the county of North Yorkshire will remain two tier, retaining both district and county councils. On 1 April 1996, the county of Humberside and Humberside county council will be abolished and will be succeeded by four unitary authorities.

The existing authority of Kingston upon Hull, on its existing boundaries, will be given unitary powers. The existing authorities of Holderness, Beverley, East Yorkshire and the northern part of Boothferry will be abolished and will comprise a single new authority, to be called the East Riding of Yorkshire. The existing authorities of Cleethorpes and Grimsby will be abolished and will comprise a single new unitary authority, to be called North East Lincolnshire. The existing authorities of Glanford and Scunthorpe and that part of Boothferry district south of the northern boundaries of the parishes of Crowle, Eastoft, Luddington, Haldenby and Amcotts will be abolished and will comprise a new unitary authority, to be called North Lincolnshire. That is the area known as the Isle of Axholme.

As a rule, decisions about where boundaries should be drawn are difficult and provoke strong feelings. Our decisions about the boundaries of York and Hull have not proved to be an exception to that rule. In the case of the City of York, we have accepted the commission's recommendation—with only very minor modifications to exclude five small parishes—that the city's boundaries should be extended to include the York greater planning area. That will substantially increase the area covered by the city, and will increase its population from its existing 101,000 to approximately 167,000.

In making its recommendations to us, the commission took into account a number of factors, including the ability of a unitary authority to deliver services effectively and efficiently and the need to recognise community identity and the expression of local opinion. It acknowledged that opposition to the extension of the city's boundaries to include the greater planning area was

[Mr. Jones]

strongest in the outlying areas beyond the ring road. The strength of the opposition has also been made clear to us in the many representations that we have received from local residents and their parish councils. Nevertheless, the commission concluded, and we agreed, that the balance of advantage lay with providing an enlarged boundary to enable the new authority to deliver services efficiently and effectively and to adopt a strategic approach to economic development, transportation planning and environmental issues, among other things.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): What reasons did the commission and the Department adduce to show that, if the boundary were merely extended to the ring road, the requirements would not be met?

Mr. Jones: The trouble with merely extending the boundary to the ring road, as the hon. Gentleman must know, is that that road breaks through about 11 parishes and runs inside the existing city of York. At one point, it would reduce the area of the city and, at other points, it would lead to the fragmentation of communities.

Mr. Dobson: The Minister's officials have been making the fatuous point that the ring road breaks through certain parishes, but everyone regards it as an approximation of where the boundary ought to be. There is considerably more support—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, there is. There is considerably more support within the ring road for joining York than there is anywhere outside it.

Mr. Jones: The fragmentation of communities and rural parishes may be a trivial matter to the hon. Gentleman, who represents an entirely urban constituency, but I can assure him that the parishes concerned would not want to be split up. Some of the parishes outside the ring road are the most urban in the Greater York area.

During the debate on the Avon order, the hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Mr. Dobson) accused us of proposing boundaries that would

"leave Bristol 'cabinn'd, cribb'd, confin'd'."—[*Official Report*, 22 February 1995; Vol. 255, c. 410.]

The city of Bristol covers an area of 10,954 hectares. The existing city of York covers an area of only 2,946 hectares.

Of course, we have said that we shall ask the commission to reconsider the Bristol boundary. I do not believe that it is necessary for it to look again at the York boundary because our proposals should ensure that the city is not "cabinn'd, cribb'd or confin'd".

The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras was quoted in the *Yorkshire Evening Press* recently. An editorial on 24 February 1995 said:

"It is a rich irony when Labour's shadow Environment Secretary attacks plans for a Greater York authority as a 'political racket'. What else does he think he and his party are engaged in when they oppose it? Labour is not making a principled stand on grounds of whether a Greater York will best serve the people, but on grounds of whether it will best serve Labour and the signs are that it will not."

I hope, however, that most people will agree with Councillor Gerald Dean, the leader of the York Conservative group, in his letter to the same paper on 14 November 1994, when he said that it was

"vitally important for all people within the Greater York Planning Area now to become partners in a common endeavour to create the new 'City and County of York' unitary authority to serve efficiently and effectively all the communities throughout the area, and to meet the needs and aspirations of all residents and their families and of future generations to come."

Following representations made to us by local people and by their Members of Parliament, we agreed to exclude five small parishes on the outer edges of the greater planning area. We were persuaded that the characteristics of those parishes and their relationship to the districts that they are in were such that their exclusion was justified. Cases were made for other parishes to be excluded, but in our view those were not as strong.

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): Will the Minister specify what those characteristics were in relation to the five parishes that were excluded?

Mr. Jones: Certainly. Those were predominantly agricultural parishes, which had much less of a link with the city of York in terms of economic dependence and interdependence. Perhaps I may quote the *Yorkshire Evening Press* again, on the subject of the hon. Gentleman. In its editorial on 17 February it said:

"Opposition from York Labour MP Hugh Bayley too might well seem to be motivated more by the local party's fears about losing its grip on the City council if the boundaries are pushed out to the strongly Liberal Democrat and Conservative suburbs than by a disinterested appreciation of what York needs . . . The politicians should pay more attention to the real issue here, which is the need to deliver efficient and cost-effective services to a base of people who are defined as living and working in York."

I entirely endorse that editorial.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): On the five parishes, which are all in my constituency, bearing in mind all the allegations about gerrymandering that are flowing back and forth, is not it the case that the removal of those five parishes will make not a scrap of difference to the warding arrangements for the new York authority, and that it will reduce Conservative party chances in the two wards affected?

Mr. Jones: The change certainly does not make much difference to the warding arrangements. I would not know whether it made any political difference, because I certainly did not consider that.

We also took the view that if further parishes were removed, with each additional parish that was removed, the case for allowing the city to adopt a strategic approach to planning and service provision would be weakened.

In the case of Kingston upon Hull, we accepted the commission's recommendation that the unitary authority should be established on the city's existing boundaries. We have, however, decided that—in the light of representations that we received from the city—in due course its boundary with the new East Riding authority should be reviewed. That will not involve major revisions or extensions to the boundary, but will, we hope, sort out a number of small anomalies that exist at the moment.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): In view of the fact that it was considered wise to extend the boundaries of the City of York to include the outlying villages, why was it not also considered wise to extend

the boundaries of Hull to include the outlying villages, as the majority of the people who live there work in and gain all their benefits from Hull?

Mr. Jones: Not only did the commission not recommend that, but it noted the opposition of the areas to which the hon. Gentleman is referring to any such proposal.

There remains one outstanding boundary issue in relation to both the Humberside and the North Yorkshire reviews—the future location of the parishes that form Goole and rural Goole. The commission had recommended that Goole and its hinterland should, with the districts of Craven, Harrogate and Selby, form a unitary authority to be called the West Riding (Dales and Vale) of Yorkshire. We rejected that recommendation because we believed that it failed to take account of community identity.

As a modification, our preferred option was to combine Goole with Selby as a new district in North Yorkshire, but in the light of the representations that we received and to enable the full range of options for the future of Goole to be considered, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will next week direct the commission to undertake a boundary review between the districts of Boothferry, Selby, Glanford and Doncaster, in relation to the parishes that form Goole and rural Goole. The commission will be asked—taking into account the structural arrangements that the orders will produce if they are approved—to recommend whether those parishes should remain with Boothferry, transfer to one of the other authorities, be divided between them, or be established as a district council in its own right in a two-tier North Yorkshire.

The commission will be asked to give priority to that review and to submit its recommendations to us as swiftly as possible.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): My hon. Friend appreciates the great pleasure that the end of Humberside and the return of our beloved East Riding gives those of us who come from that part of the country, but there is considerable opposition to the last-minute change of view—the decision to put Goole, in the first instance, in with the East Riding of Yorkshire. There is no historical connection or commonality of interest. We welcome the proposal that that decision should be reconsidered and, on behalf of the people of east Yorkshire, I ask that that be done as quickly as possible, so that all the administrative changes caused by reorganisation do not go too far along the line before a decision is made.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has campaigned for the abolition of Humberside for a very long time. I am delighted that we are honouring that in the order. On the Goole issue, we shall of course ask the commission to deal with the matter as speedily as possible because of the uncertainty, not merely for planning but for staff. It is very much our view that it should be dealt with speedily and I hope that my hon. Friend and others who feel the same way will make their views known to the commission.

Mr. John Sykes (Scarborough): My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) made an interesting argument. Many of us are delighted today at the prospect of walking through the Lobby in support of abolishing Humberside. Goole does not belong to Yorkshire, and never did for 1,000 years.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Mind your own business.

Mr. Sykes: Goole never belonged to Humberside. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) is a carpetbagger. He is not from Grimsby; he is not from Goole. He ought to know better.

Goole was never part of Yorkshire, and today many people will rejoice in the fact that Yorkshire will once again stretch from the Humber to the Tees, as it did for 1,000 years.

Mr. Jones: I do not know what Goole has done to upset my hon. Friend, but I can tell him that Goole was in the old West Riding of Yorkshire.

Once the orders are made, all the authorities in Humberside and the authorities affected by the changes in North Yorkshire will have extra duties and powers to prepare for the reorganisation. They will each be under a duty to co-operate in implementing change. Unitary authorities will have access to the information that they need.

Once the councils for the unitary authorities have been elected, they will have further powers to make the necessary preparations, including setting budgets and recruiting staff for the functions for which they will assume responsibility on 1 April 1996. They will be required to consider whether any of their new functions would best be discharged through joint arrangements with other authorities. Taken together, we believe that those provisions will ensure a smooth transition to the new structure, while providing proper safeguards for essential services.

In the absence of clear agreement between the authorities in Humberside, we have decided that the superannuation fund maintained by the county council should be vested in the council of the East Riding of Yorkshire. We believe that that will cause the least disruption to the management of the fund and the least inconvenience to its pensioners. The East Riding authority is expected to locate its headquarters in Beverley, where the county's mainframe computer and other systems and communication links and databases are located.

We believe that authorities that are to be given unitary status should be given a fresh democratic mandate. There will therefore be whole council elections to the four unitary authorities in Humberside and to the new City of York authority, in May this year.

In future, with the exception of Hull, all the unitary authorities will hold whole council elections every four years. If they wish to apply to the Secretary of State to change to a system of elections by thirds, they may do so following the passing of a resolution by the whole council, passed by not less than two thirds of the members.

Hull will return to its current arrangement of elections by thirds from 1997. That follows the city's representations that it wished to retain elections by thirds and that it did not wish to have elections in the year immediately after reorganisation. We agree that that is a sensible arrangement and have made similar provision in Bristol.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: It would be sensible to increase the number of councillors to four councillors per ward, at

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

least in the North East Lincolnshire authority. It would also be sensible to hold elections annually—or at least more regularly than the Local Government Commission proposed. The commission said that that matter would be reviewed after five years. When will the Minister entertain an application to review the number of councillors and the frequency of elections?

Mr. Jones: We have always adopted the opinion that we do not wish to lay down a specific rule and that it is for the local authorities concerned to decide whether they hold elections by thirds or all-out elections. The commission will carry out a review of ward boundaries, but naturally its priority must be areas where there are the most inequities between the present elector-councillor ratios. I shall discuss that in relation to Glanford and Scunthorpe specifically in a moment.

With the exception of minor changes that we have made to accommodate leaving Goole in Boothferry while it is being re-reviewed, warding arrangements for the new authorities are as recommended by the commission.

I have received representations from a number of the Humberside authorities that those warding arrangements are unsatisfactory and that the councillor-elector ratio recommended by the commission is inadequate. Specifically, I know that Glanford and Scunthorpe districts feel strongly about the issue. However, we have made it clear that, other than where the arrangements are technically incorrect, or where, as in the case of Boothferry, they need to be changed to reflect modifications that we have made to the commission's structural recommendations, we shall not modify the commission's recommendations for electoral arrangements without first referring them back to the commission to consider any new evidence that we have received.

On the basis of the representations that we had received, we did not consider that it was necessary to refer the recommendations back to the commission, because that would have put at risk the timetable for holding the elections to the new authorities and would have prolonged the uncertainty. We have said, however, that we shall consider asking the commission to undertake an early electoral review of authorities where there is pressure for that and it appears to be necessary, for example, for the districts affected by the York extension.

We acknowledge that staff at all levels will have a crucial role to play in implementing change and ensuring that the new structures work successfully. Most staff—we estimate at least 90 per cent.—will simply end up working for the successor authorities. The majority—the front-line service providers such as teachers and care workers—will transfer by statutory transfer order, ensuring continued provision of essential services from day one of reorganisation. Others will secure posts through open competition if the post is new, or prior consideration in which competition is limited to those in the outgoing and continuing authorities concerned.

We recognise that there may be redundancies. Local government reorganisation is intended, among other things, to achieve greater efficiency and long-term savings in the cost of providing services, and inevitably there will be some effect on staffing structures. The changing role of local government is bound to have implications for the skills and numbers of the local authority work force, whether there is structural change or not. Ultimately, it will be for the authorities to decide on their new staffing structures and how to fill them, taking account of the available resources and the need to ensure continued provision of services.

We have recently announced new measures for those who are redundant as a result of local government reorganisation. We are also consulting on a possible scheme for detriment compensation for those who take a drop in salary as a result.

As unitary authorities, the new York district council and the four Humberside district councils will be responsible for both strategic and local land use planning in their areas. We are determined that there should be adequate arrangements for strategic planning in areas affected by reorganisation.

Reflecting its recommendations for structural changes, the commission recommended that the authorities for the area north of the Humber should work jointly on a structure plan for their combined areas. It made a similar recommendation for the authorities in the area between the Humber and the Wash. However, as a result of the modifications that we have made to the commission's structural recommendations, we have also needed to modify its recommendations for planning arrangements.

Therefore, having considered representations from the local authorities and other organisations, we have concluded that the most satisfactory grouping of authorities for joint structure plan purposes would be the new York unitary authority working with North Yorkshire county council; the new East Riding of Yorkshire unitary authority working with Kingston upon Hull city council; and the new North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire unitary authorities working with Lincolnshire county council.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The Minister must be aware that there is grave concern that that decision is a departure from the Local Government Commission's original recommendation that structural planning in Humberside should be estuary-wide. As someone who once chaired the Environment Select Committee and considered coastal zone policy, I am sure that the Minister would recommend from his own Committee reports that there is a great deal more logic in having structural planning embracing an estuary in terms of industry, conservation and management than in breaking it in two, as in his recommendations. Where is the logic in those recommendations?

Mr. Jones: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to learn that I said to my officials, "If the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) is there, he will mention estuarial planning," because he and I have a long history of interest in that subject.

Apart from the regional guidance element, there is a duty for neighbouring structure plan authorities to consult, and we intend to ensure that that works to deliver the cross-estuarial co-operation that is necessary for those issues, while retaining the relationship between the North Lincolnshire authorities and Lincolnshire county council for issues that go wider than that. I am sure that the hon.

Gentleman recognises that the area south of Cleethorpes, for example, has links with the rest of Lincolnshire to the south.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Presumably, those estuarial matters can be arranged through the Humberside Forum. When the Minister refers to working with Lincolnshire, what does "working with" mean?

Mr. Jones: As I explained to the hon. Gentleman, the authorities will have a duty to prepare their structure plans together, so obviously it is something that reflects the cross-boundary planning issues. We believe that voluntary arrangements for joint working in those groupings will achieve the desired results.

The draft orders transfer the counties' strategic planning responsibilities for the areas concerned to the new unitary authorities. Each authority will also be responsible for maintaining a local plan for its area. We look to the relevant authorities in North Yorkshire, Humberside and Lincolnshire to make the necessary voluntary arrangements for joint working on the structure plan for their respective groupings. Voluntary joint working arrangements are more accountable locally than the statutory joint authorities, which it would become necessary for us to impose if such voluntary arrangements were to fail.

The orders do not provide for ceremonial arrangements. Separate provision will be made for that in regulations. However, it may be helpful to the House if I briefly explain the arrangements that we propose to put in place. In the case of North Yorkshire, the City of York will be deemed to be part of the county of North Yorkshire for ceremonial and related purposes. It will therefore have the same lord lieutenant and high sheriff as the county.

I take this opportunity to reassure people who have expressed concern about York losing its city status. That will not happen. It would be foolish and contrary to everything that we seek to achieve by our reorganisation of local government. Before the existing authority is abolished, we shall make specific provision for the continuation of the city's status and privileges. We are discussing with the Home Office and Privy Council the most expedient way of doing that. Whatever we decide, the city will continue to be a city and it will continue to have a lord mayor.

Mr. Bayley: The Minister specifically mentioned the lord mayor of York. Will York retain its sheriff?

Mr. Jones: Yes. I shall get back to the hon. Gentleman if I am wrong.

As Humberside is to be abolished, its lord lieutenant and high sheriff will also be abolished. Instead, north of the Humber we intend to provide for both a lord lieutenant and a high sheriff of the county of the East Riding of Yorkshire. For ceremonial and related purposes, Hull will be deemed to be part of that county and will therefore have the same lord lieutenant and sheriff. South of the Humber, we propose that the North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire unitary authorities should be deemed, for ceremonial purposes, to be part of the county of Lincolnshire and to have the same lord lieutenant and high sheriff.

The Yorkshire museum has mounted a very professional campaign not to be transferred from the county council to the City of York. However, as with other property within the new York district area, the museum will pass to the city under the regulations for the transfer of assets and liabilities. The museum is a charitable trust and the terms of the trust state that the beneficial area of that trust is the city of York. As a consequence, the museum and its gardens must transfer to the City of York on reorganisation. I hope that the House agrees that, if we are to entrust the City of York with responsibility for education and social services, it would be faintly ludicrous to say that it could not be trusted to run a museum. We are, however, aware of local concern that the museum should continue to play a role as an institution serving the areas of both North Yorkshire county council and the new City of York council, and we expect the authorities to co-operate in safeguarding that role.

I believe that the changes for which the orders provide will create more comprehensible, and consequently more accountable, local government in the areas that they affect. The abolition of Humberside and the restoration of individual and independent cities of York and Kingston upon Hull will be welcomed, as will the restoration of the East Riding to Yorkshire. I commend the orders to the House.

7.42 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Tonight we are discussing two orders. Both put asunder what the Heath Government joined together. The first breaks Humberside county into unitary authorities, as recommended by the Local Government Commission for England. The second, contrary to the commission's recommendations, does not break up the North Yorkshire county council into unitary authorities but confers unitary status on York—but York with different boundaries. Nothing could better demonstrate the inconsistency and political prejudice that have characterised the reorganisation of local government. It shows yet again that the Government are motivated largely by malice against Labour councils.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): The Government are motivated by malice not just against Labour councils but against local authorities in general.

Mr. Dobson: I think that there are degrees of malice.

Humberside has usually been controlled by Labour, at least when it was not led by the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) who, as soon as he stopped being leader, decided that he wanted to abolish it. It will be broken up, whereas North Yorkshire county council, which, in normal circumstances has been Tory controlled, will not be broken up. York will be separated out, with boundaries which do not make sense and which practically no one supports.

Mr. John Townend: The hon. Gentleman talks about the political bias of the proposals. Is he aware that Hull district council, which has been Labour controlled ever

[Mr. John Townend]

since I can remember, except for two years, strongly favours doing away with Humberside and getting back unitary powers for the city and county of Hull?

Mr. McNamara: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but we cannot have one intervention upon another.

Mr. Dobson: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have never been beset in that way before. In a moment, I shall deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Bridlington.

Mr. McNamara: Further to what my hon. Friend said about the record of the hon. Member for Bridlington, is he aware that, for a brief moment, the hon. Gentleman also led Hull city council? Thereafter, we went from strength to strength and now only one member of his party is there.

Mr. Dobson: Gloating is contrary to my nature.

Mr. John Townend: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I point out that that statement is incorrect? I was chairman of the finance committee of Hull council, but never leader.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for the Chair.

Mr. Dobson: I am glad that I did not gloat.

All that is a product of the deliberations of the Local Government Commission and the Secretary of State, who was supposed to be acting in a quasi-judicial capacity. I must say that it was much more quasi that judicial. The break-up of Humberside gives independence back to the city of Kingston upon Hull—not before time. It should never have been taken away from Hull in the first place by a previous Tory Government. Hull city council would rather have wider boundaries. There is considerable support, not just within the Labour party in Hull, for Hull to have wider boundaries. Even the commission recognised that wider boundaries would have made more sense. They said that they recognised the merits of the argument but decided that the proposition was not popular, so did not recommend it.

If Tory Members think that this matter has been and gone and Hull could never be extended, I remind them that, on 25 October 1994, the Secretary of State did not rule out the extension of Hull's boundaries but said that, in due course, he proposed to direct the Commission to review the boundaries between East Yorkshire and Hull. Those who think that they have won that argument may find that they have not. We are asked tonight to decide boundaries which the Secretary of State proposes setting aside as soon as we have set them in place.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: There are clearly examples in Hull and the neighbouring authorities where houses or streets are divided by boundaries, and it is perfectly sensible to review those boundaries. Given the time scale, it is simply not possible for the commission to review them before the order is, I hope, passed by the House this evening. But that is what the Secretary of State will ask the commission to review and it is a matter of common sense.

Mr. Dobson: We do not know the time scale or whether the adjustments will be as large or small as the Minister suggests. The Secretary of State asks us to agree an order on one set of boundaries while talking about changing them immediately afterwards. He threatens further changes, thereby sentencing certain areas to a further period of uncertainty, particularly as those within the city council's boundary will be unitary authorities and those outside—as in the case of East Yorkshire—will not.

That is not the only uncertainty because, as the Minister admitted, under the commission's proposals, part of Goole was to be the amazing Dales and Vales unitary authority. Despite its rhyming, it has, thankfully, disappeared as nobody supported the proposition for more than half a minute. When the Government first drafted the order, they changed that proposition in favour of transferring Goole to the Selby part of North Yorkshire which will be a two-tier authority. The Government produced a second draft order, but apparently they forgot about Goole, because it is not mentioned at all. The Secretary of State then announced that the Local Government Commission had been instructed to undertake a further review of Goole's fate. It implied that, for the next few months, Goole will be located—probably temporarily—in East Yorkshire and then it will "enter the new East Riding unitary authority".

In the context of this complex reorganisation of local government, Goole will be moved temporarily—we do not know for how long—into a unitary authority. However, as a result of further boundary changes while the reorganisation is taking place, it could be shifted into the area of a two-tier authority, thus becoming a lower tier authority again. I do not think that the Government are serious about trying to ensure that the reorganisation goes through with minimum impact on the services that the authorities concerned are supposed to provide.

It is insulting for the people of Goole to be treated as the fag-end of a local government reorganisation. They are being pushed about and shoved to one side until it is convenient for the Secretary of State to do something about their situation.

By any standards, Humberside county council had a good performance record and I think that anyone with any sense sympathises with the councillors and staff who worked hard in the area of service provision. The new authorities must be encouraged to perform. Hull is clearly capable of running itself, which it did for several hundred years. However, all of the new authorities will need to co-operate to provide the necessary Humber-wide planning and environmental policies. Everyone wishes them well, but they will be operating in difficult circumstances because of the boundaries and the uncertainties that the orders create.

That brings me to the second order, and I must declare an interest at this point. I was born and brought up in one of the villages on the outskirts of York. I went to school in York and I have a lot of family connections with that great city and also with East Riding, where I used to live. York, quite rightly, wants its independence, which a Tory Government should never have taken away.

However, the council does not want independence at any price and it believes that the massive extension of the city boundaries is too high a price to pay for York's independence. Proposals before the commission were to retain the present boundary, which would leave York with a population of about 100,000—three times as big as Rutland which is gaining independence—or to extend York's boundaries roughly to the ring road, which would

leave York with a population of about 125,000. Another alternative was to extend the boundary much further to the edge of the York planning area, which is known as Greater York, which would give York a population of 170,000.

Extending the boundary to form Greater York is an enormously unpopular proposal. York city council opposes it, as does Ryedale district council, Selby district council, Harrogate district council and North Yorkshire county council. Every parish council outside the ring road is opposed to the proposition. The Labour Member of Parliament for that area—my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley)—the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) and the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) also oppose the idea. Opposition to the preposterous idea that York should be extended in that way is not exactly a Labour racket.

The Local Government Commission—I shall make no further comments on its general stumbling incompetence—recommended the Greater York proposal in its document, but it did not offer a single word to justify extending York's boundary to form Greater York. It proposed a 900 per cent. increase in the city's area which would take the boundary beyond York's natural urban or suburban boundary.

York does not have three or four centres with rural patches in between. There has been gradual concentric expansion of York's urban areas and, if the boundary is to be extended, it should be extended to somewhere around the natural edge of those areas. The Greater York proposition takes in very rural areas. It leaves in some areas which are more rural than the five which were taken out at the behest of the hon. Member for Ryedale. I defy anyone to find a parish in England that is more rural than Kexby.

The people who live outside the boundaries of York do not see themselves as part of York and the people in York do not see themselves as part of York. I believe that the Local Government Commission may even—

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): That is nonsense.

Mr. Dobson: I am sorry. The people of York do not consider the people outside the city to be part of York. I am sorry for that slip of the tongue.

There is some suspicion that the Local Government Commission did not know what it was recommending—or at least it did not know the basis of its recommendations. According to its own figures, it seems to have misunderstood the unpopularity of its proposals. It got the figures wrong in the first report. It said that only one in three of those affected were opposed to the boundary change. That was true of people living between the existing boundary and the ring road at that time, but the local government's figures, which were collected by MORI, showed that two out of three of those people living between the ring road and the proposed new boundary opposed that proposition.

Those figures were collected during the early stages of consultation when the picture was not as clear as it was after the final recommendation was made. Since then, public opinion has become clearer. Hon. Members who are familiar with the area will know that, if anything, it has hardened against any extension of the boundary, not just beyond the ring road but beyond York's present boundaries. Strong support for York as an all-purpose authority remains, but support for the extension of its boundaries is small and it is diminishing. People living outside the ring road do not consider themselves to be part of York and, according to the commission's polling, fewer than one in three support the boundary extension.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Is my hon. Friend aware that the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, who has just left the Chamber, told the *Craven Herald and Pioneer* in November 1993 that

"York is virtually certain to get its own all-purpose council".

He said that before there was any suggestion that the city's boundary would be extended. Perhaps the Minister, like the majority of people in York, believes that the city should retain its original boundary.

Mr. Dobson: I find it difficult to understand the mindset of Government Members.

In November 1994, the city council commissioned a MORI poll of a much larger sample than the survey conducted by the Local Government Commission. It also carried out a leaflet consultation exercise, whereby it sent questionnaires to the people concerned who were asked to complete and return them. Only 24 per cent. of those consulted in that way supported the idea of a Greater York. Within York, 41 per cent. of those surveyed wanted to retain the current boundaries and 36 per cent. supported the idea of a Greater York.

When the people who were affected by the Greater York extension were consulted, their rejection of the proposal was overwhelming. The MORI poll showed that 61 per cent. of those surveyed in the outer ring opposed the extension and 23 per cent. favoured it. The leaflet exercise—which had a remarkable 42 per cent. return—showed that 80 per cent. of those surveyed opposed the extension and 30 per cent. supported it. In the districts which would be taken over from Ryedale district council, the MORI figures were 68 per cent. against and 17 per cent. in favour, with the leaflet method of consultation showing 86 per cent. against and 14 per cent. in favour.

In the Selby district, which contains two of the parishes which are closest to York—anybody who did not know would think that they were already part of York—Heslington and Fulford, the figures were only 47 per cent. against and 36 per cent. in favour.

The figures for some of the individual villages are quite remarkable. None of the villages in Ryedale outside the ring road had more than 12 per cent. in favour of being taken into York, and using the leaflet method, the lowest figure against the extension in any parish outside the ring road was 87 per cent. In Selby district, as I have mentioned, Fulford and Heslington—which would be incorporated into almost any sensible extension of York—were the only villages where as few as 50 per cent. were against the extension. Askham Bryan had 97 per cent. against and 3 per cent. in favour and Dunnington, where I was born, had 86 per cent. against and 14 per cent. in favour.

We should consider the Local Government Commission's views on how the popularity of proposals should be borne in mind. It stated:

"The commission must balance the advantages of the proposed extension against the sense of community and expressed wishes of local residents".

[Mr. Dobson]

It said that about York, where there is no doubt about the expressed wishes of local residents. In respect of Hull, it said:

"In its consultation report, the commission recognises the merits of the argument for the extension, but on balance felt the weight of public opinion against expansion was too strong to disregard."

So it was too strong to disregard in respect of Hull, but apparently nothing can be so strong that it cannot be disregarded in respect of the expansion of York.

If we then take the weight that the commission itself claims it gives to public opinion, the chief executive of the commission wrote an article saying that, had there not been a Local Government Commission,

"a new structure of local government would have been imposed on a largely apathetic public . . . I, for one, am glad that the Local Government Commission has undertaken its task in a very different way, which has produced recommendations enjoying solid local support and which has avoided the potentially expensive mistake of imposing an unwelcome new structure of local government on shire England."

The Minister of State, who is not here, said:

"Where the commission comes up with a scheme which is endorsed by local community leaders and responds to a local sense of identity it is likely to be endorsed. However, where a recommendation appeals to defy natural gravity"—

whatever that may mean—

"and be inconsistent with other recommendations it will earn a loud popular raspberry."

We have waited in vain to hear the raspberry on the proposition for the expansion of York.

If the Government do not like the polling data or the leaflet returns that have judged opinion in those areas, they have to admit that, since the proposition was put forward, 1,066 people have argued against the extension of York and 30 in favour; seven local authorities have made representations, none of them in favour; 26 parishes have made recommendations, none of them in favour and of 15 other representations, just one was in favour. People are saying quite loudly that they do not think that the shotgun marriage of York with the outlying villages should go through. The Minister should have further second thoughts.

The Government left out Shipton and Overton from Hambleton district; they left out Upper Helmsley, Gate Helmsley and Warthill from Ryedale district—and quite right, too. They now propose forcing into York—against the wishes of the people of York and their elected representatives and the elected representatives of every one of the districts and clearly against the wishes of the vast majority of people—Skelton, Wigginton, Haxby, Strenshall, Towthorpe, Earswick, Stockton-on-the-Forest, Holtby, Murton, Kexby, Dunnington, Elvington, Wheldrake, Deighton, Naburn, Bishopthorpe, Acaster Malbis, Copmanthorpe, Askham Bryan, Askham Richard, Rufforth, Hessay and Upper Poppleton. None of them wants to join; they all want to stay out.

I should emphasise that this is a Tory idea. It was not empire building by Labour-controlled York city council; it was simply put forward by the Tory machine carrying out these local government reorganisations.

To add insult to injury, the Government propose to change the voting system for York which, not from time immemorial, but for a damned long time, has had annual elections. As the outlying districts cannot be re-warded in a way which would permit annual elections and still have sensible wards, the people of York, who are accustomed to being able to vote in or out their council or many of the councillors every year will be deprived of that.

The city council said that annual elections should continue. Last week, when I said that I thought that annual elections should continue as a principle, I was told that councils should be given a choice. York has expressed its choice, it wants annual elections, but that would not suit the Government, so it will not have them.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The commission recommended that there should be all-out elections, but if the new city and county of the York authority chooses a system of one third and passes the appropriate resolution, the Government will not stand in its way. We believe that the authority should decide. The hon. Gentleman is saying that part of the authority should decide. He is saying that only the old York city council should be responsible. We think that all the councillors on the new authority should have a say on whether it will be all-out elections or elections by thirds.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands me. I believe that the law should be quite clear and there should be annual elections in every local authority in the country. That is right in principle.

What the Government are doing now is forcing people who have never lived in York to become part of York and they are insulting them by doing that. They are insulting the people of York by saying that the right to annual elections that they have had for all those years will be taken away. Just like the rest of the process, it is a total shambles. It is the product of a incompetent and badly conducted Local Government Commission and an even worse set of Ministers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): Order. I remind the House of Madam Speaker's decision to limit Back-Bench speeches to 10 minutes for the remainder of the debate.

8.7 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), in a disarmingly tentative declaration of interest, reminded us that some members of his family are familiar with the part of Yorkshire that I represent. I hope that I am not disclosing a confidence in alleging that he may even have a brother who lives in the locality of Wheldrake—or at least some members of his family live in that part of the world. I cannot reciprocate by declaring an interest in that connection as I am not sure that any of them vote for me, but to that extent alone I differ from the hon. Gentleman's approach to the problem.

What lies behind the order in reality is not, as my hon. Friend the Minister keeps reiterating, advice or pressure from the Local Government Commission. It is certainly not the aspirations or expression of views of local people. The only reason behind what has been proposed is that old, dreadful and inhuman syndrome—the gentleman in Whitehall knows best. That is the only rational conclusion one can draw from the way in which the Government are proceeding in these orders.

On what the Local Government Commission has contributed to this sorry scenario, let me remind my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State why he cannot shelter

his proposals behind the skirts of the Local Government Commission, whatever one may think of the commission itself. In its preliminary report of June 1993, addressed incidentally "to local people", and in its final report to the Secretary of State in June 1994, the commission was essentially and unmistakably tentative about the way in which York's boundaries should be drawn. It stated:

"York's boundaries should be enlarged if local people support the changes."

Local residents do not support the changes, as the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras made perfectly clear. I, too, shall emphasise that point presently.

If local people do not support the changes, and if the Boundary Commission says that the proposals depend on the extent to which such support exists, why have the Government ignored this fundamental condition prerequisite and gone swanning off on their own? Admittedly, the commission preferred, again tentatively, a new boundary for York extended as proposed in the order, but I repeat that it was tentative. The essential need was to reflect what local people felt and wanted. In other words, the people, not the planners, were given priority by the commission. Why, then, have the Government not reflected that approach?

In relation to its tentative proposals, the commission stated:

"However a proper balance must be struck between feelings of community, and the search for the most efficient form of local government that will meet the needs of the community."

Listening to my hon. Friend the Minister introduce the order relating to York, I was shocked to hear him put into the mouth of the Boundary Commission words which exactly reversed the priorities outlined in the above quotation. The Boundary Commission said that a

"proper balance must be struck between feelings of community, and the search for the most efficient form of local government".

My hon. Friend claimed that the commission said that what was sought was the most efficient form of local government which, as far as it could be, would be compatible with what local people want. The Boundary Commission made its first priority the identities and interests of local communities and the need to secure effective and convenient local government came second.

The Government have done a disservice to local government by putting the planners first and the people second. That essential imbalance is perverse and undesirable. The people in and around York have expressed their feelings about the way in which they want local government to be organised in their locality. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras vividly brought out the facts.

My hon. Friend the Minister will know of the local referendum to which the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras referred. In it, more than 32,000 valid votes were cast, the overwhelming majority—more than 80 per cent.—in favour of restricting the York city boundary and repudiating the recommendations of the Boundary Commission.

It is interesting and significant that the Boundary Commission itself, in paragraph 66 of its final report to the Secretary of State, said:

"Bearing in mind that city extensions are usually strongly contested (as can be seen in the case of both Kingston upon Hull and Bristol) the Commission considers that the opposition to the proposed extension is relatively weak. Only 800 direct representations were received from the area that would be affected by the two boundary extensions."

I hesitate to cite a letter sent to me on 17 January by my hon. Friend the Minister because I do not think that he can have read it before he added his signature to it. The letter states:

"However, whilst we recognise that there are pockets of strong local feeling—and this perhaps is not accurately reflected in the relatively low level of those who responded to the canvass you refer to in your letter—against extending the City's boundaries to include the major part of the Greater Planning Area, we remain convinced that the Commission's recommendation was correct."

My hon. Friend refers to a "relatively low level" of participation, but the Boundary Commission managed to get 800 people to respond to its canvas in its final report and then embarked on the path that we are now disputing. The poll to which the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras referred involved 32,000 people, but my hon. Friend the Minister talks about

"pockets of strong local feeling . . . perhaps . . . not accurately reflected in the relatively low level of those who responded to the canvass".

What does my hon. Friend really believe is the basis for his seeking to shelter behind the skirts of the Boundary Commission in going ahead with these proposals? Does he honestly believe that, had the Boundary Commission received not 800 responses to its inquiry but 32,000—something approaching 42 per cent. of the electorate, way above the average level of participation in local government polls and getting on for the level of participation in parliamentary polls—the Local Government Commission would have recommended ignoring the feelings of local people and proceeding as proposed? No, it would not. My hon. Friend cannot shelter behind the local government boundary commission.

I shall not vote against the order only because my hon. Friend the Minister has been helpful and constructive about Humberside. I give him credit for that and appreciate his help in making certain that Goole did not come into the Selby district.

8.16 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I must first apologise to the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) in his absence for wrongly having promoted him above his station and accused him of being leader of the Conservative majority on Hull city council. However, I must admit that I owe him a debt of gratitude as Townend's rent rise meant that my then marginal seat became safe, and Townend is a name that young mothers still use to urge their children to hurry home early and safely. He had the same distinction when leader of Humberside county council in that he cut services so much that, apart from one brief period of a hung council, Humberside, after Townend—like after Hull had had Townend—has remained Labour ever since. That brings me to the purpose of the debate.

Humberside was created out of malice and is being destroyed out of malice. It was created out of malice to try to defeat the strong Labour control in Hull, Grimsby and Scunthorpe. It was felt that going into the new county, using the excuse of an estuarial authority, would enable it to become Conservative controlled. That did not happen except for the one occasion when the hon. Member for Bridlington was leader of the Tory group.

The decision to abolish Humberside is being taken for exactly the same reason. It has been a very strong Labour council. Under its first leader, Harry Lewis, until its

[Mr. Kevin McNamara]

present one, Maggie Smith, it has provided good, efficient and cost-effective education services, social services, transport, leisure and environmental services and good economic development. People can be proud of the county council, and that applies also to the people who have served it. But despite the attempts of the Labour group on that county council over a long period, and the great quality of the services that it produced, it never succeeded in capturing the public's imagination to gain the loyalty and support that I believe it was entitled to expect, although I have always supported the case for Hull being a unitary authority. I do not know whether it was the new name that rankled with the Yorkshire people from the old East Riding, and Lincolnshire people from north Lincolnshire, or whether it was the old northbank-southbank rivalries between the "Hully Gullies" and the "Lincolnshire Yellow Bellies", but, whatever it was, despite the best efforts of many of my county council colleagues, it never won that support.

Equally, however, as far as the Labour party is concerned, since my right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) was Minister for the Environment in 1978 and the proposal of organic change was brought forward, the main large county boroughs, which had lost their status as a result of the Local Government Act 1972, had campaigned long and furiously to return to their old status and powers. Indeed, it was the policy of my party then—and still is—to have decentralised Westminster Government represented in strong regional authorities and to have strong unitary authorities for local government purposes.

It is an irony of fate that the order, with the exception of North Riding, or north Yorkshire, creates just the form of organisation that a future Labour Secretary of State may immediately implement to give Yorkshire its own regional authority and its strong local unitary authority, because the pattern of the old West Riding and East Riding is now of unitary authorities.

The attitude of the Government to Humberside has been particularly vindictive, but, having said that, the city of Hull has always wanted to return to its former glories. It is ready, willing and eager to seize that chance and opportunity. That has been shown overwhelmingly by the citizens of Hull and by the members of Hull city council. But it will not be an easy task for many of them, and those who were members of the old city council and who are standing as candidates for the new city council will find that many of the old powers that they once enjoyed have disappeared. They will no longer have responsibility for tertiary education, for example, and in many ways they will be only a cipher for the Government in the administration of rather than the creation of services. The new responsibilities that social services and education services have gained will be a burden that they will not have experienced over the past 20 years. It is something with which they will have to wrestle. Fortunately 12 existing members of the county council will be local government candidates in Hull. I am sure that their experience of administration of those services which they will bring to the posts will be welcomed by the new city council.

I know that many hon. Members wish to speak. I merely reiterate the point that Humberside county council has been badly treated. It has been destroyed out of malice by the Government, but I believe that Hull is entitled to and should have always maintained its role as an independent, strong unitary authority. Therefore, I welcome the creation of those powers for the city of Hull. I would have liked to see its boundaries extended. Over the years, I have often thought it wrong for people to earn their living in Hull, to use many of Hull's services, whether cultural or otherwise, its libraries, theatres and subsidised orchestras, and yet live outside the city boundary. It would have been right for them to have been brought in. One of the new city constituencies—that of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall)—will be Kingston upon Hull, West and Hessle. It will be divided by a county boundary, contrary to the usual recommendations given to the parliamentary commissioners when drawing up constituency boundaries. I hope that it will be part of East Riding, which will come into the city of Hull. It is true, as the Minister who opened the debate said, that there will be little bits on the margins—little bits of housing estates, old school sites and so on. But more than that should come into the city.

I welcome the order in so far as it gives unitary status to Hull, but, for the reasons given by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), which will no doubt be repeated by my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley), if he catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will vote against the order for York.

8.25 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I must tell the House that I shall be voting against the order tonight, and for two reasons: first to reflect the anger and betrayal that is felt by tens of thousands of my constituents at the proposed Greater York authority, as the opinion surveys referred to have made clear. Secondly, from the very start of the local government review, my opinion was that there should be no change in the structure of local government in North Yorkshire. The debate today has shown that no one has made any case in favour of a change. That includes York remaining part of the two-tier structure of North Yorkshire. The Ryedale district population is effectively chopped in half. I think that the figure is that 49.8 per cent. goes in and 50.2 per cent. stays out.

Although there is rejoicing that we have managed to save the county council from the worst excesses of the Local Government Commission's recommendations, there is grave concern that the residual part of Ryedale, which will remain within that two-tier structure, will have a small population and only 23 councillors to deal with an area of some 600 square miles. It will be a truly rural authority, and there may be some advantages in that; nevertheless, the people who have escaped going into Greater York are no happier about the overall position than those who are going into York.

When we reflect on the last two or three years of the local government review, few people—if any—will emerge with much credit. The Government's preferences were muddled. There was far too much of the nod and a wink, "We think that unitary is what you are going to end up with," kind of attitude. I cannot for the life of me see why we had to review North Yorkshire at all. By all means deal with Humberside, Avon, Cleveland, which seems to have been very popular with our colleagues affected by the changes, and the support for the Humberside order tonight contrasts with the lack of support from those affected by the North Yorkshire order,

but I just cannot see why we had to interfere with the two-tier structure of local government in North Yorkshire, which has worked extremely well. It is England's largest county.

The Association of District Councils encouraged all its members to opt for unitary status, even though it must have been patently obvious that most were unlikely to succeed on their existing boundaries. Of course, it is subject to caveats, which I am sure that Labour Members would want to tell me about. Both Labour and Liberal Democrat policy is to have unitary local government. That was a further encouragement.

On the Local Government Commission's recommendations, the proposal for a North Riding authority was seen and will for ever be seen as a sick joke. It was not the North Riding of old—nothing like it. What was proposed was a unitary authority, measuring 100 miles from its western boundary to its eastern boundary on the edge of the North sea, in the south-eastern corner of my constituency. The commission had the audacity to say that that would bring local government closer to the people. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in Yorkshire people can see through that kind of nonsense, and in this instance they did.

It was in regard to public opinion surveys that local authorities in North Yorkshire made their greatest mistake. When it was patently obvious that we would end up with a mess, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) and I had warned from the start, what did the authorities do? They embarked on opinion surveys in an attempt to prove that what people wanted was a York unitary area extending to the ring road rather than to the six-mile greater York boundary. That has been the cause of all the trouble. We battled to save the county council, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary for State deserves credit for having listened to our arguments and pleas. I feel that he has received much unjustified criticism.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Selby said that it was not possible to hide behind the skirts of the Local Government Commission. It seems to me, however, that debates such as this are really about boundaries rather than the principle of whether Yorkshire should be a unitary area. We heard last week—and again today—that Bristol and Hull should have wider boundaries. It is extraordinary to oppose the commission's proposal for Hull because the boundaries are too tight and then oppose the York order because they are too wide, as the Labour party is doing. That is sheer humbug and hypocrisy.

All that the Minister can say with his hand on his heart is that the commission recommended the boundaries for Hull and York—subject to the five parishes that he took out at my request—and he accepted its recommendation. In that regard, I differ from my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby. Why did the commission recommend a bigger boundary for York? It was because it was not a viable unitary authority with its existing boundary. That is undoubtedly true: everyone knows that the boundary is too tight.

I believe that we could have taken more of the villages out, but there has been no cohesive agreement among all the local authorities on what the boundary ought to be. All that people say now is, "Leave the boundary where it is." York city council, however, argued for the ring road boundary month in and month out throughout the review. Anyone who considers what it would mean for local government in York will realise that the ring road boundary would represent the worst of all possible worlds, not least because the three very successful comprehensive schools in southern Ryedale are just inside the ring road but most of the children who attend them live outside it. That is no basis for a sustainable education policy.

I have a heavy heart tonight. We have ended up with the mess and unpopularity that some of us predicted. Perhaps we have not argued against it strongly enough since the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but it was clear to many of us that the die had been cast, and that—given the controversy about the review in other parts of the country—it would be extremely difficult to change my right hon. Friend's mind about York being a unitary authority at all. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows full well, however, I asked him about six times if he would change his mind.

This is a massive leap in the dark. Will it work? Well, assuming that the order is approved, tomorrow morning we must start the process of making it work. There are a good many unanswered questions about education, social services, libraries and other financial matters that have not even been considered; there is much work to be done, and people of calibre must be elected to the new body to ensure that it does not prove to be the disaster that many of its opponents fear that it will be.

Tonight, however, is the time for me to reflect the views of my constituents. There is great anger in my constituency, and because of that—although I shall go into the Lobby with the Labour party with a heavy heart, given that Labour opposes the measure simply because it did not secure the boundary that it wanted—I shall oppose the order.

8.34 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am delighted to be able to speak in the debate because it is, in a sense, unique.

When I arrived this evening, I expected the debate to be unique for two reasons. First, we were considering two orders jointly for the first time. I feel that that was an unfortunate decision, partly because it means that on average each order has been given rather less time than any previous orders. I am not sure why the Government have it in for Humberside and North Yorkshire, which seem to me to be just as important as other areas and should be given an equal amount of debating time—and that means considering them separately.

Secondly, for the first time we are discussing an area part of which will be left as a two-tier authority but from which will be taken—if the order is approved—a main town or city that will become a unitary authority. Although this is the first occasion on which we have discussed such a case, no doubt instances involving other areas will be debated in the near future. However, this instance presents particular difficulties and we could have done with a full-length debate on it.

I have subsequently realised, however, that those are not the only two unique aspects of the debate. Another important aspect is that for the first time Conservative Members are speaking out against the Government's position, plainly and effectively. That must make your job rather difficult, Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand that you like to call hon. Members alternately to put opposing sides

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of the argument, but at present it seems that all the speakers oppose the North Yorkshire order, and that may well continue until the Minister winds up.

I will begin with the Humberside order, partly because I think that in many ways it is the easier one to deal with. One or two objections can be made to it, in particular the usual complaint about the first tranche authorities—that there was never enough consultation to establish what people really wanted, and it is therefore difficult for the House to decide how much support there is one way or the other. There is also the issue of staffing and the inadequacy of the compensation regulations. Although that issue has been raised before, it will count against the passing of the Humberside order tonight.

There are, however, many points in favour of the order. One which has not been raised sufficiently so far is the possibility of long-term savings. It is clear from the commission's report that considerable savings could be made from the move to a unitary system, and that there will be a good and short pay-back term to compensate for the transitional costs which will inevitably be incurred. There is also strong evidence of popular support for the abolition of Humberside. Like Avon and Cleveland, it was an artificial creation to begin with; it has never been loved and there will be no shortage of supporters for its abolition. A MORI poll showed that some 64 per cent. of people in the area were in favour of unitary authorities in principle, and of the 19,741 direct responses to the commission some 71 per cent. favoured a unitary solution. That is a very good proportion.

North Yorkshire is a more significant case. Most of the area will remain a two-tier authority. The Liberal Democrats, however, are not necessarily against taking out a major town or city and making it into a unitary authority, if that is the right thing to do in a particular case, as long as we consider each case on its merits. The main argument tonight, therefore, is not about the principle of taking out one town or city and making it into a unitary authority, but about whether the boundaries suggested for the new York authority are correct or have been expanded too far. As has already been mentioned in relation to Hull, the arguments in favour of the new York authority are that the people who depend on facilities in York should be part of the authority which governs that city and should have to pay for those facilities. If we were to apply that principle all over the country, however, the boundaries of London, for example, would be extended well beyond Newbury. People all over the country use facilities in major towns and cities but are not part of the authority which directly governs those towns or cities. That is therefore a weak argument in favour of expanding the boundaries of York.

There are nevertheless a number of arguments against the order. First, a difficulty exists in relation to strategic services, particularly where a two-tier authority—this is a new point which has not been debated in the House before—surrounds or nearly surrounds a unitary town or city. The Government have not adequately argued their case to persuade us that such strategic services could be properly and effectively managed.

Secondly, fears have been raised, as mentioned by the Minister, that York city might not provide the necessary funding for the Yorkshire museum. The Government have not adequately answered those fears so far tonight.

Thirdly, the fear exists—here I have some sympathy with the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway)—that what remains of Ryedale district in particular and, to some extent, of the other districts from which portions are being chopped away, will be too small to be effective and will be greatly disadvantaged. I understand that Ryedale district will more or less be cut in half in population terms to some 46,000, which will make it one of the smallest districts in England, and the smallest districts face difficulties which may also harm Ryedale.

Fourthly—this has been mentioned several times and is the heart of the debate—there is the question of the gross lack of public support for the recommendations. Even the commission admitted that it could find only about 33 per cent. of people in favour of the expanded boundaries of York. The lord mayor has made it clear that he is against the order. The MORI poll made it clear that support for an expanded unitary York in a two-tier Yorkshire stood at only about 8 per cent.—a minimal level for the Government to put the order through. In addition, 64 per cent. of the population outside the ring road preferred to remain outside the new boundaries for an expanded York.

A significant level of feeling exists against the order. It is no surprise, therefore, that a number of Conservative Members representing seats in the area have felt it necessary to tell the Minister that they cannot support him tonight.

Overall, Liberal Democrat Members will support the people of Humberside in their wish to see Humberside abolished. I am sure that that is right. We shall be watching with interest to see which Labour Members support the people of Humberside, who want the order to go through tonight. We shall also be supporting the people of North Yorkshire, who do not want the order relating to their region to go through tonight. We shall be voting against that order and we shall be interested to see which Conservative Members join the hon. Member for Ryedale, who has clearly made his intentions known, in voting against it, too.

The hon. Member for Ryedale, however, blamed local councils for having failed to persuade the Government to change their mind on the order. With a Government who have a technical minority in the House, he should have been able to ensure that enough hon. Members voted against the order to make sure that it fell. The people of North Yorkshire will not lightly forgive a Government who have turned their back on the wishes of local people, especially if—as I hope will happen—hon. Members who were elected to represent their views refuse to support the Government in the Division Lobby tonight. The people of North Yorkshire will doubtless be watching carefully to see how those representatives vote.

8.44 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): I assure the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) that I shall be speaking with enthusiasm in favour of the abolition of Humberside. I came to the House 16 years ago. I was adopted as a prospective parliamentary candidate in south Humberside 19 years ago. There has not been a day of my waking life in that incarnation when I have not railed against the existence of the county of Humberside. I accept that honourable people of all the political parties serve and have served for the benefit of the people who live in that region, but the institutions, which I readily accept were wrongly set up by my party some 24 years

ago, were fundamentally flawed. The local people of Lincolnshire are divided culturally, socially, politically and economically by that great River Humber that separates us forever from Yorkshire.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are a Yorkshireman. You and the rest of your colleagues who come from Yorkshire recognise the pride that goes with being from Yorkshire, just as we from Lincolnshire recognise the pride that goes with being a yellow belly from Lincolnshire. One may throw hundreds of millions of pounds into fusing the East Riding of Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire together by means of the Humber bridge, but the River Humber ensures that that simply has not worked and never will work.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for coming to the decision that Humberside must finally go. When Minister of State in 1989, he rightly identified the fact that the people of Humberside did not like that county, and he instructed the old Local Government Boundary Commission to investigate the case for returning district councils back to their old county councils. In 1990-91, that commission recommended that the borough councils of Great Grimsby, Cleethorpes, Scunthorpe and Glanford should be transferred as district councils in the county of Lincolnshire.

Mr. Morley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall not give way. I have no disrespect for the hon. Gentleman, who represents very well the constituency of Glanford and Scunthorpe, but we are under pressure of time and the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) took up nearly 40 minutes of time earlier, which has effectively cut the number of speeches in the debate.

In my constituency, great support existed for those recommendations in 1990-91, which I put to the Local Government Boundary Commission. But Glanford, Scunthorpe and Great Grimsby borough councils thought that there should be unitary authorities. I accept the likelihood that Great Grimsby borough council and Cleethorpes borough council will work together well as an entity. Although friendly rivalry exists between Grimsby and Cleethorpes, we must acknowledge and accept that the region has local cultural institutions and that it can work, whichever political party is elected by voters. It will be possible for local people to have confidence in the institutions that will be created in Grimsby and Cleethorpes.

The people of Glanford and the borough council there want to have a unitary authority with the borough of Scunthorpe and the Isle of Axholme. I opposed that originally. We should have had district councils in the county of Lincolnshire, but I accepted their wish. There is some feeling, which my hon. Friend the Minister touched on in his speech, that electoral arrangements have not yet been correctly sorted out. However, I accept, although Glanford borough council does not, that if we refer the matter back to the Local Government Commission, we shall not pass the orders in time for elections to take place this year, and so we shall not get rid of the wretched, dreaded and hated Humberside county council next year.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) was right to identify the case for the unitary authority structure. I accept that county councillors on all sides of Humberside county council have played their part as best they can, in the finest tradition of public service. My point is that the institution of the county council was fundamentally flawed. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North was good enough to recognise that the city of Hull wanted, deserved and will now get a unitary authority. I am not sufficiently well versed in the local argument about boundaries and it is for the hon. Gentleman, and the hon. Members representing neighbouring areas, to make representations about that. The fundamental structure seems to make sense in Hull, Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes. In Glanford and Scunthorpe there should also be the opportunity for a good working relationship that will operate effectively.

I want to see the word "Humberside" expunged from the English language. I never again want to hear anybody refer to the airport in my constituency in Lincolnshire as Humberside airport. I never want to switch on my radio and listen to a thing called Radio Humberside. Once we have expunged that word from the English language, we shall have to ensure that the airport is renamed to reflect the desires and wishes of the local people. We want to have a radio station that will cover north Lincolnshire and north-east Lincolnshire but that is not referred to as Radio Humberside. I hope that the broadcasting authorities at that station will listen to my words or at least broadcast them to the people.

In 1992, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, "Whoever heard of Len Hutton turning out to play for Humberside?" My hon. Friend the Minister—he has been my good friend over many years and was a good and forthright Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment—understands local government and the problems of local government in my area. At long last, it falls to him to make this announcement, which will lead to him being the toast of north Lincolnshire and north-east Lincolnshire when we pass the order at 16 minutes past 10 o'clock.

Humberside has never been popular in my constituency. There is no support for that county. There is the prospect of an excellent working relationship between Cleethorpes and Grimbsy. One must recognise that it is impossible to get from one part of my constituency to the other without going through Great Grimsby, a town for which I have the highest regard. Great Grimsby's football club ground is in Cleethorpes. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and I are great supporters of that football team and we recognise that there is a closeness of community between the two councils. I was delighted when I heard that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, even if he cannot bring himself to vote in our Lobby, will not vote with his hon. Friends. I pay tribute to the sincere way in which he has stood up for the interests of Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes in this debate.

The sentence of death has been hanging over Humberside for far too long. It is time to carry out the final execution.

8.53 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) will be delighted to know that BBC Radio Humberside is broadcasting his remarks live this evening.

York city council as it currently exists is an outstanding local authority. Since Labour gained control of the council 10 years ago, it has been a leader and has been

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acknowledged as such by the Government. It invented the citizens charter—it was the first public body to introduce it—which became the Prime Minister's flagship policy during the election. That policy has since faded from the Government's policy objectives, but not from the city council's.

It would be nice to believe that the debate and vote tonight would focus not on whether the Conservative party or the Labour party would gain from this local government boundary change but on whether it would make for more effective local government. The question of effectiveness was addressed by the then Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) in an Adjournment debate in July last year. He said:

"One of the best ways of ensuring that local government is effective is having local authorities that people identify with and feel committed to."—[*Official Report*, 7 July 1994; Vol. 246, c. 559-60.]

In a written question that the Under-Secretary answered last week, I asked how many people had made representations to the Minister's Department in favour of the Government's proposal for York and how many were against. Thirty individual members of the public have written to the Department of the Environment expressing support, compared with 1,066 who have written in against the proposal. Among local authorities, none have suppored the Government's proposal and seven have come out against. Among parish councils, none has come out in favour of the Government's proposal and 26 have come out against. Among all the other organisations that have made representations, only one has supported the Government's proposal. In total, 31 individuals or bodies support the Government and 1,114 have made representations telling the Government that they have got it wrong.

The Secretary of State said that he is in favour of creating authorities with which people can identify and to which they feel committed. That is not what he is doing in north Yorkshire with this order. Last week, the Department of the Environment replied to the Yorkshire Local Councils Association, of which my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) is vice-president. The leter said:

"Minsters recognise that there are pockets of strong local feeling against extending York's boundary".

Because an official wrote that letter, I can say what the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) could not say when he attributed those words to the Minister. That statement is a lie. There are not pockets of opposition, there is massive opposition from every single one of the wards beyond the York city ring road which are being forced against their residents' expressed will to join the city of York.

The ward beyond the ring road that came closest to voting in favour of joining the city of York was Haxby. In the referendum run by the Electoral Reform Society, 43 people in that ward voted against moving into York and three voted for. More typical was the ward of Wigginton in which 102 people voted against being absorbed into the city of York and none voted in favour. Another was New Earswick and Huntington in which 199 voted against and none voted in favour. Those figures were endorsed throughout the greater York area by a referendum carried out independently by the Electoral Reform Society, in which more than 80 per cent. of the local population said that they did not want to be included in York. One ward only, which my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) mentioned and which is on the border of York, voted in favour of amalgamation with York.

The Government's decision shows contempt for public opinion in north Yorkshire and it ignores the requirements of the Local Government Act 1992, which, in a written answer in November the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), described as follows:

"The Local Government Act 1992 requires the Local Government Commission to have regard to the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities . . . Public opinion is one important test of this."—[*Official Report*, 2 November 1994; Vol. 248, c. *1151.*]

In another place, in a debate on the Cleveland order last month, Lord Ullswater, said:

"In all the tests of public opinion the four unitary option has been more popular than the existing system".

He used that to argue for the four-unitary option and, quoting a press release, said:

"It really is time they accepted the decision of local people".—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 23 January 1995; Vol. 560, c. 960.]

The expression of view from local people in north Yorkshire is far clearer than ever it was in Cleveland. It is high time that Ministers applied their own dictum to their own actions and reflected public opinion.

The Government's proposal is inconsistent with decisions that they have taken in other parts of country. York is the only authority in the country to be given unitary status on extended boundaries. In every other case where a unitary proposal has been endorsed by the Government, it has been on the existing boundaries of one or more than one local authority.

Nor is it the case, as the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said, that York, in its existing boundaries, would not be viable as a local authority. The following authorities, which all have broadly the same or smaller populations as the present city of York, have been given unitary status: Bedford, Reading, Slough, Hartlepool, Torbay, Poole, Darlington and the Isle of Wight. Rutland has unitary status with a population of 33,400 people.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The hon. Gentleman is confusing the Commission's proposals with the proposals that the Government have decided on and have proposed. I should like to make that perfectly clear.

Mr. Bayley: With respect to the Minister, I am not confusing them at all. I said that, of the Government's proposals, not one has been similar to York, where the Government have combined an existing local authority with bites of two or three other local authorities. That has not happened in any other case. The York decision is inconsistent with all the other decisions that the Government have brought to the House.

The Under-Secretary said that the five parishes, which the Local Government Commission said should be included in Greater York, but which he decided should be excluded, were significantly different from all the other parishes and wards to be included because of their rural characteristics. Shipton parish, which has been excluded by the Minister despite what the Local Government Commission said, has a population density of 0.87 people per hectare. Kexby parish, which the Minister said should

be included because—presumably—it does not share the same rural characteristics, has a density of 0.12 people per hectare. It is seven times more rural than the parish that the Minister has excluded. The comparison between rural wards and urban York is quite staggering. The rural wards as a whole have about the same population density as the five parishes which have been excluded: 1.02 persons per hectare. In urban York, the present city area, the population density is 35.29 people per hectare.

The Government are simply picking and choosing parishes and wards for their own purposes. The Government's proposals for north Yorkshire as a whole and for the city of York ignore—indeed, fly in the face of—the Local Government Commission's proposals, they are inconsistent with the Government's decisions elsewhere and they are incompatible with public opinion—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

9.3 pm

Mr. James Cran (Beverley): I am very pleased to rise to support the Humberside (Structural Change) Order, although not without—I must make it clear—a little hesitation, because I think that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary realises the opposition north of the Humber to the last-minute decision to include Goole in the proposed East Yorkshire county council. None the less, I support the order simply because I have to recognise what most of my constituents have been saying for some considerable time, indeed, ever since I was elected—that they are simply opposed to the entity called Humberside county council.

I cannot quite match the colour and malice brought to the debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), but he was absolutely correct. There has been absolutely no loyalty to Humberside county council. I have discovered that all my constituents relate not to Humberside county council but to the borough of Beverley. If asked, most of them seem to think that the borough of Beverley has heretofore delivered all the services that Humberside county council is said to deliver. That simply shows that my constituents would really have liked single-tier, all-purpose local government based on the district and the borough of Beverley.

Be that as it may, I entirely agree with the Opposition Members who said that the creation of Humberside was artificial. They pointed out that a Conservative Government were responsible for that artificial creation. That is absolutely correct. There is no doubt about the fact that the wrong decision was made then. It seems only fitting, therefore, that it is a Conservative Government who are undoing the wrong that was committed then.

Although Opposition Members may not like to hear this, I must say—

Mr. McNamara: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cran: I do not intend to give way, as I have only 10 minutes in which to make my speech.

My constituents do not like the high-spending propensity of Humberside county council. My constituents consider themselves to be the paymasters of that council and they do not like it. Moreover, the political leadership of Humberside county council has been extraordinarily poor in the time that I have observed it. However, I met the chief executive of Humberside county council in Central Lobby before the debate and I must pay tribute to the officers and staff of Humberside county council who have been of an extremely high order. I look to see the easy translation of most of them from the council we do not want to the one that we do want—East Yorkshire county council.

The Local Government Commission was absolutely right, therefore, to recommend abolition. I would have preferred single-tier, all-purpose local government based on the district with an expanded borough of Beverley, because that is what my constituents wanted and relate to. However, we will gladly accept an East Yorkshire county council and my colleagues in Beverley constituency will work very hard to make it a success, whereas Humberside county council could never be made a success.

I agree with the Local Government Commission, which said that there will be substantial service improvements. In particular, I am looking for improvements for my constituency in education. When I examine the county council's decisions, I discover that most capital spending on education goes not to my constituency but to most of the constituencies south of the river. With an East Yorkshire county council, I would expect more capital spending on education in my constituency.

The reform is worth while and extremely popular in East Yorkshire and I particularly want to thank the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones), because he has been perfectly willing to listen to all opinions. His door has been open to me and to my colleagues from Beverley. I particularly thank him for the fact that he rejected the expansionary tendencies of the city of Hull.

I noted that the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) tried to sow a little discord by saying that there was to be a rather larger view of the boundaries of Hull. I believe what the Minister said. He said that the review of the boundaries is to be a minor one and not major. We look forward to that occurring fairly quickly.

Mr. Dobson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cran: No, I do not have time.

The great city of Hull wanted the suburb of Haltemprice so that Haltemprice could act as the paymaster for that great city. I am delighted that the Government have rejected that idea.

All this said, my hon. Friend the Minister will be expecting me to say that there is just one cloud in an otherwise cloudless sky. He knows that I do not understand the Secretary of State's decision to include Goole within the boundaries of East Yorkshire county council; nor do my constituents. That was not recommended by the Local Government Commission—for good reasons, which other hon. Members explained.

As hon. Gentlemen said, before 1974 Goole was in the West Riding; it has never been in East Yorkshire. It is separated from that area by the River Ouse, and has little, if any, community of interest with East Yorkshire. It is, of course, an industrial port, and a successful and good one, but East Yorkshire consists of market towns and rural areas, so there is little community of interest.

[Mr. Cran]

I remind the House that in the first two drafts of the order Goole was not included within the boundaries of East Yorkshire county council. On 8 February, the Secretary of State changed his mind "in the light of representations received."

Mr. John Greenway Yes.

Mr. Cran: I note what my hon. Friend says. But all I ask the Minister is: from where did those representations come? That is all that we want to know in my constituency. What was said? I hope that the decision did not stem from a threat of judicial review by Selby.

The position has been at least partially retrieved by the Secretary of State's decision that there will be a review of the boundaries between Goole and its neighbours. That must be done in as short a time as possible, for reasons that have already been explained by others—the uncertainty and instability not only for East Yorkshire county council but for the good people of Goole. Where are they to go? Clearly that has to be decided quickly. Will the Minister say a little more about the timing, and the how and when? Once the Boundary Commission has made recommendations, whatever those recommendations are, how will they be implemented and when?

In summary, for I must be close to my time limit, I shall support the order because I want to see an end to Humberside county council. I say that with no malice; I simply think that it has not worked. None of my constituents looks to it for services, and I want the riding of East Yorkshire to be reinstated. I would, however, repeat that we should like a speedy decision on where Goole will go, and when.

9.12 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Most of what we are debating is another example of Tory folly, in which the Minister comes to us, without an apology or admission of error in any respect, to reverse a Conservative Government policy of 25 years ago—the Peter Walker memorial system of government. Peter Walker came to us as a penniless barefoot refugee from the City, where he had been Jim Slater's dog walker, to reform the whole system of local government. He imposed a new structure on us in Grimsby, not only against our will but against the wishes of the people on the south bank, and brought the two banks together as if they were leftover bits of a jigsaw puzzle, into a Humberside county that we never wanted in the first place.

Grimsby Labour party, and Grimsby's present Member of Parliament, have provided the only consistent voices in the whole debate. We have consistently said that power should be returned to unitary authorities on the south bank and that Humberside should be dismantled, and we are the only people who have said that throughout.

Now, after 25 years, when the county has woven the two banks together and it is working well, when careers have been built on it and lives have been devoted to it, and when a whole series of people have worked well to build up a good authority, along come the Government saying, "We have changed our mind; we are going to scrap it. We have changed our mind on that issue, as on most other issues, and now we are setting out to destroy what we created in the first place."

I wonder how much the whole exercise has cost—the setting up, the running and the dismantling of Humberside after 25 years of Tory folly. The Government consistently say that they have no money for any useful social purpose, but they seem to have endless money to pour out to clear up the consequences of their own folly and misguided decisions.

The reform of local government has been a mess. It has taken place under Sir John Banham, who is a misguided missile—an Iraqi Scud missile—when it comes to decision making, and is reforming local government on a Yugoslavian model. Once again, Labour will have to clear up the mess by setting up unitary authorities and regional governments above them to give us an effective system of local government.

The reform has been a piece of wilful vandalism. It has not come from the desire of the Government to listen to the people, the desire to create efficient units or the desire to give the units optimum size. It is not a carefully thought-out reform, based on a full analysis. It is a piece of pure political prejudice, as all Conservative Members have been saying. They hate Humberside because it has been an efficient, Labour-controlled authority which has provided good services for the people of Humberside. Their real accusation against the council is that it has been Labour controlled and has done a good deal for the people of the area.

Look at Humberside's record on education. School budgets have been kept at 6 per cent. ahead of the standard spending assessment, which is why very few schools in Humberside have opted out. Social services, trading standards, development, transport, leisure, the police and the fire service have all done well in Humberside.

I come to praise Humberside, but also to bury it, because the expertise to which I have referred will now be dispersed. The reform is being carried out with the same Gradgrind, mean-minded and petty-minded brutality that typifies the Government. Some 36,000 staff have been treated abominably by the Government. They are getting not 82 weeks' redundancy, as staff involved in other local government reforms have done, but 66 weeks. The provision is only £50 million for all the areas, but Humberside alone calculates that its costs will be £25 million.

Too many costs will fall on the successor authorities, which will be crippled with a burden of debt. The successor authorities—rightly, in my view—have promised a 100 per cent. take-up of staff. Will the Government make a proper financial provision to allow them to carry through an effective transition? The SSAs will need to be revised appropriately to allow us to develop the same efficient and effective services which Humberside has provided. Only the Government can make proper provision for that. We do not want council services strangled by the council tax, which penalises any small increase in expenditure by a much bigger increase in council tax. On top of that, the council tax has a capping system which cripples local authority spending.

We cannot maintain the same quality of services unless the Government work with us and help us. It will be impossible to carry through an effective reform of local government while trying to cripple local government spending in the way in which the Government will do with their stringent controls. If we have unitary authorities—and I want them—they must be allowed to

live up to the high standard set by Humberside by working with the Government. The Government must help them, and not try to strangle them. The relationship between central Government and local government should be one of co-operation, and not a war. We should not have the litany of blame which central Government impose on local Government.

I have been consistent, as have Grimsby Labour party and Grimsby council, in wanting a unitary authority. In my evidence to the commission, I asked for exactly what we have got, and it was very good of the commission to reproduce my evidence as its report. That was a sensible move on its part and it was the only sensible part of the report, I might add. Grimsby council, Cleethorpes council, all political parties and the people want this unitary status for our area.

I could even vote for the order, despite the fact that the Opposition are on a 2.75 line Whip, which is known on this side of the House as the Hartlepool Whip. I could vote for it, were it not for the fact that it has been done in such a mean, nasty and Gradgrind way by the Government. As it is, I shall abstain, but I shall abstain enthusiastically because we are getting what we wanted in Grimsby and Cleethorpes. We are getting a Lincolnshire identification, we will have control of our own destinies and we will have an intimate and accountable unit of local government which is close to the people and is well-served by good councillors. We have the benefit of starting out with huge good will, which Humberside never started out with. As a unitary authority, we are moving up in the world, Mr. Deputy Speaker—up to the big league. This is professional stuff.

In Grimsby and Cleethorpes, we are certainly moving up to face the challenge of providing the same quality of services that Humberside provided to our people and trying to do better than Humberside. It is a challenge—an exciting opportunity. After 20 years of being run from somewhere else, we are able to take control and to be masters of our own destiny, which is a very exciting prospect.

If the Government let us carry this through effectively, we will take control and we will serve the people. We want to co-operate. That is why it is important for the Government to co-operate and allow us to carry through the logic of what they are imposing in the order.

Together, Grimsby and Cleethorpes, will rise like a phoenix from the ashes of Peter Walker's funeral pyre, which we are igniting tonight. We will rise, and it is more than time that we did, so let us go forward together, building on Humberside's achievement, but doing better.

9.20 pm

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): I find it confusing to follow the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) because, on the one hand, he says that he has got what he wants but, on the other, he is not prepared to vote for it. That seems rather two-faced.

When the review began in September 1992, views from local authorities and other interests in Yorkshire, Humberside and Lincolnshire were canvassed. By December of that year, the draft recommendations in the consultation reports were produced for further consultation. Those were published in June 1993 and at that stage we went through an "unprecedented consultation programme", to quote the concluding report of the local government commissioners.

That consultation exercise ran through until September of that year and residents, public bodies, local authorities, Members of Parliament and the Audit Commission were consulted. In total, the Local Government Commission heard from about 36,500 residents and received 4,500 letters. Also, 8,000 questionnaire forms were returned and 150,000 leaflets delivered to various people. In a sense, that canvas was disappointing, because the figures are not especially large for the areas and the number of people concerned.

As the debate on what sort of future local government would have grew, especially in North Yorkshire, I must agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) that it was felt that there was pressure for unitary authorities to be established. That was not initially the case, but it became the order of the day at a later stage in the second consultation process.

In short, local councils, such as my own Harrogate borough council, not unnaturally voiced themselves vociferously for becoming unitary authorities. Similarly, North Yorkshire county council—threatened by the unitary authority process—lobbied for the status quo. I got the impression that councillors and council officials were lobbying for their own benefit and survival. I do not doubt that that was the case.

At that stage, my position was that we had to listen to what people had to say and that we should move to a different form of local government only when it was proved that the local people demanded a change and knew what they wanted.

Significantly, the striking signal that the report of the Local Government Commission reiterated was people's reference—again and again—back to the ridings. The report states:

"In north Yorkshire there is a very strong affiliation with the Ridings (and an even stronger one with Yorkshire as a whole to which 55 per cent. of respondents feel they belong very strongly)."

Without any question of a doubt, I sense that to be the case.

The report continues with a reference to community identity and interests and says:

"However, the strength of feeling towards both Yorkshire and the Ridings informs the Commission's approach to reviewing local government structures north of the Humber."

Having listened to all that opinion, the Local Government Commission got it hopelessly wrong at that point. Its proposals for Harrogate were for a merger, as has been said earlier, into unitary status of the districts of Craven, Harrogate, Selby and Goole, taken from Boothferry district, to be named the "West Riding (Dales and Vale) of Yorkshire". There was universal condemnation and ridicule, and I shared in that. No one in his right mind could conceivably have come up with that suggestion. Similarly, the North Riding unitary authority never got off the ground and was never acceptable.

Today's order results from strong representations for the status quo, retaining as it does North Yorkshire county council. One receives little thanks from North Yorkshire county council for battling on its behalf at the time that the proposals were made.

We have spent a great deal of time discussing the expansion of the city of York, but there is a good case for the new York authority to be a unitary authority. The question arises of where its boundaries should be. The proposal is that the areas of Nether Poppleton and Upper

[Mr. Robert Banks]

Poppleton, which includes Rufforth, Hessay and Knapton villages, in my constituency, should be taken into Greater York and the new authority.

My opinion about that has always been that we needed to listen to what people had to say. It was interesting to read the results of the MORI poll, because it revealed that, in the village of Nether Poppleton, 46 per cent. of people questioned were in favour of merging into Greater York, whereas 35 per cent. preferred the status quo. The next-door village of Upper Poppleton differed, a margin of 6 per cent. wishing to be outside the new York authority—46 per cent. for the status quo and 40 per cent. for joining Greater York. Leaflet responses in both those areas were in favour of the status quo.

We must ask ourselves why people did not want to merge into York. I do not think that anyone has considered what rankled with those people that made them want to stay where they were. Some wanted to go in and some did not want to go in. It has not been determined whether that was because they wanted to get away from Harrogate borough council or whether it was because they felt an affiliation with the schools, the shopping and the employment and a natural affinity towards York as a result of being so close to the boundary of York.

I have a sense that there is a fear that, by being part of Greater York, those people will be engulfed and the character of their villages will be snuffed out by future development, which will involve them in a great urban sprawl. Of course there are green-belt areas and there is protection, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will be able to give further evidence that urbanisation of those areas will not take place. They must be protected from that awful sprawling factor.

The Secretary of State adopted the opinion, at a later date, that the name of North Yorkshire county council should be changed to the "County of the North Riding of Yorkshire". In a sense, he was reflecting the county of the East Riding of Yorkshire, and I thought that it was a reasonable idea. In fact, the chorus of disapprobation that resulted was as loud as it might have been if we had overnight decided that North Yorkshire county council should be done away with. Instead of that, one was suggesting that an extra name be added to the title.

Let us bear in mind the fact that a riding is defined as the third part of a shire—after all, it would be the second part of it—and the ridings were established by the Danes in the latter half of the ninth century. The word derives from the old Norse word for the third part, "thrithing", which became "riding", and the term remained with us until the reorganisation of 1974. It therefore appeared quite a reasonable thing, did it not, to want to use that terminology to put back the historic character that had distinguished North Yorkshire?

North Yorkshire county council reacted in an incredible way. The chief executive issued a personal press release, headed

"Riding roughshod over a million pounds".

The chief executive reckoned that the change of name would cost £1 million. Anyone in his right mind would have asked, "Has the council gone out of its mind, even to contemplate paying such a large sum?" That included signs and the livery of approximately 1,000 vehicles, which could have had a sticker for £30 or a total respray for £2,000. Clearly, the figure was raised for political reasons to embarrass the Government and get rid of the name "riding". Many people will, when they come to think about it, regret that. If a change is to be made, it is done sensibly by natural wastage, replenishing stocks where necessary, and as cheaply as possible. Nobody expected North Yorkshire county council to change its name to North Yorkshire Riding council overnight. That orchestration has lost us the character and attractiveness that distinguishes North Yorkshire from other local authorities in the rest of England.

Last year, the York museum had 110,000 visitors and the previous year it had 256,000 visitors, only 3 per cent. of whom came from York. However, it receives £600,000—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order. Mr. Gunnell.

9.30 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): I do not represent an area directly affected by the proposed change and therefore speak from a different perspective. I spent 12 years as chairman of the Yorkshire and Humberside Development Association and played a part in the economic development of Humberside as part of the Yorkshire and Humberside region. My role was to work together with members and officers of Humberside county council on the acquisition of inward investment.

When the Minister listed where the powers would go and the arrangements that would be made, he omitted to mention economic development. I did not learn whether he had discussed with his hon. Friends at the Department of Trade and Industry their reaction to the proposals and I therefore do not know what arrangements will be made for the maintenance of a service that has proved valuable, for the working of the region as a whole and to Humberside county council.

That matter is important and the debate gives me an opportunity to say that I agree entirely with my hon. Friends the Members for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) about how this process is being carried forward. The orders are clearly political and intended to give political dividends. In the distant future, an attempt will be made to change the boundaries of York and make life more difficult for the Labour party. In the same way, my hon. Friends were right to say that Humberside is now to be abolished for the same reason as it was created—to give electoral advantage to the Conservative party. We must look at the practical consequences of that.

I was interested to see the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) bounce up and down in his condemnation of Humberside and anxiety to see the word eradicated from the English language. He is in the habit of bouncing up and down like that. I saw him do so when the Kimberly-Clark investment was announced. He and the Prime Minister claimed credit for that investment and he has raised the issue a couple of times at Prime Minister's Questions. As I was chairman of the YHDA at the time and worked with officers of both Humberside and the development association on that inward investment, I know that the hon. Gentleman had nothing to do with it, but Humberside county council had everything to do with it. It must be recognised that Humberside was a successful authority, particularly in the area of economic

development. Recently I met a group of business men in Hull who showed no great enthusiasm for the abolition of the county council. As members of the chamber of commerce, they made it clear to me that they believed that Humberside county council had done some valuable work in the area of economic development.

The work of the YHDA in co-operation with Humberside county council has resulted in some notable inward investment successes in north Yorkshire and Humberside. Kimberly-Clark was originally interested in sites elsewhere in the region. Soon after we met its representatives, they said that they were interested in sites in Yorkshire but not elsewhere in the UK. The company located in Humberside in part because of the success of the county council in preparing and marketing a suitable site. Those successes should be recognised widely.

Citizen is another well-known company name in Humberside. That company located in Scunthorpe from Japan largely because of the work of the development association in partnership with Humberside county council. There have been a number of successes of that sort, and I pay tribute to the single-mindedness of the officers and county council members involved in that work.

I experienced the abolition of the metropolitan authorities, and I think it is disgraceful that the Department of the Environment is now offering those staff who are leaving county councils much worse terms and conditions than were offered to staff when the metropolitan authorities were abolished. That is an insult to the staff who have served local government very well.

What arrangements will the Minister make to accommodate future inward investment? Inward investment is co-ordinated by the Department of Trade and Industry. As a development association which was funded by the DTI, we were encouraged to ensure that we forged effective partnerships with each of the authorities in our region. When the metropolitan authorities were replaced with separate district councils, it made our job more difficult because we had to enter into new partnerships.

Although one may have worked with the district councils in Humberside and north Yorkshire, it is difficult to weld together a partnership which involves a number of authorities. The development association moved from four to 11 authorities, and it will now be asked to encompass an even larger number of authorities. That will certainly make life more difficult.

The Minister failed to take into account the effect of the estuary. It makes a great deal of sense to plan strategically for the Humber as a whole. Whatever the historical or political case—that is the real determinant—may be, there is no good strategic planning case for splitting the estuary geographically. Economic development follows strategic planning, and there is some logic to a Yorkshire and Humberside position. Many of the exporters from west and south Yorkshire use the Humber ports. The county council played its part in developing that port complex which is enormously important to the successful promotion of our area overseas. I ask the Minister: what strategic bodies will consider the Humber estuary as a whole? The south Humber is particularly attractive to industry. There is plenty of space, a relatively clear environment, good road facilities and no great density of traffic. All those factors bring companies to the area and have been part of the marketing strategy of the association.

Are the present responsibilities of the regional development organisations likely to remain the same? I believe that they are most effective as they are at present and disrupting them will certainly hinder the process of inward investment. Those questions have not been answered.

I shall vote against both orders as they are primarily political. The order for Humberside will destroy a council that is working effectively in many ways, particularly in economic development.

9.40 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): It is fair to say that when Humberside county council was set up in 1974, it was based on a flawed idea by a Government who could not resist meddling in local issues and local government without thinking them through properly.

In 1972, I was a student at Hull college of education. I recall being called in by the principal, Dr. Cyril Bibby, who told us all as student leaders that we should oppose that ill-thought-out reorganisation and what it would do to local services. Yet it went through in 1974, as my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) made clear.

Many people have invested a great deal of time, money, energy and commitment to making that authority work. Humberside county council has a great deal of which to be proud in terms of the quality of its services and what it has achieved in inward investment, and that should not be underestimated when discussing an order which brings it to an end.

It should also be recognised that Humberside county council has a great deal of support from various parts of the community. It has not been mentioned tonight that young people who were born in Humberside and have an affinity with Humberside identify with it. The business community did not want change; it felt that it worked very well for business. The voluntary sector did not want change either; the county council had tremendous support from the voluntary sector and local clubs and societies.

Humberside has delivered good, cost-effective, high-quality services, particularly in education, which many people, even its critics, recognise. When the last boundary commission undertook a review of Humberside, it did not recommend that Humberside be broken up. Although it acknowledged that there had been a job to do in trying to develop loyalty to the county, it paid tribute to the work of Humberside county council.

The decision of the Boundary Commission was overturned by the late Nicholas Ridley at the Conservative party local conference in Bridlington. His actions were based on sheer spite and malevolence. He thought that by announcing that he would refer back the recommendation of the Boundary Commission, he would win votes for the Conservative party. His objective was winning control of Humberside county council in the forthcoming local government elections. That started off the entire reorganisation. It was picked up by the then Conservative-controlled Lincolnshire county council, which made a pre-emptive bid to absorb the whole of the south bank into Lincolnshire and from that we were locked into a local government review which culminated in the Local Government Commission led by John Banham and all the problems that came with it.

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

We shall now have four unitary authorities in the area. I am not saying that there is no case for unitary authorities. There is an argument for unitary authorities; there is an argument for change in local government and my own local district council of Scunthorpe has a proud record of achievements. It has pioneered comprehensive education and sixth-form colleges. It has certainly been a model for industrial regeneration and attracting inward investment. Certainly, my local district council has a great deal of which to be proud and I am sure that it has the expertise and experience to make the new authority work.

Nevertheless, there are a number of serious problems with this order which have not been properly dealt with tonight. The first to which I draw attention concerns representation. The new North Lincolnshire authority is supposed to have 42 councillors to represent the amalgamated Scunthorpe borough council, Glanford borough council and the Isle of Axholme. Those 42 councillors are to replace the 100 or more sitting district and county councillors, but I do not believe that 42 councillors are sufficient adequately to represent the area.

It is also reasonable to suggest that there should be a full review of the re-warding of the new authority. I accept that it cannot be done before the shadow elections in May, but it has been a very long time since there was a re-warding in the area and the problem of re-warding in rural areas in particular needs to be considered.

Incidentally, I am disappointed that the recommendation for the new authority did not involve elections of one third of councillors every year, as my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) suggested. There has been long-standing support for that notion, especially in Scunthorpe, which has always operated such a system. I personally believe that such elections for local government should be the norm rather than the exception.

I intervened on the Minister in respect of planning. I listened carefully to what he had to say, but he must be aware that the original recommendation of the Local Government Commission, in its report of June 1993 entitled "The Future of Local Government from the Humber to the Wash", was as follows:

> "There is a high level of inter-dependence between the districts straddling the Humber Estuary and this needs to be reflected in an appropriate planning structure . . . the Commission accepts that there is a need for structure planning to be maintained at the level of the existing Humberside County area."

What has happened to that recommendation? What sudden change has occurred which means that the planning structure has to be based on a north bank-south bank basis? There is a strong argument for an estuary-wide structure plan, preferably based on the old county council area. It is not clear exactly what guidance the Minister intends to give the new authority to deal with it.

Although it is all right to say that there can be consultation between local authorities, issues of structural planning often lead to major differences of opinion between localities and consultation is not enough. There has to be strong and effective structural planning. The irony is that the argument has been partly accepted in the sense that the police authority area is to be retained on a Humberside basis. The same is true for the fire authority area, so I do not understand why the structural planning area is not to be retained, as recommended in the original report. The Minister should pay extra attention to that point.

Let us consider the difficulties involved in the transfer of services, especially specialist services that are delivered on a county-wide basis. The years of smooth and effective co-operation between schools and institutions are to be swept away. That is a matter of great concern to the National Union of Teachers and other teaching unions and to local government unions such as the GMB.

As has already been said, the transfer arrangements for the staff are also entirely unsatisfactory. It is unfair that, in previous local government reorganisations in the metropolitan areas, staff were given far more generous redundancy packages and transfer arrangements than are being proposed for Humberside. It is also unreasonable to treat local government staff far worse than civil servants.

I deal now with Goole, which certainly seems to get around in terms of being transferred from area to area—it is clearly a cosmopolitan kind of place. I would welcome Goole into the proposed new North Lincolnshire area. Clearly, it is a matter for the people of Goole to decide, but the Minister should take into account the parliamentary boundary of the new Brigg and Goole seat which will encompass Goole. The health authority is currently called the Goole and Scunthorpe health authority, so they are linked in that respect, too; the education division is based on Scunthorpe and Goole; Goole was in the Humberside police authority; and the Isle of Axholme is in the Goole travel-to-work area. So I think that there is a strong case to be made for transferring Goole to North Lincolnshire, if that is what the people of Goole want. I am sure that they will make their views known on that.

If the order goes through tonight, I want to see all that has been good and successful in Humberside transferred to the new authorities, particularly the North Lincolnshire authority. I must emphasise that there has been much support for Humberside. There is not unanimous opposition to Humberside. Ironically, the strongest pockets of support, as measured by letters and opinion polls, are on the south bank. The reason why there is strong support for Humberside, both at its creation and at the present time, is that people on the south bank remember what a bad deal they got from the old parochial and mean-minded Conservative-controlled Lindsey county council.

That is why I believe that if people want to maintain high-quality services—all that is good about Humberside—they cannot do it through any kind of agreement. The only guarantee for that is a Labour victory in the forthcoming shadow elections.

9.50 pm

Mr. Dobson: With the leave of the House. There has been a good debate about the past of Humberside and the future of unitary authorities, which is to be welcomed. It reflected a great deal of local knowledge, and clearly there were divisions of opinion, but I remind the Minister that, unless I misunderstood the speech of the hon. Member for Harrogate (Mr. Banks), there was not a single speech in the House in favour of the extension of the boundaries of York—to what is preposterously referred to as Greater York. That reflects the views of all the local authorities and Members of Parliament in the area, of whatever

political complexion, and clearly represents the views of the bulk of the people living outside York in the outer ring beyond the ring road and, in some cases, well within the ring road.

On the standard that the Government have laid down for themselves in the past—that, for any proposition to go through, it must be popular with local people so that the council will command their support—the proposition fails in relation to Greater York. It is equally obvious that all those who seek election, and the officers of the local authorities who will be the products of that, will do their best, but in the circumstances we should be giving them better boundaries within which to do their best, and we should wish them well in their task.

9.51 pm

Mr. Robert B. Jones: With the leave of the House. I confirm what I said to the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley), who asked me earlier about the sheriff. He was expressing some doubt as to whether my first answer was correct. I can confirm that that is the case.

When the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said that we should maintain what is best and pass it on to the new authorities, he spoke for the whole House. Indeed, that was enhanced by his hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who said that he wanted the new authorities to do better than the outgoing authorities. Whether we think that it is one or the other, I am sure that the consensus is that we want to see local government providing good, cost-effective services and being responsive to the people of the area.

That apart, the debate has revealed that local government reform divides all parties. That is clearly true on the Conservative Benches, from the speeches of my hon. Friends about the extension of the city of York; but it is just as true of Labour Members, and we heard the views of the Jacobins, from the hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and for Great Grimsby, who wanted to sweep away the authority which they thought should never have been created in the first place and which was a mistake; of the Dantonites, who wanted unitary authorities, but did not quite want them on the present boundaries; of the remnants of the ancien régime, represented by the hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Gunnell); and of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe, who saw merit in what Humberside county council had done.

It is almost impossible to understand how the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) can come to the House and say that he is in favour of extending the boundaries of Bristol, even though the commission did not recommend it, and that he wanted to extend them at the behest of the people of Bristol, but not with any regard to the people living outside the city. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North came along with exactly the same proposition about the boundaries of the city of Kingston upon Hull, saying that people who take advantage of the services in that area, who use the libraries, the schools, the leisure facilities and so on, should be within the city of Kingston upon Hull, but that somehow that argument could not apply to the city of York.

Mr. McNamara: The hon. Gentleman applies that argument to York, but not to the other places involved. It is he who is being inconsistent.

Mr. Jones: I am applying the test of what the commission recommended. Opposition Members would kick up a pretty row if the Government extended or contracted boundaries against the commission's recommendation: they would soon say that we were up to some political shenanigans.

The city of York has dominated the debate. The solution recommended by a number of Opposition Members is what my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) described as the worst of all possible worlds: the ring road. The ring road not only breaches the boundaries of parishes, but leaves outside it some of the parishes that are most urban and most dependent on the city of York. Anyone who looked at a map of the city, or visited it, would see a continuous built-up area that extends beyond the ring road in a number of directions. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras illustrated that with respect to Fulford, saying that someone in Fulford would not realise that he was anywhere other than York. I think that that is true.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jones: No. I am trying to reply to a large number of hon. Members, but time will prove the truth of what I have said.

Other hon. Members have rightly said that Goole is a difficult issue. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe, for example, presented some of the arguments for it to be linked with the new Glanford and Scunthorpe authority. He probably advanced those arguments to the commission; he certainly presented some of them in a letter a copy of which he kindly sent to the Department. There are links, in that the Isle of Axholme and Goole work together in the Boothferry authority, but there have been links between Goole and the rest of Boothferry under the present Boothferry authority, and it was Boothferry borough council that argued that the two should go together into East Yorkshire.

There are arguments for Goole to be linked with Selby and the other river towns in part of what was the West Riding. It is also argued that it has links with the metropolitan borough of Doncaster to the south. I think that the only way of achieving a solution is for the commission to examine the matter specifically, consulting the people of Goole and presenting the Government with a recommendation. We want that to be done speedily. I can confirm to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran), who raised the point, that we shall ask the commission to consider the issue as quickly as possible: that is essential to the local authority's planning procedures, and for staff to know where they are.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale raised the problems of the rump Ryedale, as it might be called. Even as a rump, Ryedale is not the smallest of non-metropolitan districts. I have every confidence that the leadership of the authority will do a very good job in running the remainder of Ryedale, but my hon. Friend raised a valid point when he pointed out that only 23 councillors were left. As I said in my opening speech, we think that that problem also should be resolved.

[Mr. Jones]

On Friday 17 February, the *Yorkshire Evening Press* summarised the issue of York. I think that it hit the nail on the head. It said:

"The danger is that the self evident commonsense of having one authority running the affairs of York is lost in the melee of councillors and MPs who are too busy jumping on a bandwagon of their own making to take a clear-sighted view of the situation. Anybody would think that the absurdity of the existing set up is worth preserving, and absurd it is that people who live within two miles of the Minster should find themselves in Harrogate borough or Ryedale district or ruled over from Selby, and that all of them should have their overlords in a North Allerton based county council."

That newspaper hit the nail on the head. That is why I commend both orders to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 283, Noes 243.

Division No. 90] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*

Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Simon Burns.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begge, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harvey, Nick
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home, Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Stainberg, Gerry
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms Estelle Morris and
Mr. Stephen Byers.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft North Yorkshire (District of York) (Structural and Boundary Changes) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th February, be approved.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the remaining Question required to be put at that hour.*

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Humberside (Structural Change) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 16th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Robert B. Jones.]*

The House divided: Ayes 304, Noes 212.

Division No. 91] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Beresford, Sir Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chidgey, David
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'lre)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Harvey, Nick
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Lynne, Ms Liz
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maddock, Diana
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Twinn, Dr Ian
Tyler, Paul

Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Simon Burns.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Burden, Richard
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Cann, Jamie
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Henderson, Doug
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms Estelle Morris and
Mr. Stephen Byers.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Points of Order

10.25 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You may recall that earlier today I asked a question about a woman called Sita Kamara whom the Home Office is trying to remove from Britain. I have since learnt that, despite my raising the matter here this afternoon and receiving a letter from the Home Office this evening, the Home Secretary intends to remove her from Britain at 7 o'clock tomorrow morning, thus denying Members of Parliament an opportunity to make representations and apparently denying her access to a special medical examination by the Medical Campaign for the Victims of Torture.

I am deeply concerned about that matter, and I look to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to advise me as to how best the House could have an opportunity to question the Home Office on what I believe to be a totally unfair and irrational act against a deeply disturbed young woman who has been on hunger strike and in prison since she arrived in this country to seek asylum from the Ivory Coast. I believe the matter to be urgent and, while I apologise for raising it now, clearly there are no other opportunities for me to do so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): The hon. Gentleman knows full well that that is not a matter on which the Chair can rule at all. Treasury Bench Members are here, however, and they will have heard the hon. Gentleman's plea.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is this a different issue?

Mr. Cohen: It is related—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Either it is or it is not.

Mr. Cohen: It is on the same issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In that case, I have ruled on it. *[Interruption.]* I am most grateful.

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall not accept it.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

That the draft Fair Employment (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which was laid before this House on 26th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (European Standing Committees),

EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT FUND

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7854/94, relating to procedures for the possible budgetisation of the European Development Fund, and supports the Government's view that, in order to maintain maximum control over the United Kingdom's level of contribution to the EDF, Her Majesty's Government should continue to oppose its budgetisation.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

The House proceeded to a Division; but no Member being willing to act as Teller, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER declared that the Ayes had it.

Question agreed to.

Wiltshire Police Force

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

10.30 pm

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): I am glad to have the opportunity to raise on the Adjournment the issue of the Wiltshire police force and the funding that has been made available to that force this year.

The motto of the Wiltshire police force is "Primus et Optimus". It is the oldest police force in the country and, we believe, very much the best. It is one of the smallest police forces and has one of the highest clear-up rates in the United Kingdom.

The financial settlement that we received this year must be seen against the background of substantial increases in police numbers in recent years and the very welcome reduction in the recorded rate of crime, which we have witnessed in Wiltshire during the past year.

In a recent parliamentary answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), whom I am delighted to see in his place, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, acknowledged that between 1979 and 1993 the total strength of the Wiltshire police force increased by about 40.1 per cent.—well above the average population growth in the county at the time. The number of officers increased by about 26.5 per cent. and the number of civilians by a staggering 96.3 per cent. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the chief constable and to all his staff—police officers and civilians—in the Wiltshire force.

This year, the settlement has come against a background of scare stories and scaremongering from the local Opposition parties, who at one stage threatened a 9 per cent. cash cut in Wiltshire's cash funding for this year. Statements such as "outrageous" and "breathtaking" appeared in the local press. In fact, if the new Wiltshire police authority spends up to its capping limit this year, as it always did under the county council police authority, we shall see a real-terms increase in funding for the Wiltshire police force this year of about 2.5 per cent. While I acknowledge that that is a disappointing increase compared with that for many other counties, it is one within which the local force should be well able to work.

I must draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister of State to one or two issues relating to the funding formula. The figures given by the old police authority, under Wiltshire county council control, at the beginning of the year—figures that were given to the Department of the Environment—amounted to a base budget for this year of about £57.8 million. The figure that the chief constable gave to the other Members of Parliament representing the county represented a base budget of about £58.76 million—a discrepancy of almost £1 million.

I spent several weeks trying to reconcile the difference between the two figures and I am most grateful to officials at the Home Office and the Department of the Environment for the considerable time and effort that they put into attempting to reconcile the figures. They were eventually explained to me, by the treasurer of the new police authority, as representing savings that have been rolled over from the previous year into the 1994-95 budget.

That begs three questions. First, why is it, when such crucial figures are being put to central Government and when local Members of Parliament are being lobbied, that the old police authority and the police force, as represented by the chief constable, are unable to agree on the correct level of funding and on the correct base budget for the year? Secondly, I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister of State would confirm that such rolled-over savings should not be included in the base budget as I have been unable to confirm that so far. Thirdly, if such rolled-over savings are not to be included in the base budget, why is that not so in this case? Is it not fair that a base budget should be based on spending arising out of financial prudence from the previous year? We have had considerable confusion in Wiltshire in the past few months about our capping limit, and I should be grateful if my hon. Friend could make a few comments to try to clear some of the confusion.

I shall dwell for a moment on the main problems of the new funding formula as they affect Wiltshire and, indeed, as I believe that they affect several other counties which have suffered under that formula. In Wiltshire we have undoubtedly been penalised as regards pension payments for this year, and we envisage difficulties this year in funding those pension payments.

Allowance has been made in the 1994-95 budget to fund pension payments for officers eligible to retire during this financial year. However, it is likely that the pension expenditure allowed under the new formula will not be enough, given the reality of expected retirements for the year 1995-96. Police forces as a whole usually consider it prudent to allow full provision for those who may be eligible to retire, but in 1995-96 we may well be confronted with additional problems in Wiltshire.

For a variety of reasons, many of the officers who were due to retire before 31 March are likely to stay on until September 1995. As a result, about £1.6 million which would have been spent on payments for the 1994-95 year will not be spent. In previous years, under the old formula, 49 per cent. of those payments could have been rolled over into the following year, but unfortunately that is not permitted under the new formula.

I should be most grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister of State would consider the issue of pensions, and specifically if he would inquire whether a case can be made for a capping disregard to allow for such funds to be rolled over to allow some easing on pension payments in the current year.

The second problem that the formula has thrown up for us is that of the rural nature of the county which is spread out over a great area, with the exception of Swindon which is the large town in the county. It appears that those of us who live in rural areas—and police forces which operate in such areas—experience a certain amount of discrimination under the funding formula.

I believe that the standard spending assessment for education, which the Department of the Environment controls, includes some factor to take account of rural sparsity. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister has been inquiring into that and I wonder whether he has made any progress in considering the issues for the funding formula in the coming year.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I too have brought pressure to bear on our hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, on the question of sparsity. It is a significant

[Mr. Robert Key]

issue, not only in my constituency and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber), but in the Devizes constituency next door—and I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) is in his place. Has the Minister received any response at the Home Office about that sparsity factor? I know that the Department of the Environment revises the statistical basis of its standard spending assessment calculation every year. That issue should surely be tackled for the Wiltshire police.

Mr. Faber: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I think that that is the case. My hon. Friend the Minister, in a letter to colleagues just before the funding debate a few weeks ago, highlighted the pensions issue and the rural sparsity factor and said that he would take that into consideration. I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury and I very much hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give us a few words of wisdom about the extent to which that review is progressing and whether he is able to give us any further advice this evening.

We now have a funding shortfall to fill. According to the chief constable, who has now published a list of possible cuts within the Wiltshire police force, it may be as much as £3 million.

As my hon. Friends in the county have pointed out on previous occasions, we hope that there will be no need for a reduction in police strength. The new police authority and the chief constable may be able to make savings, and I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister about one or two of those. I understand that this year Wiltshire will receive £500,000, which it must spend in the current financial year on common police services such as the national police computer but that under the funding formula for next year that will not be the case. I am interested to know whether that money will revert to Wiltshire's funding and be additional money that the chief constable will be able to spend.

My hon. Friend the Minister and the chief constable will not want to talk at great length about security matters, but Wiltshire has way above the normal number of VIPs to protect and the county has a large and active special protection force. If the peace process in Northern Ireland continues to be successful and to reap the peace dividend, we hope that officers withdrawn from special protection duties will be able to boost the normal manpower available to the Wiltshire police force. Whether the budget is spent in hard cash or on numbers of police officers, I hope that it will revert to the Wiltshire police force and will not be subsumed into the national budget.

In the few minutes left to me, I shall strike a slightly discordant note. Like one or two of my hon. Friends, I have received many representations recently, both by post and at my surgeries, about the major concern caused by local press reports suggesting that the new police authority set up under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 may plan to spend as much as £200,000 on acquiring new premises for the police authority to meet in, possibly in Devizes close to the Wiltshire police headquarters. When I first heard that, I was surprised. Having done some research, I think that I have managed to understand where the various grants are available from and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for his written replies to me in recent weeks on that matter.

I understand that two grants are available to new police authorities and police forces under the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act to help set up the new police authorities. One is for £97,500, which is specifically for the use of the police authorities. In a letter sent to the chief constable of Wiltshire police on 8 July 1994, the payment of that initial grant is decreed as being to cover

"costs such as selection panel expenses, members' allowances, the appointment of a clerk and treasurer, accommodation and anything else directly attributable to the parallel running of two police authorities."

In addition, an initial grant will be made available to the police force. Again as a result of a parliamentary reply from my hon. Friend the Minister, I understand that in the case of Wiltshire that grant will be some £400,000. The chief constable of Wiltshire, in a letter of 26 August 1994, applied for a grant of £220,000 to finance a new police headquarters in Devizes under the £400,000 grant. The submission was subsequently changed and a detailed claim was submitted by the clerk of the new Wiltshire police authority on 15 December 1994 for £180,000 for the new police authority headquarters.

Either way, I consider that those sums are unnecessary and a waste of public funds. They fall short for two reasons. First, why does a new police authority with a few members, which has already said that it plans to meet in town and village halls around the county, need to spend £200,000 on premises in which to meet when it already has facilities available to it in Trowbridge, where the old police authority has been meeting since time immemorial, for the sum of some £7,000 or £8,000 a year in rent? Even if the new police authority were to rent new buildings, I understand that that would cost £25,000 more than the rental on its existing accommodation at county hall. That is possibly the cost of one new police constable on the beat. At a time of cuts, that seems a very poor saving.

Secondly, I believe that an application of that type falls outside the spirit of the grant. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on that point. I understand that the Wiltshire police force applied for the grant originally. However, circumstances changed and the new Wiltshire police authority subsequently applied for the grant. In a letter of 31 January which was sent to the clerk of the Wiltshire shadow police authority, one of my hon. Friend's officials said:

"However, I note that the accommodation bid of £180,000 is now intended for the new police authority. Wiltshire's original letter of 26 August 1994 suggested that this accommodation was for the use of the police force . . . While it is for the police authority to decide how to spend its money, claims for initial financing grant for police force use will not be verified where they relate to expenditure incurred only for police authority use".

Will my hon. Friend assure the House that the grant will not be given to the new police authority for its new premises? I have received information in the past couple of days from a reliable source that it is possible that the grant application will revert to the Wiltshire police force. I understand that premises have already been found close to the police headquarters on the outskirts of town in a new business park in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes. It is possible that the new police force will move into those premises and will be followed closely by the police authority.

At the very best, I believe that such an application is outside the spirit of the grant, and at the very worst—I hesitate to say it—I believe that the police authority is using underhand tactics to gain expensive new accommodation. I

hope that my hon. Friend will consider carefully the points that I have raised. I hope that he will consider whether the grant should be paid and whether it is viable expenditure by the new Wiltshire police authority.

10.46 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. David Maclean): I have listened carefully to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber), which I take very seriously indeed. I am also grateful for the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). My hon. Friends the Members for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who is in his place, and for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham) have made representations to me outside the Chamber about policing in Wiltshire. I am glad that they are in the Chamber tonight to hear my remarks.

The key purpose of the programme of reforms that we are implementing is to ensure a positive future for policing. I am very encouraged by recent figures which show crime on the retreat, and we must maintain and improve the conditions to take that process further.

Providing sufficient funding for the police service and distributing it fairly are rightly matters of prime concern. That is particularly true at a time when we are introducing important changes to the system for the next financial year. Moving to the application of a new, objective formula for the allocation of resources between police authorities has been a complicated business. I expected to receive a large number of queries and I have not been disappointed. I will shortly be responding to a letter from my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury in which he passed on representations from the chief constable of Wiltshire.

The Wiltshire constabulary is an excellent example of the kind of strong local force that is the backbone of British policing. It is committed to quality and to the service of a wide range of local communities. While it is not a large force, it has a real sense of identity with the people of the county and that is the basis of the partnership which we see as an essential element in preventing and dealing with crime. A well-developed system of consultative groups allows for regular contact between officers and those whom they serve and there are also strong links with crime prevention panels. There are 4,116 neighbourhood watch schemes in Wiltshire covering more than 62,000 households.

The Wiltshire force is also forward-looking, with a strong record in technical development and effective liaison with other agencies, such as the Crown Prosecution Service. Most important of all, the force is playing a vital part in getting crime rates down. In the 12 months to June 1994—the latest period for which we have figures—recorded crime fell by 5 per cent. in England and Wales, but Wiltshire beat that figure with a fall of 9 per cent. Burglaries and vehicle crimes in the county fell by 7 per cent. and 12 per cent. respectively. Wiltshire's clear-up rate is also very good at 35 per cent, compared with a national average of 25 per cent.

Basic support in money terms for the Wiltshire force increases by 0.4 per cent. in 1995-96, and I understand that the budget for that financial year has now been set at £59.145 million. The uplift may seem modest, but we need to delve a little deeper to get a more accurate view of the position and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury for delving deeper.

First, Wiltshire certainly gets a fair share of resources under the formula as it currently stands. The relative demand for policing is assessed as higher in many other areas and that is not altogether surprising. Thankfully, Wiltshire is not a rabid hotbed of crime. While a number of English county forces historically spend less on policing, none recorded fewer offences than Wiltshire in the most recent year for which figures are available.

To be blunt, we have to recognise that any redistributive formula will produce gains and losses in relative terms. I am confident that while the formula will inevitably need further development to take into account such factors as rural sparsity, pensions and so on, it is working as fairly as possible, but some people will inevitably be disappointed with its local effects.

Wiltshire says that it is doing badly under the formula compared with 1994-95, but let us look at the background to the funding for 1994-95. It was based on an establishment which had increased by nearly 16 per cent. since 1979, almost double the national increase. As a Government, we are proud that Wiltshire had that dramatic increase in establishment. Over the same period, strength has grown by 255, or more than 25 per cent. compared with a national increase of 14 per cent., so between 1979 and 1995, total expenditure on policing in Wiltshire grew by nearly 154 per cent. in real terms, as against the national increase of 92 per cent. Therefore, any claim for further substantial additions to funding should be seen in the context of those generous increases over a period of 15 years.

The chief constable recently referred to a budget now standing at £60.677 million for 1994-95. Of course, the basic allocation for 1995-96 looks low in comparison, but the chief constable's figure includes significant savings from the 1993-94 budget rolled over with the county council's agreement. I understand that many of those savings related to unspent pensions provisions and that there is likely to be another underspend in that category in 1994-95. If there is, the county council may be prepared to make arrangements for the new police authority to have access to some of that money for 1995-96. The budget may then look distinctly healthier.

Pensions are a problem for police funding, but they can also distort proper comparisons between year-on-year budgets. Stated budget requirements may be inflated by making financial provision for all officers eligible to retire in a particular year. In practice, experience shows that much of that provision will often be left unspent.

My hon. Friend commented on the effect of capping on the Wiltshire police in 1995-96. As hon. Members know, capping is designed to protect council tax payers from the burden of supporting excessive increases in local authority spending. Base budgets for capping purposes and spending caps are a measure of the burden which has been or will be placed on local taxpayers. The final figures, therefore, exclude any expenditure which has been or will be funded by drawing on reserves or by income generated from charging for services. In the case of Wiltshire police authority, the 1994-95 base budget was reduced to reflect the county council's income from fees for registering births, marriages and deaths.

The Wiltshire police argued, understandably, that as they had no involvement with this work and saw none of the income it generated their base budget should be

[Mr. David Maclean]

reduced. The police base budget was correspondingly increased by some £26,000 from £57.82 million to £57.85 million.

My hon. Friend mentioned the concern in Wiltshire that an underspend in 1994-95 could not be carried forward into 1995-96 and benefit the police in that year because it would be included in the capping limit rather than being added to it. That is not the case. The underspend would be carried forward this year by putting money into reserves and then drawing on those reserves next year. Spending from reserves is entirely separate from capping because it does not impact on council tax payers whose interests capping is designed to protect. The spending from reserves in 1995-96 could, therefore, be used to finance additional expenditure above the capping limit.

My hon. Friend said that there was a suggestion that some money allocated for the police service might be used by the police authority for accommodation. I cannot comment on any strategy that a police authority might develop to circumvent the rules for the allocation of initial financing grant for police force use, but I can assure my hon. Friend that the expenditure against which initial financing grants will be paid will be subsequently scrutinised by district auditors who will be countersigning the grant claim form that will be required to be submitted by 31 December this year. Grant that has not been properly used will be reclaimed—it is as simple as that. At that stage, such money could not be re-allocated to another police authority.

Mr. Faber: I have been listening carefully to what my hon. Friend has been saying. The fact remains that the new Wiltshire police authority is under the impression that the grant has been approved. Indeed, in a letter that it sent to me today, it is clear that it believes that the £400,000 has been approved and, within that, the £180,000 for a new police authority headquarters at Devizes. Can my hon. Friend say whether that grant has been approved, or whether his officials are still considering it?

Mr. Maclean: I should like to respond in detail, but I was not aware of that letter. I should need to check it carefully before responding. I can say only that we believe that the law is quite clear. I am sure that no police authority would seek to act in a way that would get round the spirit of the law and risk the district auditor's not countersigning the grant claim form. Not only would the police authority not get access to the money, but the police service would not get access to the resources for which I am sure everyone is fighting. I should like to see the details of what the authority is claiming, and I should then be delighted to respond in writing to my hon. Friend and other hon. Friends.

I am confident that we can do more in Wiltshire and elsewhere to increase the number of officers on the beat where they can reassure the law-abiding public and deter potential offenders. The whole question of funding and the arguments about formulae arise because people want the maximum police effectiveness for the large amounts of money that are, rightly, spent on the police service. The Government's record speaks for itself. There has been an increase of 16,000 police officers since 1979, and we shall improve the position further from April by removing the central controls on numbers in each force. Chief constables on the ground—not the Government and Whitehall—will decide force priorities and they will be able to choose freely between additional police officers, civilians, equipment or any other form of expenditure.

We shall keep up the pressure on police forces to put civilians into jobs that do not require police officers' powers, skills or expensive training. Since 1983, that process has helped us return more than 7,000 officers to front-line duties. We have been able to do that because, in addition to the 16,000 bobbies, we have recruited 16,000 civilians to take over the typewriters and release officers for front-line duties. Wiltshire has a very good record on civilianisation, but there are still a number of posts that civilians could do and should take over. That is the opinion of HM inspectorate of constabulary.

Having mentioned cash limiting of the police grant, I shall say a little more about the key change to the funding system. When linked to the introduction of free-standing police authorities, it will ensure that each force gets a full and clearly defined share of the resources available. Under the new system county councils will not be able to divert resources to other services as some—in fact, the majority, I believe, last year—have done in the past. Nor will additional spending attract automatic grant that will have to be financed from national taxation. The new system of formula funding will depend vitally on the effectiveness of the arrangements for distributing resources, and that is where the formula comes in.

The new formula fills the gap that existed under the old system and it corrects those anomalies. It provides a much more direct link between funding and policing needs. The key factor driving it is population, with particular social and demographic factors playing a small but significant part. Some allowance is made for roads and motorways and the number of officers on ports and protection duties. Around 9 per cent. of the formula is linked to predicted pensions expenditure. Although moving to an improved basis for distribution is all very well, I can assure my hon. Friends that we realise that there cannot be too much change all at once.

Nor do we imagine that we have got everything right the first time. We will continue to review and develop the formula this year and will do so in consultation with the police and local authority representatives. One focus of that work will be the way in which we allow for the special problems of policing rural areas in counties such as Wiltshire. No one will be happier than me, as a Member representing another rural county, if the police service comes to us with very good reasons and arguments about building in a sparsity factor. So far, we have not had arguments that would justify my making that change. I cannot depend on gut instinct, although I believe that the policing of rural areas is bound to have a greater cost than the policing of some urban areas.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Maclean: Very quickly.

Mr. Beggs: I thank the Minister for giving way.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 1 March 1995

The House met at Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Government of London

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

10.4 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): This is an unusual occurrence. We are meeting on a Wednesday morning to debate the government of London. We have to hold such a debate in our national Parliament because there is no government of London that can debate the issues affecting the people of this capital city.

Over the years we have had many debates on the issue, and there is a growing consensus throughout London about the need for an elected authority for the capital city. Indeed, ours is the only capital in Europe without a single, elected government. The steady stream of history shows that when cities remove their elected tier of government, or any sort of central authority, chaos ensues. The central government commission of 1837, looking into the administration of the capital, concluded that it was necessary to set up a single authority to deal with London's affairs. That authority eventually became the London county council, which in turn became the Greater London council in 1965.

The GLC had a good record of administration of services, of pioneering work in education, architecture and housing, and of delivering to Londoners real hope for the future. A whole generation of good council housing would not have been possible without the work of the LCC, and later the GLC. Similarly, the body had an imaginative transport policy, and a highly imaginative arts policy—especially in the latter period of the GLC under the able arts section leadership of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

When, in 1983, the Government published their document on the so-called streamlining of government in the major metropolises and in London, the GLC responded with an interesting document called "The Future of the Greater London Council", published in January 1984. It stated prophetically:

"There is no doubt whatsoever that in the next 20 years metropolitan areas throughout the world will pose greater and greater problems. For, unlike the United Kingdom, the rapid expansion of metropolitan populations of many other countries increases apace. Every day another 100,000 people join those living in the urban areas of the world. By the turn of the century, it is estimated that over half the world's population will live in metropolitan scale cities. Given this future, what example is this democratic country to set the world in 1984 of how to organise its public affairs to meet the metropolitan needs of its capital city, London?"

Despite that statement, and the enormous campaign demonstrating the popularity of a central authority for London, the Government, with their large majority of the time, hammered through the destruction of the GLC, together with the sale of a large number of its assets. This achieved, not a cut in public spending or a saving on bureaucratic expenditure, but a transfer of power away from democratically elected politicians and accountable officials to wholly unaccountable but equally—if not more—expensive quangos throughout London.

A large number of organisations surrounding London Pride recently produced a document describing the money that London puts into the national Exchequer, and the money that it gets back in return:

"Yet for decades London's contribution has been taken for granted. While other European cities have been investing heavily to secure long-term success, so long as central London has seemed crowded with tourists and commuters London has been assumed to be doing all right. Benign neglect is no longer good enough. The time has come for the capital's needs to be recognised and its potential fully realised."

The document goes on to describe what constitutes a world city. London fits all the criteria to qualify as an important world city; the only thing it lacks is a unifying authority that can deal with the serious problems that it faces.

I have mentioned how the government of London has been broken up since the GLC finally went out of existence in 1986. There is, for instance, the sad sight across the river of that empty mausoleum County hall, which has been surrounded by scandals—a point to which I shall return.

All around London we see the problems bequeathed by the lack of a central authority. But more than anything, we must examine what is democratic and what is undemocratic about London. Londoners elect about 1,600 councillors every four years by an elective process. Those councillors are elected to run their local authorities. They take considerable personal financial responsibility for the affairs of those local authorities and risk surcharge and personal debarment from office if they are deemed to have overstepped the mark in any way, whether justifiably or unjustifiably.

However, Londoners have no say in the non-election of an equally large number of people to a series of quangos and appointed bodies all around London. They have enormous access to expenditure—£6 billion a year—they are accountable to no one, they are not open to the public in the way that local authorities are and hardly any of their members are elected to any other body. The Government are essentially appointing their friends to organisations that they think are appropriate to run the affairs of Londoners.

In 1995, it simply is not good enough to say that Londoners do not have the right to elect their own local authority to deal with the important strategic issues facing London. The expenditure of more than £6 billion a year is the responsibility of a mixture of health authorities, housing action trusts, city challenges, London Regional Transport and the London Residuary Body, which manages to get through £72 million a year.

The London Residuary Body sounds like something out of George Orwell. As it was created in 1984, it is highly appropriate that its Orwellian nature should be examined. What is the body for and what has it done? It has an appointed board of directors who are paid. Its job was to oversee the disposal of the assets of the Greater London council and the transfer of its staff.

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

One of the London Residuary Body's greatest claims to fame must be its treatment of County hall. That building was built by public subscription. It is a fine building for all to see across the river, as are its ancillary buildings, the north and south wings. I make no such claim for the architectural beauty of the island block, having suffered many meetings there in the past in my days as a trade union organiser within the GLC.

What is happening to County hall? When visitors from all over the world come to the House, hon. Members take them out on to the Terrace and point to all the wonderful buildings along the Thames—where the Archbishop of Canterbury lives, the United Nations office, the Shell centre and south bank. But Conservative Members seem to forget about the large building opposite and when visitors ask what it is, they say that it is County hall. When they are then asked whether that is the home of London government, they say, "No, it's empty." The only thing that it seems to be used for is the training of police dogs. They charge up and down the corridors looking for phantom thieves, whereas the thieves are elsewhere around the world at the present time.

We must examine seriously what has happened to County hall. The London Residuary Body told the world that it had sold County hall to a Japanese property speculator known as the Shirayama corporation. I understand that Mr. Shirayama had a wonderful deal with the London Residuary Body in that he did not have to pay any money straight away. He was allowed a considerable delay on payment. I understand that £10 million due under a secret agreement has still not been paid.

The Government intervened on a number of occasions to ensure that the building went to a group of Japanese property speculators rather than the London School of Economics, such was their obsession to ensure that the building was not seen to be in public hands in any way.

The National Audit Office is looking into the matter, which I believe to be a serious scandal. I hope that when it has reported, the Government will be prepared to take action and return County hall to the purpose for which it was always intended—a centre for the government of London.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Is it not a fact that that building hosted meetings of huge numbers of organisations, which may have been unstatutory, semi-statutory or fully statutory, representing the people of London in dealing with all-London strategic matters? Is it not also a fact that the final decision about the destruction of one of the finest and oldest civic councils in the world was made by a single leader of the Conservative party because policy is vested in the leader of that party?

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend is right. A vendetta against the GLC was promoted by the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. She sought to destroy the GLC because it represented a central authority and because of its popularity among people who saw life in London improving under the imaginative policies of the GLC.

The GLC was also a valuable resource for meetings for all kinds of community organisations, groups and others. Under the leadership of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), the GLC was an incredibly open building. Anyone could go in and hold meetings there. It was a real resource for the people of London. Its destruction is bitterly resented by many people to this day.

The Action for London group has done marvellous work in demonstrating the appalling waste of resources that that empty building represents. I should like to know how much of our money is being spent on guarding, sealing off and securing that empty building, denying its use to the people of London. That is an appalling vista.

In December last year, David Puttnam, in his London lecture, spoke at some length about the artistic merits of London and its abilities to promote good theatre, film, the arts and so on. He said:

> "Bette Midler once said, in her inimitable and caustic way, 'When it's 3 pm in New York it's still 1938 in London.' And that was before the democratically elected authority for London was wiped out by a vindictive Government eight years ago.
>
> In a very real sense it's not 1930-anything in London. It's far closer to 1890-something and all of us are losing out in consequence. The self-same reasons that led our Victorian fore-fathers to establish the Metropolitan Board of Works and then the London County Council—the need for better planning, better transport, better housing, better education, better public health and civic amenities—all of these are once again zooming up the agenda and crying out for clear and forceful solutions; not solutions thought up by concerned groups of well-intentioned citizens, but long-term strategies argued, implemented and resourced within the framework of the elected and democratically answerable city government."

That is what we are searching for today.

If one wants to know what the people of London think, one must look at the recent polling evidence produced by the Harris research centre for Carlton. There is incredible pessimism about the future of London which I see every day in my community and my constituency. I find it among young people, the unemployed, the homeless, the rootless and the poor in London.

The survey showed that 61 per cent. have no confidence in London's future, an incredible 61 per cent. felt that their children probably would not have jobs when they left school and 77 per cent. believed that the next generation would be unable to obtain decent housing in London. It showed that 17 per cent. were deeply concerned about crime, 16 per cent. about pollution and 15 per cent. about traffic. It showed that 43 per cent. believed that travelling in London had become harder during the past five years and 81 per cent. believed that there was insufficient decent housing in London. When asked whether they thought that there should be an elected council or authority for London, 61 per cent. were for that and only 29 per cent. against. That is an enormous figure.

We must bear in mind all those concerns about the future of the capital city and address them urgently because they are deeply important.

In 1984, the GLC produced a document on ministerial commitments made during the passage of the Local Government Act 1985 which abolished it—page after page of them, from the then Minister, the right hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) on auto-pilot in all-night sittings, droning out soothing words in an attempt to appease my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West. He did not succeed one jot, but he tried hard. Those commitments will come back to haunt the Government. I could quote them all, but I do not have time, so I shall simply quote one concerning housing resources.

The right hon. Member for Acton said:

"Although the boroughs welcome the chance to take over and manage the GLC stock, I know that many councils and tenants still need reassurance that resources will be available . . . We have repeatedly made it clear that abolition will leave that total resource to London essentially unchanged. London's HIP allocation will be shared among the boroughs alone without a top slice being pre-empted by the GLC".

He continues:

"The distribution of allocations will take account of expenditure liabilities inherited from the GLC . . . We cannot guarantee the availability of a particular level of resources for London beyond the assurances that we have already given."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 5 February 1985; c. 1107.]

Many of us would be quite happy to get the resources at the level of the assurances that he has already given. My borough and those of every one of my hon. Friends around me are building almost no homes at all at present. Some 12,000 families are on the transfer list in my borough. There are 8,000 on the waiting list. Every homeless family hostel is chock-a-block. Bed-and-breakfast millionaires abound in London. Why? Because of a vindictive attitude by the Government towards expenditure on housing in London. Those are the issues that must be addressed.

Poverty in London is absolutely appalling. London is a city with more than 6 million residents in 2.8 million households. Some 1 million people in London claim income support and 733,000 claim housing benefit. About 831,000 existing households, plus an estimated 250,000 households, need a new dwelling. About 500,000 people live in households with more than one person per room. More than 500,000 households in London share or lack basic amenities. One million people are over retirement age—50 per cent. of them rely on state benefits. Some 40 per cent. of pensioners live alone. As one who spends a lot of time working with or meeting pensioner organisations in London, I can attest to the misery and poverty of many older pensioners in London, particularly the older women pensioners, who have no access to occupational pension schemes. About 400,000 people are registered as unemployed in London, including 100,000 young people and 175,000 long-term unemployed. About 300,000 children live in non-earning households and about 300,000 are eligible for free school meals. Some 100,000 households include lone parents looking after children. Some 780,000 people in London have a limiting long-term illness, including 32,000 children.

Living in London ain't nice. It ain't happy and it ain't healthy, and those issues must be addressed. That cannot be done while we fail to address the need for a central authority for London to tackle those issues. When one looks at the national statistics for poverty, misery and homelessness throughout the country, one finds that the worst areas are all in London. Seven of the 10 poorest parts of the country are in London.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): The point that my hon. Friend makes is reinforced by a report, "Out of Sight—London's Continuing Bed-and-breakfast Crisis", which I and, I suppose, all hon. Members received today. Is my hon. Friend aware that Wandsworth, the borough that I represent, has one of the worst bed-and-breakfast records in the whole of London? Hundreds of properties are boarded up and are waiting to be sold rather than the council allowing homeless people whose roots are in the borough to live there. It is interesting that the Minister who will reply to the debate was the leader of the authority that encouraged that policy.

Mr. Corbyn: It is nice of the Minister to be here this morning, as I understand that he is quite busy in the dental surgery some mornings of the week. It is good of him to come at all.

We must look seriously at the problems of homelessness and the misery that it causes in London. What is it like for children to be brought up in bed-and-breakfast hotels? What is it like for their parents? What play space is available? What quality food is available? What cooking space is available? It is not even cheap. It costs us millions each year. People who have been allocated a hostel or bed-and-breakfast place by the local authority, because they are homeless, come to me and ask: "Mr. Corbyn, is it sensible to be paying out several hundred pounds a week for me and my family to live in bed-and-breakfast when the council could buy or build a flat for less than that?" I tell them: "You are absolutely right. The council agrees with you, but it is not allowed to buy or build." It is nonsense and something must be done about it.

The problems of poverty and ill health in London are often related to other factors. Air quality and water quality in London are poor. The quality of air in London is seriously damaging to people's health, particularly during a period of still weather. One in seven of London's children now suffers from asthma. If one goes into any school, particularly infant or primary schools, and goes into the school secretary's office, one will see all the inhalers on a shelf above the secretary's desk, to be given out to particular children at lunchtime. There is an epidemic of asthma among London's children—and, indeed the elderly. If one goes into a children's ward in any hospital, one will find many children suffering from chronic asthma, related—not entirely, but mainly—to air pollution in London. Those issues must be addressed.

Some 150,000 people in London are waiting for access to a hospital bed, to undergo elective surgery. In my own borough, no elective surgery is being carried out until after April. I was trying to explain to somebody from another country how it is unfortunate if someone needs an operation in the latter part of the financial year in London. That person could not understand the concept of having to be ill in the early part of the financial year, not the latter part. Again, we have the nonsense of the internal market and fundamentally unaccountable health authorities that administer Government health policies for London.

Transport—the one area in which the GLC gained the most publicity during its latter years—is the greatest concern to everyone in London, whether they are waiting for a bus that does not come, as the buses are held up on overcrowded and congested roads, or whether they are trying to get on an overcrowded train, paying through the nose for the highest fares anywhere in Europe. London Underground and London Transport as a whole are entirely strapped for cash and unable to invest in the vital new railway and tube lines that are needed. A proposal is made for the Chelsea to Hackney line—a proposal that has been around for a very long time—but then we hear that it is unlikely to be even thought about until the start of the next century, despite there having been reports for the past 30 years of the importance of that particular line.

[Mr. Corbyn]

That area requires the attention of democracy in London. There is a need to address the problems of the democratic deficit in London.

The purpose of the debate is to highlight some of those problems. Indeed, many of my hon. Friends wish to make, I imagine, broadly similar points to those that I have made on health and housing. We must address the problem of the lack of a democratic, accountable authority for London. Londoners need to have some pride in their city as a whole. It cannot be governed by a plethora of 32 boroughs, one City of London, a couple of dozen quangos and a Government office for London, which is handing out Government money through the single regeneration budget without the agreement of elected councillors, or of any elected authorities. Indeed, it is being done solely by an appointed civil servant answerable only to Ministers and not to anyone to do with London.

Mr. Spearing: A gauleiter.

Mr. Corbyn: As my hon. Friend says, a gauleiter for this capital city. Those issues must be addressed.

Once a year, the London Labour Members of Parliament go in delegation to meet the Home Secretary, who is the police authority for London for the time being, and, in a separate meeting, to see the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. I used to think that the worst possible way to run a police force was to have the Home Secretary as the police authority, answerable to the House for his actions once a year in an Adjournment debate. I now find that there is something worse—the Home Secretary being the police authority for London, being advised by a group of bankers, appointed by himself, to say how the police authority should be run.

A proposal must be made by the House, at the earliest possible opportunity, for the creation of a new authority for London, which will have responsibilities for overall planning in London. What mad schemes have been approved in the past 10 years to have allowed London to have 22 million sq ft of empty office blocks—office blocks are still being constructed—and no housing programme worth speaking of other than a small number being built by housing associations, and the problems that go with that? Who would have thought that London Transport, the wonder of the world for many people for many years, would now be threatened with privatisation, break-up and deregulation? Our health authorities are unaccountable, with two regional health authorities covering Thames regions, which include London. A London health authority should be involved in a London-wide elected authority. Likewise, why cannot Londoners have a police committee in the same way as other parts of the country?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): My hon. Friend skimmed over the question of who owns County hall. I can only go on what I read in, for instance, the *Evening Standard*. The fellow involved sounds like a crook to me: if he were a Labour councillor, he would probably be surcharged. He uses various aliases; he is known as Mr. Heinz, of the 57 varieties.

If the Minister had any guts, he would deal with the matter on behalf of Londoners and the British people as a whole. I believe that there is a scandal that needs to be investigated. Instead of closing the door when it is all over, as they did in the case of Barings, the Government should expose the gang of crooks who are supposedly in charge of County hall.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend makes an important point. In fact, the National Audit Office is currently investigating the scandal surrounding the sale of County hall to the Shirayama corporation and the gentleman who seems to own it. He goes by a number of aliases, usually the names of types of Japanese motor car. I do not know how many makes of Japanese motor car there are, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West has explained on a number of occasions, there seem to be quite a lot. We hear of Mr. Honda, Mr. Toyota, Mr. Mitsubishi and so on.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May I offer my hon. Friend some up-to-date information? I walked past County hall a few minutes ago, and absolutely nothing is going on there. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) pointed out, it is a scandal. Both the Minister and the Secretary of State have discussed the matter with me; I hope that when the Minister winds up the debate, he will tell us a little more about what the Government are actively doing about the scandal that is taking place on the other side of the river.

Mr. Corbyn: Those of us who have lived through the saga of the abolition of the GLC and the sale of County hall will not allow it to be swept under the carpet. We will persevere, because we want the building back in public hands and public use rather than the obscenity that it is now.

I believe that there is a strong case for an elected government for London, with responsibilities for overall planning, transport, health, a police authority and a housing strategy to tackle homelessness and the social, health and economic cost of poor-quality housing. There should also be a co-ordinated and supportive strategy for the development of the arts in London. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West had an excellent record as chairman of the GLC arts committee, providing access to the arts for all people: minority tastes of all sorts were catered for. That was an exciting period of growth in the arts—film, theatre and other entertainments—throughout London. All those facilities are now threatened; indeed, many of them have closed. That is very sad.

Similarly, the Inner London education authority used to manage expenditure on education. However, its resources for the arts, music, out-of-London pursuits, adult education and many other things have been destroyed with ILEA itself.

It is also crucial for London to address the problems of its economy. As I said earlier, there are 400,000 registered unemployed people in London, but I believe the number of people out of work to be closer to half a million. Half a million members of a population of 6 million want to work but cannot find jobs.

In its latter days, the GLC did its best to rebuild some of London's manufacturing industry, to encourage different areas of enterprise, to put money into co-operatives and to support those who tried to produce quality goods and services. It was very difficult, because the GLC's powers to act within local government legislation were limited. I believe that a new elected authority for London should have overall strategic responsibility for all the matters that I have mentioned, and powers to rebuild and plan London's economy.

Are we to go forward into the 21st century as a city with an incredibly rich minority of people living in certain high-security enclaves—as described by Richard Rogers in the past few weeks in his Reith lectures on the radio—and a mass of poor people living on high-crime, poor-quality estates, looking forward to a life of unemployment and surrounded by filth, degradation and destruction?

London can be an exciting and wonderful place in which to live, but it requires planning, direction and vision. I do not believe that that vision is fulfilled by a plethora of quangos composed of Tory placemen, and by the scandals and sleaze that surrounded the destruction of the GLC. I hope that today's debate will strengthen the case for an elected authority to make London the city that it can, should and—I believe—must be.

10.34 am

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): I hesitate to intrude on a debate about London. Let me clarify my provenance: for eight years I served as a London councillor in Bexley. Moreover, I believe that my constituency would be viewed as part of the Thames gateway by the all-seeing, all-powerful body offered to us by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) as a new government for London. I think it entirely inappropriate for the Medway towns—which include my constituency, 30 miles out of London—to be subject to government from County hall, or by some new body in London.

I well remember that, when I was a Bexley councillor, the council governed very well. As a near-unitary authority, it provided social services, housing, education, roads, parks, leisure facilities and many other benefits. My only recollection of the GLC is of a body that intruded into minor planning applications and housing matters. Exercising an extraordinary policy of municipalisation, it bought houses scattered all over the place. Far from acting as a strategic authority, it was a nuisance authority.

The last days of the GLC were marked by a bizarre campaign against the Government's proposals to do away with it. The hon. Member for Islington, North described the GLC's popularity—revealed, he said, in that great campaign at the end of its life. The so-called popular campaign, however, involved the expenditure of a seven-figure sum on advertising and other PR material, sent out from County hall under the auspices of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone).

Mr. Tony Banks: How can the hon. Gentleman explain the fact that, years after the abolition of the GLC, the most recent opinion polls show that 66 per cent. of Londoners still believe that we should have a strategic authority for the capital?

Mr. Couchman: I set as much store by those polls as I do by some other current opinion polls. What London really needs is a strengthening of the government of its boroughs.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): Does my hon. Friend believe that that opinion poll—or, indeed, any poll—has informed Londoners about how much they have saved as a result of the GLC's abolition? It is probably £200 a year.

Mr. Couchman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for pointing that out. Indeed, it was one of the main reasons why we did away with the GLC.

The hon. Member for Islington, North also mentioned ILEA, one of the most bloated education bureaucracies that the country has ever had.

Mr. Spearing: What?

Mr. Couchman: Precisely so. It would be entirely inappropriate to foist ILEA on London again.

My message to any new London body would be, "We do not want you in north Kent." We want unitary authorities, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is currently considering their establishment. If we are to have good governance in our part of Kent, we must have nothing to do with London. We certainly do not want a new Greater London council, stretching to the M25 and beyond—stretching to the Medway towns as part of the Thames gateway—as suggested in recent reports of Labour's thinking. My message to the hon. Member for Islington, North is, "Hands off the towns of north Kent." If there is to be a co-ordinated development of the Thames gateway, it will be better organised by central Government than by some new GLC.

10.38 am

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am very pleased to follow the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), who appeared to have two reasons for his view. One, understandably, was his experience of the GLC as a Bexley councillor. I assume that he played some part in the legal affair that was responsible for the destruction of "Fares Fair", which was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone).

Mr. Couchman *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Spearing: He says no, but I think that it was a Kent and Bexley initiative.

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): It was Bromley.

Mr. Spearing: My hon. Friend corrects me: it was Bromley, which is next door.

The remarkable feature of the speech by the hon. Member for Gillingham, who is not a London Member, was that he accused a possible future Greater London authority or the GLC of the time of having designs upon north Kent and the Medway towns—a proud and ancient area which was related to London in function and history. I have heard no suggestion at any time that a Greater London authority should extend its boundaries thus far. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to tell me where he got his false accusation from.

Mr. Couchman: I understand that there has been a suggestion in the *Evening Standard.*

Mr. Spearing: If the hon. Gentleman believes everything that he reads in the *Evening Standard,* including an inaccurate account last week of my history, which said that I attended a public school, although I went to a grammar school in Hammersmith, it shows the standard of his judgment publicly and in this place. I shall ask him about another matter. I am a past member of the transport planning and highways committee of the GLC, to which I was co-opted at different times.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): So the hon. Gentleman is to blame, then.

Mr. Spearing: I shall shortly take great pleasure in dealing with highways.

The hon. Member for Gillingham said that that committee and the GLC, using its powers as a strategic planning authority—at one time I was a leading member of part of the planning committee for north-west London—interfered in minor planning applications. Will the hon. Gentleman give an example of that?

Sir Paul Beresford: I shall give an example relating to the renovation of an estate on the edge of the constituency of the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), who is not in his place. As is normal, there were consultations with tenants and postmen about the numbering of the flats on the estate. Those consultations were concluded in a short time, but it took five months to get a decision from the GLC. That was interference in a minor, insignificant planning issue.

Mr. Spearing: I asked for an example and the Minister has given one. If that delay occurred, it must have had some sort of statutory basis and the GLC must have had some responsibility in that matter. Perhaps the Minister could respond to that at a later date rather than delaying our proceedings now. Speaking as a former part-time student postman—*[Interruption.]* This issue is not funny. Too many Conservative Members do not understand real life. That is why they are in trouble. As a former post person I know that it is important to get a good numbering sequence. If the Minister engages in canvassing, he will know that that is the case.

I do not say that that justifies what the GLC did. It may not, because bad mistakes can be made in any organisation, and especially in the Government. The strategic planning of London was destroyed, as was the coherent traffic planning of London, which brings me to the matter of highways. The GLC introduced delayed traffic signals and the first freeways, and that was done after exhaustive consultation, in which I was involved, with each borough. It was broken up by Baroness Thatcher who dispersed coherent planning in London not only for roads but for transport.

I shall now turn to "Fares Fair". That was upset by Bromley council through a legal point which destroyed the concept of public transport introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East with great boldness and initiative. The people of London look back to that time. A public transport system needs to have as many people using it as possible so that fares can be reduced. That applies especially to the underground, which can carry more people because of its infrastructure. That was the vision of the late Lord Ashfield and of Herbert Morrison, who together created the former London Transport. That has been destroyed by the Conservative party.

I shall give an example of how current fares are unfair. After years of development, the docklands light railway, which is the responsibility of the Government, still does not run at weekends. That is because the concept is wrong. An extension of that railway is planned to Lewisham. A Bill has gone through the House so that the line can run from Island Gardens in the Isle of Dogs under the river to Greenwich and then to Lewisham. That is a much-needed link. It is to be privatised and not long ago I saw a commentary in a business paper about who would take over. It stated that on that commuter route to the extraordinary development in Canary Wharf in the Isle of Dogs—which, incidentally, did not receive the necessary planning permission—it was probable that a premium fare could be charged. That was to be an attraction for the investor.

"Fares Fair" is one thing, but fares are unfair and not just in the general proportion of revenue which is so high in London compared with the rest of the world. That is an example of fares being jacked up on a line for which the capital investment has been put up by the public. Currently, public subsidy for the DLR is 70p per passenger mile. That information was contained in an answer a few days ago. That shows the disintegration of public transport in London for which Conservatives are wholly responsible and which the Minister appears to defend.

Sir Paul Beresford: In the context of the GLC's relationship to London docklands and the railways, it is worth pointing out that the GLC in combination with the five Labour boroughs failed to do anything for docklands for years. That railway is there because the GLC failure was recognised by the Government and docklands was taken away and we got rid of the GLC.

Mr. Spearing: I knew the chairman of the former docklands joint committee, the late Councillor Percy Bell, who was a well-known east London councillor of great sagacity and who gave great service. The docklands joint committee produced an outline for docklands. One of its publications in the early days dealt with a transport spine for tube, bus or tram. That committee considered the need for the DLR, but it was disrupted by the work of a certain leader of the GLC, Sir Horace Cutler, who did not co-operate in the way that the boroughs had been co-operating.

The President of the Board of Trade, who at the time was the Secretary of State for the Environment, opened new houses built under the Becton district plan produced by the borough of Newham. The marshes had to be drained and I understand that a year's public investment of the then Thames water authority, on which elected members from the GLC sat, was absorbed on draining that area from Tewksbury to London. That was instituted by the committee. Therefore, the hon. Member for Gillingham was not correct in his history. That land, a third of my constituency, went under the suzerainty of the London Docklands development corporation, which had powers for planning and borrowing and for goodness knows what, literally to do anything under the Bill. When the statutory instrument came to the House for a one and a half hour debate and although a third of my constituency and half the LDDC area was involved, I did not get the opportunity to speak. That shows the authoritarian nature of Conservative Members. Even if a body such as the LDDC was needed, it should have been accountable to this elected House rather than to the Secretary of State.

I have unexpectedly used some illustrations which were given by Conservative Members. I could go on. What about the new towns? Could any organisation in the world have produced those? They were the pride of Britain after the war. The education service has been mentioned. It was economical and was one of the greatest education institutions in the world. I shall give an example. When

the Conservative party wanted to break up the London county council education service in 1963 or 1964 when the GLC succeeded the LCC, there was tremendous debate in London. It was saved because the LCC had a comprehensive series of occupational and adult education courses throughout London. Those were well known because of the *Floodlight* booklets—attempts are still made to publish them. Specialist colleges all over the place had been built up to a peak of professional expertise. Where those colleges were sited in each borough was a matter of chance, but let us consider what happened when the LCC was split up into boroughs.

I shall not name the borough nor the well-known institution, but one highly specialist college on medical matters had a worldwide reputation. People not just from all over London, but from the south-east used to travel up to it at night and at weekends. That college, in a central London location, was in the hands of the local borough. The borough pressed for money for that college, and we know why. When that request came before the relevant committee, the elected councillors asked, not unnaturally, how many of the college's students came from the borough. When they were told 5 per cent., the response was, "We can't have that," and that college disappeared.

Further and higher education and training are all the rage. The break-up of the further, higher and technical education systems of inner London, which the hon. Member for Gillingham may describe as bureaucratic, is one of the greatest losses to education. That happened at the flick of a finger of the noble, or less than noble, Baroness Thatcher.

In Newham, we have to spend £8 million of our standard spending assessment on the homeless because the formula agreed by the Minister and his senior colleagues does not provide enough money for the homeless. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) mentioned that problem. That £8 million has to be shaved off education and social services to meet our statutory responsibilities. Some of the homeless in our borough are transferred to us from Westminster. The council bought up private houses which it cannot sell through private enterprise, so it is housing the statutory homeless in them. That is good for them, but the system is rotten, bad and retrogressive.

Democratic accountability is at the heart of the issue. It has been attenuated in London to a degree that the Scots would find absolutely unbelievable. What remains of the London borough administration is being hogtied by the vicious standard spending assessment and revenue support grant formulae. They are causing revolts in the shires, so one can imagine the effect that they are having in east London, in particular, the deprived boroughs of which have such well-known problems.

As for the police, Sir John Quinton has been appointed chairman of the advisory committee to the Home Secretary. He has been given that job not on the grounds of policing criteria, but because, as is clear from correspondence, of his expertise in budget cutting and budget allocation. Although the advisory committee has a wide remit and people have been appointed to it by the Home Secretary, it is steering towards economies. It is not focusing on how the police can do their job in association with Londoners. It is considering how the police can operate with reduced finances.

There will be a great deal of debate later today on democratic accountability and the democratic deficit. One of the biggest democratic deficits nearest the House is the governance of London. Even before there is an elected authority for London under another Government, I hope that combined representatives of the boroughs could get together on a non-statutory basis. Perhaps that group could incorporate some aspects of the Association of London Authorities and the London Boroughs Administration. I hope that the Under-Secretary would agree that that group could, during whatever life remains in the Government, through consensus, come to some conclusions about London. Even the Government have found through their encouragement of London First, London Pride and from all the programmes, as well as organisations concerning London that are multiplying and holding conferences all over the place, that a vacuum needs to be filled. That vacuum must be filled by a proper and proud successor to the LCC and GLC to serve the people of London in the next century.

10.54 am

Mr. Matthew Banks (Southport): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). I am not one of those hon. Members who believe that everything that the GLC did was wrong. It did a great deal of good work, but in the latter years of its existence it did a great deal of harm.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) suggested that there was a tremendous force outside the House to recapture a government for London. He mentioned an opinion poll in which 66 per cent. of respondents were in favour of that. I do not know where that opinion came from—possibly from the *Evening Standard*—but I should not attach too much credence to that opinion poll if the hon. Gentleman pooh-poohs some of the suggestions made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), which also came from the *Evening Standard*. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander and we cannot be too selective when quoting from that newspaper.

Although I represent a constituency that is about 250 miles from London, I live here during the week; I have lived in three London boroughs and had six years' experience in local government. I therefore have a good idea of what certain Opposition Members mean by democratic accountability. What I perceive as important and as democratic accountability is not necessarily shared by some Opposition Members.

From time to time, I agree with some of the things that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West says. If what he said about London was correct, I would be fighting to catch your eye this morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. A number of my hon. Friends who represent London constituencies share my concern at what happened in the GLC in its latter years and do not want a London-wide authority, so their absence this morning is understandable. If there is such strength of opinion among Opposition Members about the need for such an authority, I should have thought that far more Opposition Members would be present. Apart from the hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford), the Front-Bench spokesman and the Opposition Whip, however, we have only the hon. Members for Newham, South, for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and for

[Mr. Matthew Banks]

Newham, North-West. The latter two Members are here, of course, and they represent all the things that many of my hon. Friends and I found unacceptable in the GLC.

Mr. Couchman: Champagne socialists.

Mr. Banks: I do not know about that. I used to get the Refreshment Department bills of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, which was an interesting experience, until I finally managed to sort out the Department. I do not know about champagne socialism, but a vast amount of ratepayers' money was wasted in the final years of the GLC. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham asked how much money was wasted. An independent survey—my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State may wish to comment on this—has suggested that if the GLC had been allowed to continue, it would have spent £1.5 billion. And for what? I am not convinced that Londoners would have received a better service.

I should like to compare and contrast briefly my experience of so-called democratic accountability because my constituency is in one of the large metropolitan areas of the north-west. I do not wish to be ruled out of order, so I shall be extremely careful to make those comparisons briefly.

Mr. Tony Banks: I must record my appreciation of the hon. Gentleman paying my bills from the Pugin Room from time to time. He just said that the GLC, had it still existed, would have spent £1.5 billion. He asked what that would have been spent on. A quick list includes new towns, seaside and country homes, housing, the London mobility scheme, the south bank arts complex, London Transport, London's waste disposal, the fire brigade—the GLC used to run the ambulance service and there were no complaints then—historic houses such as Kenwood and Marble Hill, the magistrates courts, bridges, tunnels, the Woolwich ferry, the Thames barrier, the national sports centre and strategic parks. I could go on. That is a lot of money, but what a lot of good services.

Mr. Banks: Now that the hon. Gentleman has made his speech, perhaps he will give way to me. I accept that a great deal of money was spent, but many of those services are continuing without the madcap ideas that were evident when the hon. Gentleman was in office. I think that he was a Member of Parliament when he moonlighted from time to time as chairman of the GLC. I do not believe for one moment that there is a great weight of opinion outside the House or, indeed, among Labour Members, for the return of a London-wide authority.

Mr. Booth: My hon. Friend is dealing with the democratic deficit, a matter raised by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). Does he agree that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues are in fact calling for a fourth tier of government in London? If their proposals were accepted, we should have the boroughs, central Government with their Minister for London, Members of the European Parliament and a London-wide authority.

Mr. Banks: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, who makes his point in his own way. If Labour Members had the opportunity to institute an authority similar to the GLC, there would be enormous increase in bureaucracy but not necessarily an improvement in the services provided for the people of London.

I have lived in three London boroughs—Wandsworth, Westminster and Lambeth. My colleagues have talked about waste, and I must say that services in Lambeth have certainly improved since Labour lost control there. It was something of a novelty for my wife and me to look out of the bedroom window the other day and see someone sweeping the street.

I shall pick up a number of points made by the hon. Member for Islington, North. He referred to County hall being used for meetings of non-statutory organisations. That conjured up in my mind a picture of senior citizens meeting for various cultural activities. However, he did not mention the fact that the GLC was often used as a platform for political campaigning at the ratepayers' expense and for promoting organisations with which I suspect that most of his constituents would not have agreed had they been asked. However, it was not only at the GLC that such things happened.

The hon. Member for Newham, South mentioned the police. I remember the days of the Greater Manchester police authority, in those days an offshoot of Greater Manchester council. It spent an enormous amount of money—hundreds of thousands of pounds—on a police monitoring unit. Vast sums of council tax payers' money were spent on hindering the police in the apprehension of criminals.

The hon. Member for Islington, North was very unfair to our health services. He may have been describing what is happening in the capital and other urban conurbations, but in financial terms local health services are now far better planned than ever before. We no longer experience the kinds of difficulties at the end of the financial year that he described. Not only in London but in my constituency there have been vast increases in the resources provided to the national health service, and they mean that the concerns expressed all too flippantly by the hon. Gentleman pale into insignificance.

Certainly, my constituents had to wait for the election of the Conservative Government in 1979 to get the brand new hospital that they now enjoy—Lord Healey had cut the hospital building programme so savagely when he was Chancellor because the Labour party got the economy into such a mess, and I have no doubt that if it were ever to be in power again we should find ourselves in the same mess because it wasted money nationally just as it wasted money at the GLC.

The hon. Member for Islington, North mentioned the use of County hall. I noticed that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who is no longer in the Chamber, did not give the name of the individual whom he was accusing. I think that he has a duty to do so. It is generally understood in the House that the National Audit Office is examining some of the issues to which he referred. The NAO is respected and I have no doubt that, as and when it reports, we shall listen carefully to what it has to say and take appropriate action if necessary.

The fact that it is necessary to use today's business to raise matters relating to London does not worry me in the slightest. We do not need a talking shop costing millions and millions of pounds just across the river. Hon. Members have the opportunity to raise issues relating to their constituencies and regions, as they are doing now.

The hon. Members for Islington, North and for Newham, South also mentioned transport. The hon. Member for Islington, North is perhaps not aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has recently made a number of important announcements on air pollution following a report by those who take an interest in pollution, not least the Select Committee on Transport. I greatly welcome the opportunity to tighten the MOT test in respect of exhaust emissions.

It is the buses and lorries in London that create much of the pollution, and diesel-powered vehicles are the greatest polluters. It is those vehicles that we should be examining. If Labour Members are concerned about reducing congestion in London, they might like to suggest that a London borough such as Newham could institute a pilot scheme with the help of the Department of Transport to introduce road pricing so that we could see how it works and how it might benefit London. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Newham, South laughs—he is a great cyclist, but I do not recall the GLC doing a great deal for cyclists when it was in a position to do so.

Unitary authorities—the London boroughs—now have the opportunity to make sensitive decisions affecting their areas. They are extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to be unitary authorities and I look forward to the day, in the lifetime of this Parliament, when my constituency will get back to the position in which it was before 1974 and does not have to do as it is told by members of the Labour party who have a majority on the Merseyside passenger transport authority, who could not give two hoots about spending money in my constituency and who abuse their position. I look forward to the day when my constituency has the same system of unitary government as London.

11.7 am

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): We have heard a remarkable amount of old rubbish from the Conservatives. It is striking that they cannot find a London Member to defend the effects of the abolition of the Greater London council but have to drag in an hon. Member from Southport to drone on about matters on which he is ill informed. The GLC established a cycle unit and introduced cycle routes across much of London, but since abolition the programme has not been developed.

We still see the achievements of the old London county council and the GLC. There is hardly a road, a public housing scheme or a hospital—hospitals were once run by County hall—that those two forms of local government did not help to create. They created London as we know it, certainly to a greater extent than any other force or organisation. It is a record of which we are proud—a dramatic and tremendous achievement in rebuilding London after the war, but it is now being lost. Everyone in London today feels that it is less worth living in this city than it was a decade ago. Opinion polls conducted by the *Evening Standard* chart that progress year by year.

I have heard the Under-Secretary of State ask what the GLC did about the docklands. We created the infrastructure that the London Docklands development corporation inherited. It then stepped in and the legislation involved wasted the best part of 18 months as it went through Parliament.

We have been asked about transport. I remember Sir Horace Cutler, under the Tory administration between 1977 and 1981, proposing that we should build the Jubilee extension into docklands. It was blocked by the Treasury. When I became leader of the GLC in 1981, we proposed that the Jubilee line should be extended to docklands. It was blocked by the Treasury. If County hall had been allowed to get its way, the Jubilee line would have opened and would have been running for the past seven years, and because we never borrowed money to build such projects—we paid for them out of the rates—we would not have incurred the debts created now that the Government have finally got round to the project 15 years later. We were planning to go on to build the Chelsea to Hackney link, which would probably have been operating by now as well.

County hall thought in London's interest, which meant inevitable conflicts. Whenever there was a Conservative Government and a progressive administration in County hall, there was conflict. In 1896, Lord Salisbury complained that the then Liberal administration at the London county council was practising socialistic and revolutionary schemes and proposed that the LCC should be abolished. When Herbert Morrison was creating what I think was a marvellous record of municipal enterprise and achievement in the 1930s, Conservative Members of Parliament were demanding that the LCC be wound up. We saw the same thing in the late 1950s, when boundaries were extended in the hope of creating permanent Tory control. Finally, when Mrs. Thatcher was in power she had a big enough majority to push through the lunacy which had been defeated on previous occasions and London has lost out.

We heard allusions from Southport that the GLC did barmy and dreadful things. I will tell the House what I am proud of. I am proud that the GLC took up the issue of racism in London. I am proud that we took up the issue of women's interests being neglected in London and tried to make local government respond more to their needs. I am proud that the women's committee funded dozens of child care schemes across London. I am proud that we took up the rights of lesbians and gays in London. I am not ashamed of those things. We moved those issues to the centre of the political agenda as those groups were not achieving their full potential because they were suffering from discrimination. It is a legitimate right for those elected to represent London to represent all Londoners, whether they are women or black and irrespective of their sexual orientation. I shall not go on any longer as I know that we have to fit in two more speeches.

11.12 am

Mr. Nick Raynsford (Greenwich): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on initiating this important debate, which has, although it has been short, provided an excellent opportunity to highlight many very important issues. It is somewhat surprising that, from the Conservative Benches, we have heard only from the hon. Members for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) and for Southport (Mr. Banks). No Conservative Member who represents London, other than the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), who will respond, has spoken. That is perhaps indicative of the way in which the Government—

Mr. Booth *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: No, I shall not give way as we have very little time. It is indicative of the way in which the Government have treated London with contempt.

There is so much in London about which we can be proud. The city boasts a whole range of attributes and qualities, which make it a vibrant and exciting place to live in, to work in and to visit. London's rich legacy of history and fine buildings, magnificent parks and outstanding cultural attractions, its impressive, if somewhat neglected, river, its cosmopolitan and multi-cultural atmosphere, and many more attributes, make it a unique and great city.

I am sad to say that there is another side to London, too much in evidence in recent years, which tarnishes the bright spots and raises real fears for the city's future. London now suffers from a higher level of unemployment than almost anywhere in Britain—second only to the north in the proportion of people out of work, it having lost 470,000 jobs in the past seven years alone.

That of course relates to London as a whole, but when one looks at the specific problems in the most deprived areas of London, as the *Evening Standard* did in its important and disturbing survey of life in east London, entitled "The Betrayed", the characteristics highlighted are more representative of what one might see in the third world than in the capital of one of Europe's leading countries. It is made all the worse by its proximity to the gleaming office blocks of Canary wharf and the affluence of the City.

The devastating loss of manufacturing industry has left London's economy seriously unbalanced, and over-dependent on services. In the week in which we have seen the collapse of Barings, we should not be complacent about a city which is over-dependent on financial services for its economy.

Not only are there serious questions to be asked about London's economy, but the city is facing an acute transport crisis, as a result of years of under-investment—points well made by my hon. Friends the Members for Islington, North and for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing)—coupled with an abject failure to recognise the damage being caused by ever-worsening traffic congestion. That means that people cannot move quickly and cheaply around the city and far too many of our children are suffering from the appalling incidence of asthma, of which traffic-generated air pollution is unquestionably one of the major contributory causes.

While I mention health, what can one say about a city whose once proud hospitals are facing closure as a consequence of the crude political vandalism of the Department of Health? Hard-working and dedicated doctors and nurses are demoralised and angered by ill-considered cuts. Patients, London's long-suffering public, are infuriated by the incompetent decision making and administrative bungling of the Secretary of State for Health and her army of highly paid accountants, administrators and assorted quangocrats.

Before we leave the subject of health, I cannot fail to mention the London ambulance service, which is staggering from one crisis to the next, bedevilled by malfunctioning computers—the telephone system went down yesterday. Despite all the Secretary of State's promises of improvement, it is turning in far and away the worst performance figures of any ambulance service in Britain.

Behind all the statistics and all the evidence of London not coping as well as it should, there lies one inescapable and fundamental theme, to which everyone who has looked seriously at the issue returns without exception. London is seriously disadvantaged by the lack of its own city-wide government. Unique among European capitals, unique, indeed, among capital cities in the developed world, London has no single voice speaking up for the city and representing the views and aspirations of its citizens. Instead, London suffers from fragmentation, from divided and unclear responsibilities and from the malign consequences of the excessive centralisation of decision making, which has become such a hallmark of the Government, who, ironically, when they came to power, pledged to devolve power rather than to centralise it.

It is not just the accumulation of power by Ministers that is causing concern; the proliferation of quangos and other undemocratic institutions is too. They have been established in breach of Tory promises. Let us look back to the Second Reading debate on the Bill which abolished the GLC. The then Secretary of State for the Environment, Lord Jenkin, could not have put it more clearly. He argued that the fears expressed—not only by the Labour party but by several Conservative Members—about centralisation of power and proliferation of quangos were ill founded. He said:

"They say that, after abolition, Whitehall will take over. Wrong again. Only 5 per cent. of service spending in London, and virtually none outside London, will go outside local government. They say that the abolition councils will be replaced by quangos. Wrong again. Only two permanent new appointed bodies will be created".—[*Official Report*, 3 December 1984; Vol. 69, c. 36.]

With huge swathes of spending on London Transport, health, urban regeneration, employment and training all taken out of the hands of democratically elected local bodies and vested in the hands of Ministers, and a whole swathe of quangos administering services all over London, the judgment of Lord Jenkin is about as spectacularly inaccurate as the failure of Mr. Nick Leeson to judge the movement of the Tokyo stock market. The consequences for London have been about as disastrous as the consequences for Barings.

Instead of a democratically elected London-wide authority speaking up for London in the national and international arena, we have a whole series of fragmented initiatives. As the *Evening Standard* rightly and aptly reminded us yesterday, by printing Tony Travers's excellent article entitled, "Why Paris is pulling ahead of London", we are losing out in the international arena because others are doing things better. Jacques Chirac, the right-wing mayor of Paris, has no illusions about the important role of the city government that he leads.

"Paris' ambition is to lay claim to the title of European capital by the year 2000"

is his unequivocal objective. His publicity machine has little difficulty in putting the knife into London. Paris, he boasts, with justification,

"has a high performance transportation infrastructure."

The contrast with London could not be more striking.

London has suffered disastrously in the nine years since the abolition of the GLC, and Londoners are crying out for the restoration of a democratic city-wide authority to

fight for their interests and to oversee the future planning and development of their city. London needs a strategic authority that can promote London's interests in Europe and throughout the world, that can attract vital new inward investment, which is so critical to our capital city's future, and that can begin the long hard process of rebuilding industry, jobs and hope in London's devastated areas—most notably in east London.

London needs a strategic authority that can plan the new transport policies that are vital to unblock the congested arteries of our city, to ensure a substantial shift from the use of private vehicles to public transport and, in doing so, to clean up the city's polluted atmosphere that is so damaging to the health of our children and to the attractiveness of our city to visitors.

Economic development, transport planning, land-use planning, oversight of London's environment and all the strategic functions that cannot be carried out by individual London boroughs should and will be given back to a democratically elected city-wide authority by the next Labour Government. We will consult widely in due course about the city-wide responsibilities that the new authority may assume, including, possibly, the role of the police authority and the oversight of health policy. As we have already made clear, that authority will be a streamlined and lean body, not involved in day-to-day service delivery, which is best handled at a local level. It will focus on the big issues, the issues that need to be planned and co-ordinated across the whole of London, the issues which are fundamental to the success and vitality of our capital city in the 21st century. The Labour party will give back to Londoners their rightful say on the government of their city and, in doing so, will give London back its pride, its self-esteem and control over its destiny.

11.21 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): Of course, the Opposition's proposals would give London a huge bill and more bureaucracy. That is what we should concentrate on. The two most important points about the government of London are the quantity of government—we already have quite enough—and the quality of government. There is a strong link between the two. The hon. Member for Greenwich (Mr. Raynsford) talked about a "streamlined" authority. That is the word that the Opposition used when they set up the GLC and the LCC. What did we get? Bloated bureaucracy. [HON. MEMBERS: "The Government set it up."] They were wrong—absolutely wrong. *[Interruption.]* That is right, and it was wrong.

As the quantity of government grows, so the quality of government drops. Many of the calls that we now hear for a new strategic authority for London are totally misconceived. There would be an extra layer of government, and that would solve nothing. We do not want more bureaucrats, bigger bills or slower decisions on even minor matters. I, too, was a child postman. We want less but higher-quality government. We want local government to work with the private sector and to adopt the standards of efficiency and customer service that we expect and receive predominantly from the private sector.

Opposition Members have quoted the *Evening Standard*. I should like to quote *The Economist* which, in August, after detailed consideration of the government of London, concluded:

"a big central authority for London was likely to damage, not enhance London's long-term economic interests."

The city, *The Economist* said,

"can continue to adapt and grow flexibly without central planning".

Mr. Corbyn: That is the City.

Sir Paul Beresford: I am not referring to the City of London; I am talking about London. Opposition Members have not defined the city of London. Interestingly, they have very carefully not stated any borders. The article also said that

"London's fragmentation was a source of strength rather than weakness. The lesson for rising megacities is that a central strategic authority is not essential for prosperous growth. Self-governing neighbourhoods work better than a single city hall and are a safer base for an urban economy".

Reference was made to ILEA and to the fact that it had good services for adults. I accept that, but it needed to do so. ILEA tested the IQ of London children aged five and found that it was average, but, after 11 years of ILEA education, the IQ test showed that the standard had dropped. That is why London needed adult education.

It is against the background of less but better government that we look to the principles of promoting the role and responsibility of the individual and freedom from unnecessary regulation and over-government. The Government have a key role. We seek to empower the individual and reduce bureaucracy, particularly when the latter serves no purpose. The lesson of London during the 1980s was too much government, gerrymandering government, and too much waste. [HON. MEMBERS: "Westminster."] The housing of London is where the gerrymandering was done. The GLC gerrymandered housing throughout London. One needs only to see the mess—

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister give way?

Sir Paul Beresford: No. I have only five minutes.

Mr. Corbyn: Just on Westminster?

Sir Paul Beresford: No. We will not refer to Westminster. We may refer to Roehampton, which I happen to know even better than Opposition Members do. That was a GLC gerrymander if ever I saw one.

As I have said, the lesson of London during the 1980s was too much government, too much waste and too much bureaucracy. People have forgotten that, although the GLC was responsible for a mere 11 per cent. of local services in the capital, it had a budget of almost £1 billion—excluding ILEA—92 councillors and 20,000 staff. In the five years until its abolition, it increased its spending by 170 per cent., when prices generally rose by just 29 per cent.

I remember a former leader of the GLC on an elephant in Battersea park. That explains the emphasis of the GLC.

Everybody agrees that London is a major world city. But, when we look closely at London, we see not one city but a series of small towns and villages, each with its own identity. To use a dental phrase that has been thrown at me, we see an amalgam of villages. That variety is its strength as well as the cause of some of its problems.

[Sir Paul Beresford]

It also makes London hard to define. For example, no Opposition Member has dared to define its boundary. Is its boundary the 33 boroughs, the area within the M25, or is it further away? London's influence is substantial. As *The Economist* pointed out, London dominates Britain far out of proportion to its population. In terms of public transport and commuting, London dominates the south-east. Should a strategic authority for London include key parts of the south-east?

I notice that Opposition Members have produced several proposals, which have been leaked to *The Independent*, the *Evening Standard* and so on, for various forms of authority, but they have not come to a real decision. They talk about the M25 and an ill-defined central area. They shift and churn in various directions—U-turns and S-turns. I warn Londoners of the cost to London—the direct bill on the doorstep—of delay, particularly to business. People in business in London have made it clear to me and to others that the key is that London is not as heavily regulated as other European cities.

Mr. Raynsford: Business supports a strategic authority.

Sir Paul Beresford: No, it does not.

The only other European city of a size or status anywhere near equal to London is probably Paris. We have heard much about Paris, with its mayor, as an example of how a great capital city should be run. Although Paris has one titular major, the city is in fact run by eight unitary authorities, with small parishes below them. It does not support the case for a single authority or a single mayor for London.

We touched briefly on public transport. Much is made of the GLC's so-called "Fares Fair" policy, but we should be clear that that was no panacea for road congestion. During its operation road journeys were reduced by a mere 2 per cent. In economic terms, it was not a great success for London Transport. The policy was based on the premise that the taxpayer should always foot the bill.

I realise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that although I would like to add more I have completely run out of time. We need to reflect on the impact of our efforts to reduce the quantity and increase the quality of government in London. London is far from the problem city that many critics would have us believe. It is the favoured location for European business men, who are encouraged by low tax and low regulation, and by the high quality and flexibility of the work force. London is rich in arts and culture, drawing visitors from the rest of Britain and the rest of the world. Overseas visitors find London clean and safe, and even the education standards—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

Middle East Peace Process

11.30 am

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I am delighted to have secured the opportunity of a debate on the middle east peace process, which besides being a matter of wide interest is of particular interest to many of my constituents.

I am delighted to see my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office here, because he has played an especially important role in co-ordinating Britain's policy on the peace process. I pay tribute especially to the important job that he did in updating the 1975 trade agreement between Israel and the European Union.

A week ago, the House heard important news about the latest developments in the Northern Ireland peace process. From that process, we know how much the lifting of the threat of terrorism, the enjoyment of peace and the presence of hope contribute, how much those have meant since the peace process began and how they are changing the atmosphere in the Province.

In their efforts for peace, the people of Israel seek and deserve no less—the opportunity to enjoy security, to build an atmosphere of peace and to move forward in the peace process towards, I hope, a permanent solution. I seek to put at the forefront of today's debate and to draw to the attention of the House the issue of security, which is so vital for the people of Israel.

The Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, won the 1992 Israeli election on a platform promising peace with security. He realised that the one could not be achieved without the other. We all know that since 1948 Israel has faced a constant and often painful struggle to achieve security. She has fought wars and suffered terribly at the hands of terrorists, who have shown ruthlessness and who have stopped at nothing to inflict damage on Israel, her people and the Jewish citizens of other countries. It is not surprising, therefore, that security is of paramount concern for Israel. Unless the peace process can guarantee security it cannot guarantee peace.

Many people in Israel and throughout the world hoped that the declaration of principles and the Oslo accords would bring about a peace process that encompassed and met Israel's natural and legitimate security concerns. Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat deserve the high praise and recognition that they received for their part in commencing that process.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): I think that everyone agrees that Israel has every right to live free from terrorism, but does my hon. Friend not concede that the building of the settlements around Jerusalem—an entirely illegal act—is fuelling Hamas and the very forces that are trying to destroy both Mr. Arafat and the peace accord?

Mr. Clappison: I shall deal with that aspect in a minute. I recognise that there are issues between the parties, but the vital point that I want to make is that security must be an overriding consideration. As we know from our own experience in Northern Ireland, once there is security there are good prospects for establishing an atmosphere of peace and all that that means in terms of an eventual solution to the outstanding problems.

In recent months the peace process in which we invest so much hope has been overshadowed by a terrorist menace that has struck at the heart of Israel. We have seen the escalation of the terrorist activities of Islamic terrorist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which have perpetrated serious acts of terror and exploited their own young people by sending them on suicide missions.

Last October the bus bombing in Tel Aviv was carried out by Hamas; 22 people were killed and 42 injured. In January this year at Beit Lid, in perhaps the most callous attack to date, one suicide bomber detonated himself in a crowd while another waited for rescuers to gather to aid the wounded and dying and then detonated his explosives, killing 19 more people.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that when we think about terrible events such as those we must look at both sides of the equation, not just one? Is it not true that since the Gaza and Jericho agreement was signed more than twice as many Palestinians as Israelis have been killed?

Mr. Clappison: I shall acknowledge later in my speech the importance of stability among the Palestinian people, and especially of stability for the Palestine National Authority. But the hon. Gentleman should join me in recognising the serious terrorist threat directed against Israel while Israel and her people are playing their part and entering into negotiations in the peace process. The people of Israel are being asked, not for the first time, to make a substantial sacrifice in the cause of peace by enduring those attacks while still searching for peace. To be realistic about the prospects for peace we must recognise the strain that that puts on the Israeli people and therefore on the peace process as a whole.

The campaign of terror organised by those groups from outside Israel has not been confined to the territory of Israel. A most serious aspect of their activities consists of attacks directed against Jewish communities throughout the world. In 1992 I had the pleasure of visiting Argentina with the Inter-Parliamentary Council Against Anti-Semitism with Members from both sides of the House. We visited the Jewish communal offices in Buenos Aires, where we enjoyed warm hospitality in a happy, friendly family atmosphere.

Last year I and other Members who had been on the visit watched television pictures of the appalling atrocity that took place in those offices, where more than 100 people were murdered by a terrorist bomb. There have been similar acts of terrorism against Jewish communities in this country. It is a matter of good fortune, but no thanks to the behaviour of the bombers and extremists, that the two bombs at the Israeli embassy and at Balfour house, the headquarters of the Joint Israel Appeal, did not cause fatalities, although planting them was a ruthless, reckless and wicked act that caused several injuries.

As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), plainly there are issues to resolve between the various parties, but I urge the House and the Minister to agree that surely the need for security overrides those considerations. We have our experience of Northern Ireland, and our Government have rightly been conscious of the need for a cessation of terrorist violence and for the decommissioning of arms as part and parcel of getting the peace process under way. The same must apply to Israel. That country has an entirely natural and legitimate concern that violence should end and that the peace process and the resolution of the outstanding issues should take place in an atmosphere of peace.

Prime Minister Rabin deserves great credit for continuing negotiations with the Palestinians against the background of those acts of terror both in Israel and abroad.

Israel has been placed in a terrible dilemma. Its experience has shown that the incidence of terrorism can be reduced by the closure of the territories. At the same time, part of Israel's dilemma is that closure means a deterioration in the economy of Gaza, which in turn undermines the Palestine National Authority. I must say to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) that I recognise that the stability of that authority is very important.

Given the severity of the terrorist threat that I have described, it is not hard to see why Israel recently took the decision to close the Gaza strip and prevent Palestinian workers from entering Israel. Given the need for the authority to be stable, it is not hard to see why Mr. Rabin showed that he was conscious of the issue by deciding to ease the closure of the territory after meeting the PLO chairman last month.

Mr. Rabin was frank about his position, and said that he had probably acted against Israel's security interests to prevent tension among the Palestinians. The House would do well to recognise the statesmanship and courage that Mr. Rabin has shown in pursuing peace in the circumstances. I am sure that that courage extends to the people of Israel too.

Israel is also faced with a dilemma regarding the deployment of troops on the west bank, which—understandably—has been judged to be necessary for security reasons. Pressure exists for the troops to be redeployed from the west bank to allow arrangements for autonomy and elections to proceed. I hope that we can recognise that dilemma, and sympathise with the people and Government of Israel.

In extending our sympathy and support to Israel, it is right to support the position of the new Palestine National Authority and to give it stability. We must give it every encouragement, as it could be very important in dealing with terrorism and disorder. I make no bones about paying tribute to Chairman Arafat for the course on which he is proceeding in the face of considerable personal and political risks.

I welcome the fact that the British Government have played a constructive role in seeking to bring stability to the new Palestine National Authority, not least by granting it £75 million in aid.

I turn from the question of the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians to wider issues of the peace process. Syria is an important element of the process and, at present, there is a great deal of uncertainty about its intentions and position. In many respects, the Syrian track of the peace process—an important one—is at an impasse. President Assad put forward a formula of, in his words,

"Total peace for total withdrawal".

But that has not been sufficiently explained in tangible terms.

I suggest that Israel has shown flexibility towards Syria, and that, in my judgment, calls for a response from Syria. Israel is bound to be cautious, in view of the strategic importance to Israel of the Golan heights.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): Does my hon. Friend deprecate the fact that Damascus has become a safe haven for no fewer than 10 different terrorist groups, most of which are aimed against Israel?

Mr. Clappison: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. That factor undermines Israel in many respects, and I shall turn to that in a moment. I do not know whether my hon. Friend has visited the Golan heights, as I have, and stood among the disused Syrian bunkers with their commanding views across Israeli villages and the kibbutzim below. If he has done so, he will appreciate the special strategic and security implications for Israel.

I commend to the House the flexibility that has been shown by the Prime Minister of Israel. Last year, he told the United Kibbutz Movement:

"I view the Golan Heights through the security prism, first and foremost, no matter whether settlements exist there or not . . . if we reach the point where we need to remove settlements for the sake of peace, I have been and will remain in favour of it . . . For me, peace is a higher value for Israel's future and security than this or that group of settlements."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I hear the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House, and we should commend that approach. Mr. Rabin, while putting security as the foremost consideration, is showing flexibility, and I hope that that flexibility will result in a response from the Government of Syria.

I also hope that Syria shows flexibility in respect of the important issue of the future of south Lebanon. Israel's position must be equally flexible, and governed by quite natural considerations of security, given the vulnerability of its northern borders. Everyone hopes that the Syrian Government will respond to that clear flexibility.

Confidence must be built, a starting point for which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mr. Booth). The Syrian Government must show that they are serious about curbing terrorism in the middle east, and rebut any suggestion that Syria is in any way a safe haven for terrorist groups. One could not escape noticing the fact that the leader of Islamic Jihad, Fathi Shkaki, claimed responsibility for the Beit Lid outrage from Damascus. I join my hon. Friend and other hon. Members in support of the contention that Syria must rebut any suggestions that it is involved in terrorism, and I urge my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister to exercise all the Government's influence with the Syrians to move the peace process forward.

Jordan is a happier story, as it has played a full part in the peace process. I am sure that all Members would want to recognise the leadership of King Hussein over the Jordanian people. King Hussein waited for the Palestinians to begin their part of the peace process and to arrive at an agreement before concluding a peace treaty with Israel, which has removed the remaining differences between Jordan and Israel. Since then, a number of border crossings have been opened and the free passage of people and goods has commenced.

The King and the Government of Jordan deserve our support. They have shown clearly by their actions that they are interested in a warm peace, not a cold peace, and in many ways that sets a good precedent. They have stood firm in the face of discouragement from Syria at various points during their involvement in the peace process. King Hussein has been at pains to deny the charge that Jordan's treaty with Israel weakens Syria's negotiations. He said:

"On the contrary it might have created a precedent in the right direction".

I am sure that many Members on both sides of the House agree with the King, and I hope that his actions set a helpful precedent which others could follow.

There are many difficult hurdles which the peace process must overcome. One of the most difficult of those is the issue of the future of Jerusalem. Jerusalem has special significance for three great faiths, and I feel it proper to recognise the way in which the holy sites have been maintained and made accessible to all since 1967, for the first time in 2,000 years. That is important to people of many faiths.

Jerusalem presents a difficult problem. There was wisdom in the Oslo agreement, which sought to postpone discussions on Jerusalem until negotiations on the final settlement were complete and progress on other fronts had been made. I do not want to criticise the Palestinians—I want to support them in their endeavours—but they might be wise to reflect on the wisdom of the agreement and to act within the spirit of it. One way in which they could do so is to think carefully about the use that could be made of Orient house in east Jerusalem, which has been suggested as a site for some form of diplomatic headquarters. The Palestinians must think carefully about that. Perhaps they should think again and concentrate on promoting other areas in which progress can be made.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary rightly stated, the parties to the negotiations have to work out and agree the timing and the pace. Surely they would be well advised to consider the effect of the timing and pace of their actions on the future of Orient house.

Finally, on relations between Israel and this country, my right hon. Friend will shortly make his first visit to Israel as Prime Minister. It will be the second visit to Israel by a British Prime Minister in office—Lady Thatcher made the first in 1986. I warmly welcome the visit, which will cement the excellent bilateral relationship between this country and Israel. I also warmly welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend will be accompanied by a group of prominent business men, which I hope will help to develop the growing trade between the two countries, as Israel is our third most important trading partner in the middle east. I hope that more good will come of my right hon. Friend's visit.

The visit also has significance beyond trade, important though that is. The peace process in the middle east means a great deal to the region and to many people throughout the world. We have a good record of contributing to that process and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister deserves our strong support across the House for the further efforts that he will undoubtedly make to move forward that process, in which we have all invested so much hope.

11.50 am

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on winning this Adjournment debate. At this time in the middle east peace process, it is important for the House to have an opportunity to discuss the issues and for Opposition Members to have the chance to support the efforts that

the Government and the international community are making to ensure lasting peace in the middle east. It is also important for hon. Members on both sides of the House to set out some of our concerns.

We do not have much time and I do not want to take up any more than necessary, but it is important to say one or two things, given that the thrust of the speech by the hon. Member for Hertsmere concerned the security of Israel. I have been in this House for 16 years and have heard many people talking about the security of Israel from different perspectives. The argument has moved on, but it has not really changed. The hon. Gentleman fell into the trap of thinking that dealing with security in its military sense is the only way to guarantee Israel's security, without realising that the best security and harbinger of peace in the middle east would be a comprehensive peace settlement. That is the only security and future that Israel could and should be striving for, and that must be what all hon. Members dedicate themselves to.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere is right in saying that we must concentrate our efforts on a comprehensive peace settlement for the middle east and the various aspects of it. I agree with him that one of the most crucial aspects of that peace plan is for the Israeli-Syrian peace accord to be moved forward. I agree that the Syrians have made it clear that it must be full peace for full withdrawal and the Israelis have said that the depth of peace will be commensurate with the depth of withdrawal, but we need to go beyond that.

We have had many hints from the various capitals of the world that the two countries are close to concluding that agreement. We need to press harder to encourage them to take that extra step for peace. Then we must move on to the peace accord between Lebanon and Israel and to a further comprehensive peace that will remove all the inhibitions and problems that Israel faces. Israel cannot complain at the moment that it has somehow lost out because of anything that has happened so far as part of the declaration of principles, the Oslo agreement, or any other agreement for that matter.

I also pay tribute to the Israeli Government. They are the first Israeli Government to be elected on a platform for peace during the 16 years that I have been in this place and that should be recognised in the House. They were not only elected on a platform for peace, but have had the determination to make it happen. I have sat here through two previous Israeli Governments—the Likud Governments of Begin and Shamir. The latter went to Madrid and signed the original peace accord. As we now know, he did so with no intention of moving any way towards giving the Palestinians any rights, responsibilities or freedom and certainly with no intention of giving them a Palestinian authority, let alone a Palestinian state. This Israeli Government command respect and support because they fought on a platform for peace, and what is more important, a platform that set out land for peace, as outlined in Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

There is a different environment in Israel and I hope that the Israeli Government will be re-elected in the forthcoming elections. It is vital for the Israeli people and the middle east peace process that that Government, who are committed to peace, should be re-elected.

The Israeli-Palestinian problem is the crux of the middle east problem. I have difficulty agreeing with much of what the hon. Member for Hertsmere said on that matter. It is clear to anyone who has worked in the middle east, understands it and realises the problems that the lack of comparability and equality between the two parties, who are supposed to be negotiating equally across the table, is the problem. There must be an equality of legitimacy between the Israelis and the Palestinians and that cannot happen unless the Palestinian authority can sit at that table as a directly elected authority. I am sure that many of my hon. Friends agree and will support me, as will Conservative Members, when I say that an early election on the west bank and Gaza is one of the vital cogs in the process. The forum, size and nature of the authority is for the Palestinians to determine and to agree with the Israelis and we must try to help. Whether it is a 100-person council, 65 persons as proposed by Egypt, 40 or 20, as proposed by Israel, is not as important as the fact that those elections take place. Unless and until they do, there cannot be the legitimacy of equality over the negotiating table, which is so vital if we are to move the peace forward.

As the hon. Member for Hertsmere secured this debate, I am sorry that we were not able to invite him to listen to the talk by Emma Murphy, the British academy postdoctoral fellow, at the University of London School of Oriental and African Studies last week. She gave an excellent paper which, for the first time, brought together all the concerns and fears and began to look at the declaration of principles, the Oslo accord and the way in which they have impacted on the two countries. What Israel has done to exploit—I use that word as it is supposed to be used—the Oslo accord and the declaration of principles is no less than any other Government would have done in negotiations with another party. Later today, we will discuss the various ways in which Britain might secure the best place for Britain in Europe.

I was not surprised when Emma Murphy set out in such detail in her paper the way in which the accord could not work because from the outset it was structured to favour the Israelis to the extent that there was an imbalance that would not allow it to be a success. She identified two international failures:

> "Firstly, the international community has failed to insist that economic and political development in the West Bank and Gaza Strip should go hand in hand and secondly, Israel has been speedily rewarded both politically but more importantly economically, for its participation in the process, without regard for its own failures to fulfil either the spirit or the letter of the DOP"—

the declaration of principles. If any Member wants to challenge me, he need not merely take my word for that. Let us hear from Danny Doron, president of the Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Israel, who said:

> "The firms are moving here on the belief that the peace process is a done deal."

Previously they were reluctant to deal with Israel for fear of damaging their business with the Arab world.

Let us list what has happened to Israel since then. By August 1994, it had announced that 20 countries had established diplomatic relations since the Israeli accord. Prime Minister Rabin has been to China, Indonesia and Singapore to open up those markets, which were previously closed to Israel. Even Vietnam has had discussions with Israel. Even the Japanese Security Dealers Association authorised its members to conduct trading through the Israeli stock exchange for the first time, and the Japanese Trade and Industry Minister offered training to Israeli managers and workers in Japanese firms.

[Mr. Ernie Ross]

So it is difficult for anyone to come to the Chamber and argue that Israel has lost out. What should concern us is how the Oslo accord has worked against the best chances of a real peace agreement in line with the declaration of principles. As a result of that dialogue, the Palestine National Authority has been given direct responsibility for education, culture, health, social welfare, direct taxation and tourism. But it must co-operate with Israel in the more strategic areas of water, electricity, energy, financial development, transport, communications, trade and industry, environment, labour, media and the hunt for international aid and finance. Most notably, Israel divests itself of the expensive function of government but has retained its influence over matters directly related to the economic development of the authority which it handed over to the Palestinians.

So, from the outset, the Palestinians' hands have been tied because they were given the most costly matters to look after while economic matters must be agreed with Israel. Moreover, as a result of the Oslo accord and the newly developing peace, Arab money is pouring into the west bank and Gaza and, for the first time ever, that money is now accessible to Israel. Who would have thought that Israel would have had access to Saudi, Egyptian, Jordanian and diaspora Palestinian finances? As it now has that access to the occupied territories' markets, it is not much of a loser.

None the less, the world community, including this country, finds fault with the Palestine National Authority and asks why it has not done this or achieved that, without realising, understanding or accepting the imbalance in its relationship with Israel. It is perhaps ironic that it took 26 years thoroughly to reduce the occupied territories' economy, yet the international community expected a massive turnround in the space of months. When Israel's disengagement fell behind schedule and elections failed to materialise, Israeli closures strangled the lifeline of the Palestinian income, aid only dripped into the west bank, Gaza and the occupied territories and living standards fell, the result—not surprisingly—was a loss in public faith in the opportunities presented by the deal and a rise in political tensions.

It is crucial that those issues are understood. For the benefit of the hon. Member for Hertsmere and with the agreement of Emma Murphy, I shall place her extremely enlightening document in the Library so that the hon. Gentleman and other colleagues can read it.

The benefits for Israel are great. The Troika visited Israel recently for discussions with Prime Minister Rabin and Foreign Minister Peres. Apart from correctly raising issues which it regarded as blocks to the success of the middle east peace process—the settlements and the failure of the international community to help Palestinians in Gaza—it also discussed special, favoured terms for Israel. The European Mediterranean Association agreement, which I understand is 95 per cent. agreed—we are arguing over the last 5 per cent.—will give Israel, the only non-European Union member, privileged access to research and development and bidding for projects in European countries. It has gained that privileged access because of its commitment to resolving peacefully the problems in the middle east.

At the same time, Israel is telling the European Union, which is the largest single contributor to the peace process—it is giving 500 million ecu—that it must keep its nose out of the political side of those negotiations. That is no longer possible. Without seeking to attack Israel, we must remind it, as the United States Government did when they temporarily suspended $10 billion of aid some years ago because Israel was not working as hard as they thought it should, that if it wants that association agreement to be concluded, we expect certain measures from it. If it intends to be a partner to the European Union, it is not too much to ask that it listens to what we have to say.

One of the most important measures is Palestinian elections. It is essential that the Palestinians can sit down at the negotiations as an elected authority to negotiate with their elected counterparts in Israel. It is also important that we understand the conditions under which those elections can and will take place. The International Human Rights Law Group, in its book, "Guidelines for International Election Observing", defines the following minimal conditions for free and fair elections:

"no unreasonable limitations placed on a citizen's ability to participate in the political process, including the right to a secret vote and the right to be elected to office; and respect for the rights of freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly for a period adequate to allow political organizing and campaigning and to inform citizens about the candidates and issues."

There must be a full withdrawal of Israeli military presence if those elections are to take place. I firmly believe that, if an elected Palestinian authority can negotiate with its Israeli counterparts, a comprehensive peace plan will be well on the way to being established. That is the best and only security that Israel can possibly want.

12.6 pm

Sir Timothy Sainsbury (Hove): It is some 13 years since I last had an opportunity to participate in a debate on the middle east and Israel. During that time, while other responsibilities enforced my absence from such debates, a great deal happened—most recently, an advance in the peace process. I therefore warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on initiating this debate and welcome the opportunity to make a new contribution to it.

The hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) emphasised several times that, in his view, the best way to obtain security for Israel was a "comprehensive peace". In a speech 13 years ago, I made the obvious and, I hope, now generally agreed point that the best way to advance the peace process was to promote direct negotiations between Israel and her neighbours. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that, given everything that has happened since then, that is not just the best way but the only way to achieve substantial progress in the peace process. Intermediaries have an important role, but it should be restricted to bringing about direct negotiations, which have achieved results in respect of Egypt, Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

A powerful message must be given to Syria. If it refuses to participate in direct talks with Israel, it is effectively saying that it has no interest, in advancing the peace process and bringing about détente. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere said, a second message

that we should give Syria is about terrorism. Eliminating terrorism is the best confidence-building measure that one can have. Syria must not only say that it opposes terrorism but show that it will do something about it, instead of accepting the presence in its capital of many terrorist organisations, which seem to be able to operate with no interference and perhaps even with encouragement from the Government.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: My right hon. Friend made an interesting argument about the need for negotiations between the two partners to the accord; but is that the whole picture? Surely the United Nations has some part to play. What about United Nations resolutions 242 and 338? At a time when Israel is obviously breaking international law in the occupied territories, surely the wider community and the world has a part to play.

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: As I said, intermediaries do have a role, and I recognise that the United Nations can be an intermediary. Nevertheless, the history of efforts to obtain peace and improve security in the region shows that the only effective way to make real and lasting progress is for the parties to sit down face to face and negotiate—although that may be the result of a process and work by intermediaries. It is common sense that one will be unable to build confidence with a neighbour unless that neighbour is prepared to come and talk directly, instead of, so to speak, corresponding through solicitors. I reiterate that.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg) *indicated assent.*

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: I notice that my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State recognises the disadvantages of using lawyers on those occasions.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): And on many other occasions.

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: And also on many other occasions.

Obviously, it is also important that we do everything possible to retain and build on confidence in the peace process throughout the region. I support, in part at least, what the hon. Member for Dundee, West said about that.

The first effective way to do that is to improve the safety and security of all parties in the region, not only by negotiations between countries, but by eliminating terrorism, which is very destabilising to the process, and not only life-threatening but worse.

Mr. Booth: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, especially as I am another lawyer.

My right hon. Friend has mentioned terrorism. Does he agree that one needs to widen the net, and that, as it is now public knowledge that the Hamas illegal money is probably laundered through London, and as President Clinton has frozen similar assets in the United States since 24 January 1995, Britain should do the same?

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: My hon. Friend, who is a staunch supporter of Israel and who I know takes a close interest in these affairs, makes a valid argument. I entirely agree that attacking money laundering, whether it be in connection with drugs, terrorism or any other aspect of criminal behaviour, is an important way of fighting crime.

The second way to enhance confidence in the peace process, which has already been mentioned, is very important—it is to promote economic co-operation and trade. That will enable the people of the region—the people of Gaza and of Jericho as well as the people of Israel, Jordan and all the surrounding areas—to witness direct economic benefits in their lives, such as more jobs and greater prosperity.

There is enormous scope for advances to be made by co-operation between Israel and her neighbours. That co-operation can bring benefits, whether it be on transport infrastructure, tourism or water resources. Everyone recognises that there is an enormous number of ways of advancing co-operation.

I hope, and I am sure, that the United Kingdom Government will do all that they can to promote that co-operation and to bring about those benefits. The forthcoming visit of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to Israel will provide an opportunity to do that, especially as he will be accompanied, not only by right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, who will respond to the debate, but by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Export Trade, who I hope will build on the target set by one of his predecessors—me—to double trade flows between Israel and the United Kingdom. I am happy to say that we have made good progress towards that object.

Mr. Gerrard: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: I do not want to give way too often, because I know that several hon. Members wish to speak, but I shall give way briefly.

Mr. Gerrard: In considering the economic developments that I am sure that we all want, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it would be helpful if, during the visit by the Minister for Export Trade, the Minister will argue that the policies of economic separation between the Palestinians and Israel that appear to be being pursued and actively encouraged by the Government of Israel are of no help in that process?

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: With the time limitations, I should not like to go too far down that route. Obviously there are ways of developing co-operation, which, for instance, might take the form of development of industrial estates on the borders between Gaza and Israel, which would provide job opportunities and opportunities for the use of Israeli capital and skills to provide work for inhabitants of Gaza.

Something else that would be essential to taking best advantage of opportunities for economic co-operation is the dismantling of the remaining and distasteful aspects of the boycott. Undoubtedly, we now have the best opportunity that we have ever had to give the people of Israel, and indeed her neighbours, peace and economic advance. I am sure that we in the United Kingdom—including my right hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State in his negotiations and all his contacts—will take every opportunity to advance that process and to build on what has been achieved.

12.15 pm

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on securing the debate.

[Mr. Richard Burden]

The last time that I was in the middle east was about 18 months ago. That was at a time when the Madrid and Washington talks were generally felt to be on the rocks, at least by people living in the middle east. There was pessimism at that time among the people of the west bank and the Gaza strip about what the future held for them. Few people at that time knew—certainly I did not—of the talks that were going on in Oslo. Yet as soon as a couple of months later we witnessed that historic moment on the White house lawn when the peace accords were signed between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin.

Much has been achieved. Much was achieved in that moment. The declaration of principles achieves a great deal. However, since that day in September 1993, there have been some reminders of the great importance of the peace process. Some of those reminders, as the hon. Member for Hertsmere reminded us, were the attacks of Islamic fundamentalists. There was also a reminder, in February 1994, when Baruch Goldstein massacred 29 people at the Ibrahim mosque in Hebron. That was a salutary reminder of the importance of the peace process.

We all support the peace process, but one thing must be understood; it cannot stand still. It is a fragile process, and unless it constantly moves forward it is likely to fall apart. As time is short, I shall concentrate on two aspects that are vital in ensuring that the peace process moves forward and does not fall apart.

The first aspect has already been alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross)—the necessity for early elections to the Palestine National Authority. One of the top Palestinian negotiators on elections, Dr. Saeb Erekat, has said that the issue of elections is the make-or-break issue for the peace process. Elections will be the cement that binds that process together, which allows the Palestinians to act as full partners with Israel in making progress in the peace process.

A great deal of emphasis has rightly been placed on the need for economic revival in that part of the world, yet, if that is to happen, elections are a vital component. The fact that elections have not so far been held is one reason for delay in the provision of some of the aid that was promised by World bank donors as long ago as 1993.

We need to consider the ways in which barriers to those elections may be removed. An early redeployment of Israeli troops away from the population areas must be a central part of that process. I welcome the fact that the Minister of State made that argument in the House on 1 February 1995, and it was made again much more recently by the European Parliament.

Political legitimacy requires democracy. For democracy to thrive, the participants in it must be confident. It is very difficult for the people of the west bank and Gaza to have that confidence if they feel that their elections are being supervised by what they still regard as an occupying power.

I refer briefly, and secondly, to the settlements, which are central to the success or otherwise of the peace process. I welcome the fact that the Minister recently acknowledged in the House that the settlements in the west bank and Gaza are unlawful—under international law and under article 49 of the fourth Geneva convention. There was a time when the former Government of Israel seemed to think that it was open season for building settlements. I am pleased that the present Government do not see them in those terms and have declared a settlement freeze. If that settlement freeze is to be meaningful it has to be consistent, and seen to be so by the Palestinians living in the west bank and the Gaza strip.

I accept what the hon. Member for Hertsmere said about the issue of Jerusalem being left to future negotiations, but they must include all aspects of Jerusalem. The future status of Jerusalem should not be pre-empted by continued settlement building on the borders of east Jerusalem—which is what is happening. On 23 January this year *The Guardian* described the Israeli Housing Minister, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, as having

> "backed further expansion of the arc of burgeoning dormitory suburbs around mostly Arab East Jerusalem. He told Israel radio: 'I will continue to do my best to convince my colleagues in the government that the only thing we have to do is to continue to reinforce the defences of the capital of Israel.'"

Faced with that, it is hardly surprising that Palestinians will see the so-called freeze on settlement building as not all that it is cracked up to be.

When I was in the middle east about 18 months ago, what was going on around the outskirts of east Jerusalem was obvious: an arc of settlements being built around Arab east Jerusalem. Those settlements are not only a barrier to peace, but they have an impact on the Arab quarter that is psychologically dangerous. That too serves to underline the inequity in the negotiations.

The settlements are a major obstacle to Palestinian confidence in the peace process. Should hon. Members wonder why that is so, let us remember, for instance, what was said by the Israeli military commander responsible for the west bank area when he testified before the Shamgar commission, set up to investigate the Hebron massacre:

> "You have to understand the basic situation. A Jew has a weapon to defend himself. An Arab who is carrying a weapon is a terrorist. A Jew with a weapon is defending himself and he is allowed to shoot. We forbid soldiers in the IDF to open fire at them."

We need to get away from this sort of attitude and to state clearly that peace is indivisible: it must be respected on both sides. As we rightly condemn attacks made by Islamic fundamentalists and others on Israelis, so too we expect the Israeli Government and Israelis in general to respect the basic rights of the Palestinians. They have to recognise the role that the settlements play. They must also recognise the force of what Hanan Ashrawi said some time ago. It spoke volumes about the settlements which, she said,

> "cause friction, are a blatant injustice to Palestinians, fragment Palestinian land and prevent the emergence of a geographically contiguous Palestinian entity. Leaving the settlements untouched is like putting a flame next to a powder keg and saying: co-exist."

There are many difficult issues to be faced. The Oslo accords and the peace agreement signed on the White house lawn were but the start, not the end, of a difficult process. We have the chance now of a real and lasting peace in the middle east; but if it is to be meaningful, it must be based on equality. To be equal, it has to be legitimate and democratic. Two necessary prerequisites for that would seem to be early Palestinian elections preceded by an early redeployment of Israeli troops away from populated areas. There must also be a proper freeze on settlement building, to include the outskirts of Jerusalem as well as other parts of the west bank and Gaza.

12.24 pm

Sir David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on initiating the debate, which comes at a timely moment.

The middle east peace process always seems to proceed in fits and starts. Temporarily we appear to be in the doldrums again, but middle east instability remains, as it always has been, an immense danger to the west. Apart from our long historical connection with the area, it surely remains in the British national interest that we should play a positive role in the middle east.

As this is a short debate I want to make just three brief points. First, I applaud the fact that Mr. Rabin's Government in Israel have taken risks for peace and have some considerable diplomatic triumphs to their credit—especially the agreement with Jordan. Like my hon. Friend, I give credit to the part played in that by King Hussein and his Government. Inevitably, the problem of the settlements in the west bank and Jerusalem is making further progress in the talks between the PLO and Israel extremely difficult.

When Mr. Rabin's Government came to power in 1992 they said that they would freeze settlements. Settlements policy is bound to be hotly contested when Israel holds general elections next year, but of course it will not be the only issue that the Israeli electorate will have to consider. It would surely help the peace process along if the Israeli Government announced an immediate and stronger freeze on the settlements, not least because that would deny the extremists who want to wreck the peace process easy propaganda to use against the Government of Israel, who are striving on all fronts to achieve a peace agreement.

The peace process is certainly dangerously incomplete without the positive involvement of Syria. It is important to remember that the dispute between Israel and Syria did not start in 1967. There was constant trouble and warfare on the armistice lines between 1949 and 1967, and everyone who takes an interest in the subject must realise the extreme Israeli sensitivity about future security on the Golan heights.

This year, 1995, is surely the year in which progress on this dispute can be made. First, there is Syria's need for more economic aid, now that the Soviet Union no longer exists to back it up. Israel does not have elections this year and so has time to prepare a package to put before the electorate in 1996. President Clinton does not have elections this year either; without big American involvement, I do not believe an agreement to be possible.

There will surely have to be a step-by-step approach to the problem. Initial territorial compromise will be needed before a complete solution is achieved. I do not believe that a non-aggression pact between Israel and Syria will be adequate, but America will need to give as strong a guarantee for the security and stability of the Golan heights as she gave to west Berlin at the time of the cold war.

It is impossible to overemphasise the fact that a poor middle east is a dangerous middle east. Enormous improvements in living standards could be made if only these countries would reduce the amount that they spend on arms. Wild talk of an Islamic nuclear bomb and the dangerous unpredictability of Iran, to say nothing of the situation in Algeria, make it all the more important that we make progress in 1995; and that peaceful co-existence, with all the advantages that it would bring to Israel and her neighbours, becomes a reality, not a dream.

12.28 pm

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on securing the debate and making an excellent speech. I thought that some of my hon. Friends' observations assumed an influence for this country that we simply do not have—and have not had for a long time. The Foreign Office does not enjoy the influence in the middle east that it thinks it should have. It has forfeited that and has not made a particularly good job of affairs in the middle east. I am even handed about that. That has been the position since Ernest Bevin. I absolve the Minister of State. He enjoys a good reputation in the House and a growing international reputation on the issue. I do not blame him for the lack of influence that the Foreign Office appears to have in the middle east.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere mentioned a number of points which should be pursued. He mentioned Europe, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross). It is true that Israel was among the first non-European states to recognise the importance of the Common Market and it signed an economic accord with the trading bloc in 1975. Today, after all that time, Israel's trade deficit with the European Union amounts to about £7 billion per annum. The British Government should do something about recognising that. They have failed actively to encourage our European partners to support Israel's trade agreement and they should do more in that regard.

The key issue involving Israel today is the peace process and what is going on in the nations that surround Israel. The biggest worry of all is Syria and the Syrians' failure to take a much more positive attitude to the peace process. Syria's main interest focuses on the return of the Golan heights to Syria and no one can underestimate their strategic and military importance. But Mr. Rabin's Labour Government have made it clear that they are prepared to withdraw on the Golan heights for a full and comprehensive peace with Syria.

Unfortunately, our Government are not positive enough in pursuing that. We should take a far stronger line with Syria on the question of Hizbollah and other terrorist groupings, to which the hon. Member for Hertsmere referred, and the fact that they find a safe haven in Syria from which to conduct attacks on the state of Israel. The British Government should be much clearer in what they are saying to the Syrian Government about that and be much more demanding that they desist in order that the peace process may be progressed.

Likewise, the British Government, despite our long friendship with King Hussein and the people of Jordan, are not positive enough about Jordan. Jordan has acted with great courage in the peace process. King Hussein and his Government are to be warmly congratulated on what they have done. But, again, there is a trade deficit between Jordan and the United Kingdom and, despite promises, the United Kingdom has agreed to write off only approximately 10 per cent. of Jordan's debt. I hope that the Minister will say something about that.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere also referred to the £75 million available to the Palestine National Authority. He made a good point about that, but so far only

[Mr. Norman Hogg]

£10 million has reached the Palestinians. That is not a good record. I accept that circumstances have not been as conducive to the delivery of aid as we had hoped, but I hope that the Minister will be able to say something about that in order to assure us that the money that has been earmarked for the Palestine National Authority will reach it as a matter of urgency.

On Europe we have not done enough; on Syria we have not done enough: on Jordan we have not done enough: on the Palestinian question we have not done enough. Those questions must be addressed by the Government. When they are addressed, then and only then will the Government be able to say that they are making a positive contribution to the peace process.

12.34 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on his success in securing the debate. I do so with some feeling because he and I applied for a one-and-a-half-hour debate on peace in the middle east: he was successful and I was not.

Peace in the middle east will come only when there is mutual trust. That mutual trust would be helped if the people of Israel could be told of the fate of the Israeli hostages, if those who are alive could be returned to their families in Israel and if the remains of those whose death has been confirmed could be sent back to their families.

We must remember that John McCarthy and Terry Waite live in freedom because Israel kickstarted the release of hostages in the middle east by releasing a large number of prisoners. That decision meant that the west owed Israel a debt of honour. Israel had a right to expect that she would receive something in return. In fact, all she received in return were the bones of a dead Druze soldier.

The parents of Zachary Baumel still do not know his fate 12 years after he was captured; Joseph Fink's parents have been told that he is dead, but they have still not been able to give him a burial; but much worse is the case of Ron Arad. On 31 December, when the people of England were celebrating new year, Ron Arad was celebrating his 3,000th night in captivity.

Ron Arad was shot down on 16 October 1986. It is known that he was captured by the Amal and it admitted that it was holding him. In the first year of his captivity, he was allowed to write three letters to his wife, Tami, who also received two photographs from him, but since 1987 there has been a ghastly silence from that poor man. His relatives have not received a message and he has not been allowed to receive any messages from them.

In 1988, he was removed from the care of Amal and transferred to the care of the Resistance of Believers. In 1989, he was transferred to that benevolent organisation, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. Until recently, we have had only rumour to go by, but this weekend an Iranian appeared on Israeli television to say that he had seen Ron Arad alive in 1994. Mr. Manucher Matumer—I apologise to the gentleman if I have mispronounced his name—appearing on Israel television on 25 February this year, said: "I have a message both for the wife and the mother of Ron Arad. The message is: your husband is alive; your son is alive."

It is surely a scandal that, some eight and a half years after that man was captured in Lebanon, he is being kept in solitary confinement, against all the rules of the Geneva convention, and that his mother, his wife and his young daughter have not heard from him. Surely if we are to have peace in the middle east, Ron Arad should be allowed to return to his family rather than being kept in solitary confinement in Iran. His continued incarceration is an act of sheer barbarism.

There is always a risk that a new peace process will create a crisis of rising expectations. We know that Camp David did not yield the immediate dividend that everyone expected. There was not the anticipated increase in tourism and trade from Egypt to Israel. One of the tragedies of the middle east is that the bus that used to go from Tel Aviv to Cairo was full of Israelis, but the bus from Cairo to Tel Aviv was only infrequently full of Egyptians.

I believe that the peace between Jordan and Israel will be a very warm peace. I pay tribute to the courage of King Hussein, who must always have been reminded of the fate of his grandfather. Anyone who has stood on Allenby bridge knows that people and goods have moved between Israel and Jordan for a very long time. One of the risks involved in the peace must be that the people of Jordan may feel that their economy is not expanding quickly enough. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, when he visits the middle east later this month, will be able to give them economic hope.

When the people of Israel signed the Oslo agreement, they hoped that they were getting security. We have seen in Argentina, London and Israel how Hamas is determined to try to defeat peace in the middle east. The people of Israel deserve our understanding when they have to act to try to ensure security and peace for their own people, because if they do not succeed in doing that peace in the middle east will be very much at risk.

12.40 pm

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on securing the debate and on choosing this topic. I particularly commend his use of the phrase "warm peace", which, perhaps, has guided the whole tone of the debate. That is to be welcomed.

I say respectfully to the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) that these debates are an opportunity for us to go further than simply rehearse and exchange old grievances, no matter how deep and legitimate the hurt that lies behind them.

I share the anxiety of the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Sir D. Madel), who expressed concern that the middle east peace process should not stall, but let us begin by recognising the unique place in the history of democratic government that the present Government of Israel will have. The endeavour on which they have set out is one of the boldest, bravest and most testing endeavours that any democratic Government in the history of democratic Governments have ever attempted. It is a matter of pride for me that the party that lies at the core of that Government bears the name of my own party and shares many of our hopes and traditions, and that we can say truthfully, sincerely and with great respect that they are our brothers and sisters. All my hon. Friends who have spoken have done so in that sense and with respect for the great endeavour that is being undertaken.

I recognise some of the points that the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West made about settlements, but the present Government of Israel face not one set of extremists but two, and the courage of the measures that the Israeli Government have already taken on settlements gives some hope for the future.

Time is short and I want to allow the Minister adequate time to reply. At the heart of the matter is a rapid construction of the strength, legitimacy and success of the Palestine National Authority. Without that, the peace process will stall. The strength and legitimacy of the Palestine National Authority will depend, as my hon. Friends the Members for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) and for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) pointed out, on its ability to legitimise its own place in the life of the Palestinian people through election processes.

But it does not end there. This is a battle for hearts and minds that will be won as much on kitchen tables as ballot boxes. My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) made a telling intervention on precisely that point. When the Prime Minister visits Israel and Gaza—he will take all our hearts with him when he does so—I hope that this will lie at the core of his visit. Something must be done quickly to improve the water, sewerage, electricity, homes and jobs of the people for whom the Palestine National Authority currently bears responsibility. I hope that that is the framework in which we can start to discuss the matter and move it forward. Skilful diplomacy and tough and plain speaking are certainly important, but let us not forget the part that chicken and vegetables will play in resolving the matter.

I hope that the Minister will be able to assure the House that the Prime Minister will not go to Israel and Gaza with empty hands, and that we have, ready to be delivered quickly, while it is still important and while it can win the hearts of people, positive proposals to put young men back to work, to give them a place in their own community and to give them some sense of their own power and place in society, because that is as important in Gaza as it is in many other parts of the world.

12.45 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): May I begin, like all other hon. Members, by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on having secured this debate? It has been an extremely good debate and it has reinforced the wisdom of the House in creating opportunities on a Wednesday morning for such debates. The number of participants demonstrates the importance that hon. Members attach to promoting the peace possess within the middle east.

The starting point for every speech has been a very strong welcome for the peace process. Hon. Members have recognised the very considerable courage that has been shown by Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat. It is right that we should all recognise—as did the hon. Members for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), and for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg), and my hon. Friends the Members for Bedfordshire, South-West (Sir D. Madel) and for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall)—the contribution that His Majesty the King of Jordan has made.

I agree that, as the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) said, the momentum of the peace process must be maintained. It cannot stand still, because if it does it will fall.

The agenda for the debate was set by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere. I agree with the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth, who apologised to the House for not being able to stay for the closing speech, about the comprehensive framework that my hon. Friend set for our discussion. My hon. Friend touched on all the major issues. Therefore, in the course of my response, I will base what I have to say on the framework that he established.

My hon. Friend concentrated substantially on security. He is entirely right when he says that security has overshadowed the middle east peace process, most notably in recent months. Israel clearly has a right to look to Chairman Arafat and other neighbours to combat terrorism, but another proposition needs to be advanced. Terrorism in the middle east and the threat to the security of Israel cannot be checked or contained exclusively by military or police action. That is true whether it be military action by the Israelis, the Palestinians or anyone else.

Advances in political rights and increasing prosperity are an essential element in promoting the security of Israel. That point was made by the hon. Member for Dundee, West, and I wholly agree with him. It follows, therefore, that Israel should not make unattainable requirements of, for example, the Palestine National Authority, as a condition of further negotiations within the peace process.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): As it is clear that security is at the base of so many of the difficulties in relation to the peace process, why have the British Government changed their attitude towards Syria? What is offered in exchange for the considerable support that they have given Syria in their change of attitude?

Mr. Hogg: I shall deal with Syria shortly, but first I must emphasise that security is best promoted by the development and eventual achievement of a comprehensive peace process.

There has been a good deal of discussion about the importance of Syria in that peace process. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Sir T. Sainsbury)—I was glad to hear him break a 13-year silence—focused on that subject. I wholly agreed with his view that face-to-face negotiations between Syria and Israel are essential if there is to be agreement between the parties; solicitors are not an adequate channel, even if they are as good as Secretary Christopher. That, I think, is the point that my right hon. Friend was making.

I hope that face-to-face talks will take place. Indeed, discussions of that kind have already taken place in Washington, at ambassadorial level. Such talks, however, will not lead to an agreement unless it is based on the two propositions that have been advanced: total withdrawal from the Golan on Israel's part, and a full, comprehensive and—I would say—warm peace with Israel on Syria's part. Those are the two essential elements.

Hon. Members have pointed out that Prime Minister Rabin has committed Israel to full withdrawal, and—although at times the language has been a little equivocal—I think that he has. To the extent that he has, his commitment is welcome. I hope that Syria will now feel able to spell out in detail what is meant by "total peace": that, along with agreement with Syria, is essential to Israel's achievement of a comprehensive and sustainable agreement in the middle east involving all her neighbours.

[Mr. Hogg]

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) mentioned terrorism. All of us should do all that we can to persuade Syria that any endorsement of terrorism, either in southern Lebanon or in Israel itself, is wholly wrong and destructive of the peace process, and should be stopped. The British Government take every possible opportunity to make that plain.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere mentioned Jerusalem. He is entirely right to say that a way must be found to enable the various parties to the negotiations to reconcile their legitimate interests in Jerusalem, but that will be extraordinarily difficult. It will require generosity from all parties. I am convinced that that issue should be left until last.

I also agree with what I took to be the general message from the House about the importance of not taking steps designed to shape or pre-empt the ultimate agreement. Specific reference has been made to settlements: it was made very strongly by the hon. Member for Northfield but also by my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West. In so far as we can stop the process, we must not allow settlements to be so constructed as to pre-empt that ultimate agreement. Indeed, I say categorically that the construction of settlements is an obstacle to peace, and I very much hope that the Israeli Government will desist from it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere rightly pointed out that bilateral relations between the United Kingdom and Israel have never been better. Perhaps unconsciously, he was echoing a point made by Prime Minister Rabin when he visited the United Kingdom last year, and his view is strongly shared by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere welcomes my right hon. Friend's visit to Israel in two weeks' time, on which he will be accompanied by a substantial number of UK business men. Much of the preliminary work was done by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hove, who has contributed substantially to the promotion of Anglo-Israeli relations, which are very important.

The fact that so many business men are going to Israel with my right hon. Friend demonstrates the extent to which the boycott has fallen away. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West that a poor middle east is a dangerous middle east: that is a true statement, which influences our thinking.

Mr. Cousins: We welcome the fact that business men are to go to Israel, but if business is to be done money must be invested. It is essential to use that money to return people to work.

Mr. Hogg: Money is certainly important. In fact, the European Union is the largest contributor to the Palestinian cause in financial terms. As the hon. Gentleman will know, 500 mecu is promised over five years. But he is wrong: 100 mecu has been disbursed up to the end of February, and the British Government's contribution is £75 million over three years. We shall try to find other ways of enforcing our commitment, but the hon. Gentleman must allow my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to deal his cards as he thinks best.

The question of elections was raised by a number of hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Dundee, West and for Northfield. I agree that elections are terribly important: they underpin and reinforce the legitimacy of the Palestine National Authority. I also agree that it is extremely important for the Israelis to feel able to redeploy troops away from residential areas. Let me say to the Palestinians, however, that the Israelis have legitimate security interests. I hope that the Palestinians will themselves feel able to exercise flexibility in their calls for redeployment, taking account of the security requirements that Israel certainly has.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South raised the question of hostages, most notably the case of Ron Arad. I associate myself with what he said. As Ron Arad is still alive—we believe that he is, but we have no certain knowledge—the fact that he has been detained for so long is, as my hon. Friend said, a crying scandal. We say to any Government with influence—the Iranians, for instance, may have some influence—that it is indeed a crying scandal, and that Ron Arad should be released.

I also say to the Israelis in this context—although I am not establishing any kind of linkage—that we welcome what has been done recently with regard to Khiam prison. I recall that the hon. Member for Dundee, West raised the matter when we last discussed this issue. Two important steps have been taken. I welcome the Israeli Government's decision to allow families access to the prison; I also welcome the decision to release some 32 prisoners. As I have said, no link is involved, but I welcome what Israel has done and feel that her action should be applauded. Nevertheless, I again emphasise the importance of securing the release of Ron Arad, whose detention has been a scandal.

A number of important points have been made, but I am afraid that I have not been able to deal with all of them in 14 minutes. I mean no discourtesy to the House. This has been an important and interesting debate in the sense that to a considerable extent hon. Members have spoken with one voice. We are indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere for making that possible.

Rutherglen Maternity Hospital

12.59 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): My reason for requesting the debate is that Greater Glasgow health board has issued a consultation paper which proposes, among other things, the closure of Rutherglen maternity hospital. The debate is a direct response to that proposal. I have the support of my hon. Friends the Members for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall), for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson), for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) and for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson).

The hospital was officially opened in May 1979 and has clearly established a first-class record for providing service to the area. The proposal is to close the hospital and to direct the people in its catchment area to Southern general hospital. The catchment area consists basically of Cambuslang, Halfway, Rutherglen, Toryglen and East Kilbride, in which a third of the mothers attending the hospital live, and it includes a swathe of south Glasgow. That is a big area containing 250,000 people. In contrast to many areas and to proposals for hospital closures, this catchment area is expanding, especially in East Kilbride.

The board's only justification for the closure is the "stand-alone" principle, with which I shall deal later. I am bitterly disappointed that, in a 20-page document, the future of the hospital is dealt with in six lines, within which the hospital and its ethos and service are dismissed by the board. It is disgraceful that the hospital is felt to be so unimportant that it is dealt with in such a short space.

By the end of the year, the hospital will have delivered almost 50,000 babies. It has an excellent record not only for the service that it was started to provide but for the various services that the hospital has developed since it opened. It provides a day-care unit, a parenthood education department, a community midwifery base, physiotherapy and speech therapy units, and two pre and post-natal wards with 50 beds. The ground floors house an antenatal clinic, ultrasound facilities, an X-ray department, a dietician, social workers, a pharmacy, biochemistry and an in-service training department.

I do not intend any criticism of any hospital anywhere in the Greater Glasgow health board area when I say that I cannot think of a more modern and up-to-date maternity facility in that area. As befits a centre of excellence, it continues to expand its services. Recent developments include a pre-pregnancy clinic which provides consultant assessment and counselling on a one-to-one basis. The hospital has an Ultramark 9 scanner, which is one of the most up-to-date available. It has a day-care unit for the monitoring and assessment of maternal and foetal well-being and it provides a comfortable environment. I shall deal with that later in my speech. It has a host of special facilities which it has developed over the years, and that justifies my view that it is a first-class centre of excellence.

Over the years, two wards have been closed on the top floor. The board made a special case on that to the Minister, but they were closed as a result of the shorter time that women now stay in hospital after having their babies—it has dropped from over a week in some cases to just a couple of days. In the spirit and attitude of the Rutherglen maternity hospital, those wards have been put to positive use and now contain the X-ray service and physiotherapists and speech therapists. One indication of the work that has been put in by the hospital staff is community support. Fund-raising events have been held frequently to ensure that the hospital is one of the best equipped in the city of Glasgow or the surrounding area. There was such an input from people that it has become a vital care in the community asset in which most of the younger people have a firm stake. The hospital has an excellent record in clinical safety, and I shall expand on that when dealing with the stand-alone argument.

In addition to the services which I have mentioned, the hospital has a first-class training department. It is part of the Victoria infirmary NHS trust and is committed to the pursuit of excellence through clinical training, audit and research. It provides higher professional training for senior registrars, and participates in an extensive range of clinical audit and research projects, which include a leading UK role in fish oil trials in pregnancy. There has been a systematic review of clinical practice in labour suites and it has locally co-ordinated the Scottish joint breast feeding initiative. It uses the Cochrane database which provides information on clinical trials in obstetrics. Those and other continuing developments in clinical practice clearly show that it is not just a maternity hospital but a centre of excellence.

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): My hon. Friend's views are strongly expressed in my community. Some 900 births a year—two thirds of all the births in East Kilbride—occur in that hospital. Its closure will have a major impact on the delivery of hospital, maternity and obstetric services in that important part of Lanarkshire. I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising these issues and wish him well in his campaign, which has the full support of my constituents.

Mr. McAvoy: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. East Kilbride is a key part of the area that is covered by Rutherglen maternity hospital. That is shown by the fact that the East Kilbride community, led by Joe Quigg, was the first of the communities served by the hospital to initiate a campaign of opposition to the proposed closure. That group was, of course, supported by my hon. Friend.

One of the key points which even the Government seem to accept in the provision of services in the NHS is women's choice. If Rutherglen maternity hospital is removed as a choice, the women in the population of 250,000 people in the catchment area will have their choice removed at a stroke. That is unacceptable and it will be challenged.

As I have said, the stand-alone principle was the reason given by the board for closing the hospital. It takes the view that a maternity hospital should not stand alone from acute hospital services in case anything happens to a mother or baby during birth. The fact that the board dealt with that in only six lines shows that it does not have a large base on which to justify the stand-alone theory. If throughout the medical world there were a proven and accepted clinical reason for stand-alone maternity hospitals being regarded as unsafe and bad practice, I would not argue against it. If the clinical world said that such a system was not good for pregnant mothers, I would accept it. But the board's reasoning is disputed not just by lay people but by medical people and by the Victoria infirmary NHS trust board. The proposal should be reconsidered.

[Mr. McAvoy]

I would like to see the look on the faces of Scottish Office Ministers if the policy to abolish stand-alone maternity hospitals was implemented throughout Scotland, because they would then be responsible for trying to finance the building of replacement new hospitals. The policy has ramifications for Scotland, if not for the United Kingdom.

Let us consider the practical opposition to the stand-alone hospitals. Since Rutherglen was built, no mother has died either during or after transfer to the Victoria infirmary because of complications. The maternity hospital has a good track record. Greater Glasgow health board, to its credit, has not sought to cite any occasion when lives have been lost because of the stand-alone policy. I accept that the board must consider all aspects of health care, but it does not seek to fulfil the aim of providing optimum services in all health services. It does not station ambulances on motorways because of the bad risk of accidents taking place there. I do not see why we should accept its argument that, by abandoning the stand-alone maternity unit, it will provide optimum services to mothers in the catchment area.

The board's decision comes down to an unseen reason—cost. Mothers in the catchment area will be expected to travel to Southern general hospital in Govan, a journey which will take an extra 15 minutes. Who is say that that extra travelling time for those from Blantyre, East Kilbride or Halfway will not cause problems for mothers and babies and the people looking after them? The board has taken no account of the complications that could arise in that 15 minutes.

I make no criticism of any other hospital, but the board has tried to suggest that the acute and maternity services at Southern general are side by side. I have been reliably informed by people in the health service that should a mother develop complications in the maternity unit at that hospital, she would have to be transferred to the acute hospital services site by ambulance, because there is no direct route. That shoots down the argument that Rutherglen should be closed because of the delays experienced when mothers have to be transferred, because of complications, from that maternity hospital to the Victoria infirmary. The same argument applies to the Southern general, so where is the safety gain?

I pay tribute to a number of people who have campaigned for Rutherglen maternity hospital. They include members of the Victoria infirmary NHS trust board, who support the retention of Rutherglen. The campaign has received excellent support and backing from the chief executive of that trust, Barry Small, and one of the managers at Rutherglen maternity hospital, Jim Bretherton. One of the key people to challenge the stand-alone theory is Mrs. Kim Margey, of Rutherglen, who is a member of the National Childbirth Trust. Those people are part of the community campaign against the closure of Rutherglen.

The strength of local feeling was revealed when I organised a meeting of delegates from local community groups in the catchment area, when more than 400 people turned out. I remember the atmosphere in the hall when Dr. Neil McDougall illustrated the efforts of the staff to provide good services to the public. He came across extremely well and had the support of the audience. A host of other people and organisations are behind Rutherglen maternity hospital, for example, the Womens Royal Voluntary Service, which has supported the hospital for many years. That hospital and the services which it provides are valued in our community. I cannot vouch for those services, but my wife has certainly been a consumer of them. My younger son, Brian, is a true-born Ruglonian, because he was born at that maternity hospital, within the borders of Rutherglen town council and borough.

The hospital is rooted in the heart of the community. The chairman of Greater Glasgow health board, Sir Robert Calderwood, whom I respect, has said:

> "In drawing up these proposals, the Board has sought to emphasise the importance of the involving of local communities in the provision of health care. "

The community served by the Rutherglen maternity hospital want it to remain open and it will continue to make that case. If Sir Robert is true to his word and the board listens to the community served by the hospital, the closure proposal will be withdrawn. The hospital and its staff will then be allowed to get on with providing their first-class service.

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) warmly on securing a debate on this important subject, which I know is of great interest to him and to his constituents.

I should like to set out the current position on the future of Rutherglen hospital. Greater Glasgow health board has issued for public consultation a document setting out its purchasing intentions for acute and maternity services to the year 2001. That document sets out, among other matters, proposals for the reorganisation of maternity services for the Greater Glasgow health board area. The proposals suggest that Rutherglen hospital should close as part of the reorganisation and creation of new maternity services for the area.

Greater Glasgow health board is, of course, aware of the impact that its proposals will have outwith Glasgow. For example, over recent years the board has been in discussion with Lanarkshire health board. Its views have been sought as part of the current consultation exercise. The board will consider all responses lodged with it by the consultation deadline of 30 April. Any subsequent proposal by it to close the hospital would be subject to the consent of the Secretary of State for Scotland. He would have to be satisfied that better services would be put in place before he would agree to any such proposal.

May I reassure the hon. Member and the House that the current debate in Glasgow on how best to provide maternity care should not be taken to reflect on the staff and standard of care provided at Rutherglen hospital; but the board believes that continual improvement in care and services is vital. With that in mind, the board is merely seeking better ways of doing what it already does well.

The proposals in the Glasgow consultation document reflect a concern on the part of the board that, wherever practicable, maternity units should have the availability and back-up of the full range of clinical support services of a major acute hospital. As the hon. Member will know, the document sets out an argument against the Glasgow

area retaining stand-alone maternity facilities. The health board aims to provide expert maternity services with full back-up facilities on site.

For the benefit of those present, Greater Glasgow has four NHS trusts which manage maternity services. Those services are currently organised from the Southern general hospital, the Queen Mother's hospital at Yorkhill, the Glasgow Royal maternity hospital and Rutherglen. In all, some 313 maternity beds are available. The consultation document, in proposing a reduction in bed numbers to 244, was arrived at following full discussions with local clinicians and general practitioners.

As its consultation document points out, 244 beds by the year 2001 is considered by the health board to be appropriate to estimated need and appropriate for the provision of a safe complement of beds for the city. That level of provision also takes account of the needs of women who may decide to come to Glasgow for their deliveries and maternity care in preference to their local health board services.

I have mentioned safety in terms of the board's views on future bed numbers. Safety is also a key consideration, of course, in the organisation of all health care—no less so for maternity services. Again, for the benefit of those hon. Members present, it is worth noting the consideration that lies behind the Greater Glasgow board's wish to have on-site full acute facilities to back up its maternity services.

In cases where mothers experience difficulties and complications after giving birth, it is obviously desirable and safer for all concerned that the full range of clinical support facilities of a major acute hospital be available on site. This is clearly set out in the board's consultation document.

There is another equally important consideration that has informed the Greater Glasgow board's thinking in this matter. As in most spheres of medicine, new techniques are also being developed by obstetricians, which allow the antenatal diagnosis of congenital disorders as part of the specialty of perinatal medicine. Where neonatal surgery and complex neonatal paediatric care are required, that can now be diagnosed before delivery. The board is of the view that there are clear safety benefits to be gained were babies in this category to be delivered and cared for on the site of the main neonatal surgical and medical paediatric unit—Yorkhill hospital, of course—and continuing services from the Queen Mother's hospital at the Yorkhill site is consistent with the board's view on back-up and the availability of specialist care.

Mr. Ingram: Although I take on board some of the Minister's arguments, I agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) about the views expressed by doctors at Rutherglen maternity hospital which, in a sense, tend to contradict some of the Minister's remarks. It is worth bearing in mind that there are about six maternal deaths per 1,000 in the United Kingdom but that there has not been one maternal death at Rutherglen maternity hospital since it was opened. The proportion of perinatal deaths throughout the United Kingdom is nine per 1,000 but only five per 1,000 at Rutherglen maternity. Those figures tend to cancel the safety worries about the hospital as a stand-alone facility.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman's point will be taken into account in the consultation. The board is sympathetic to the views of those who support Rutherglen and will take those views into account before reaching a final decision. As I said, the Secretary of State's consent is required for any proposal to close Rutherglen.

As a dedicated sick children's hospital with associated academic units, Yorkhill is unique in the United Kingdom. As the board points out, this facility offers particular advantages in the care and treatment of sick newborn babies.

It is worth taking a step back for a moment and reminding ourselves of the great strides that have been made in developing maternity care in Scotland. Over the past few years, there have been steady improvements in maternal and infant health. Outcomes in childbirth in Scotland as a whole compare favourably with levels anywhere in the developed world. Since 1980, the rates of perinatal, neonatal and infant mortality have fallen by more than one third and the rates of maternal mortality are now so low that the fear of dying in childbirth has all but been eradicated. We should never take this achievement for granted, and it is worth reflecting how real a danger maternal mortality was until comparatively recently. We should never be complacent about these achievements—as ever, there is still further progress to be made.

Rutherglen does not have the advantage of being attached on site to the full range of back-up clinical support facilities—most critically, blood transfusion services—routinely found in a large acute hospital. That is why the board, having decided on the best course for the organisation and provision of modern services, is recommending the closure of Rutherglen.

As hon. Members will know, Rutherglen is a stand-alone maternity hospital. It has a proud history; it is held in high regard by the many mothers whose babies were delivered there and it is viewed with fondness, I am sure, by those born there. There will always be genuinely held strong feelings and attachments to local facilities, and the views offered in the consultation process and in this debate will further inform the health board's consideration of the proposals. Rutherglen hospital was opened in 1978 and currently has 56 beds, 15 special care cots and two intensive care cots. The hospital dealt with some 3,036 deliveries last year.

I mentioned that the Greater Glasgow board is in touch with neighbouring health boards on the proposals. Hon. Members may wish to know that, although it will be for individual mothers and their GPs to determine where individual births would occur, if Rutherglen were not available there would be sufficient capacity within existing facilities in Lanarkshire—principally at Bellshill hospital but also at Law hospital—to accommodate the current and anticipated levels of deliveries for Lanarkshire without any adverse effect on the quality of care.

Mr. McAvoy: I am grateful to the Minister, who has been very generous in giving way; that is much appreciated. I refer again to the heart of the problem, which is the stand-alone theory. Would he care to comment on the fact that the latest report states that only two patients in 3,000 in the past year were transferred from Rutherglen maternity hospital?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: That is a telling point, which will inevitably be considered in the consultation. I have no axe to grind. Clearly, the hon.

[Lord James Douglas-Hamilton]

Gentleman wants the very best services that he can get for his constituents. Were Rutherglen to be closed, current anticipated Lanarkshire birth levels could be accommodated at Bellshill and Law hospitals without quality being compromised. The key point is that the Secretary of State has to be satisfied that there will be an improvement in services before he consents to any proposal from the board.

In the board's view, the forecast number of deliveries for the year 2001 could be met satisfactorily in the three proposed maternity units. Local access will, of course, be given full consideration, and geographical circumstances, which have been mentioned, will also be taken into account by the Secretary of State in his consideration of all closure proposals.

The Secretary of State will need to study the proposals carefully in the light of Government policy on the provision of maternity services. I shall briefly spell out that policy. I have outlined already some of the significant improvements that have been made over the years in maternity care. In particular, there has, of course, been a move to develop more sensitive, flexible and safe systems of care.

The Scottish Office has been keen to promote those developments. Last year, its policy review on the provision of maternity services in Scotland set the framework for action by health boards. It affirmed the importance of delivering maternity care which is sensitive and effective and which offers the best value for money. It asked health boards to examine their existing services with a view to further improving choices in maternity care—a matter that the hon. Gentleman stressed—to promoting DOMINO and other community-based schemes and to achieving a shift from specialised to less specialised forms of care.

Meanwhile, the CRAG/SCOTMEG group—the Clinical Research and Audit Group and the Scottish Management Efficiency Group—on maternity services has been looking in more detail at particular aspects of maternity care, with a remit to develop strategies for raising standards and improving training. The Government attach the highest importance to making certain that while these improvements take place, we continue to maintain the high standards of safety that have been achieved.

The benefits of easy access to services have to be considered alongside the need for sufficient concentration of staffing and resources to allow the delivery units to offer first-rate medical care, including the sophisticated technology of special baby care and neonatal intensive care units.

Delivery facilities need to handle enough births to ensure that clinical staff can keep up and improve their skills and experience in dealing with the more difficult cases and with emergencies. Proper arrangements need to be on hand to ensure 24-hour emergency medical cover and access to sophisticated clinical back-up. In short, the key is to work out for each local area, and in a way that is sensitive to local circumstances, the proper balance between the concentration and dispersal of resources for maternity services.

In reaching its planned configuration for bed numbers and locations, the Greater Glasgow health board has, quite properly at this stage, not announced what the final distribution of maternity beds will be between the three proposed sites. That remains a matter for discussion with clinicians. The location of neonatal intensive care cots will also be subject to clinical input before decisions are made. However, I know that, whatever the outcome, the board and NHS trusts will arrive at a flexible arrangement that can respond to future changes in need.

I am not in a position to anticipate the final outcome of the consultation exercise or the Secretary of State's decision, but the points made by the hon. Members for Rutherglen and for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) will be fully taken into account. There is no hidden agenda in the board's consideration of the organisation of maternity care provided for Glasgow. The current proposals have arisen from a genuine review of how best to match maternity care to need and how best to provide that care for the Greater Glasgow health board area. This strategy review is not driven by any artificial target on bed numbers. No target exists. The board's actions are confirmation of the board's continuing commitment to the policy of putting patients' needs first. We look forward to receiving its proposals following the conclusion of its consultations on 30 April.

I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Rutherglen on raising the important matter. The fact that so many of his hon. Friends—the hon. Members for East Kilbride and for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood)—are—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order.

Education in Kent

1.30 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I am most grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to open an Adjournment debate on education in Kent, for it gives me the opportunity to comment on change—desirable and undesirable—in the structure, motivation, direction and philosophy in maintaining provision through the agency of Kent county council.

My right hon. and hon. Friends who represent Kent and I wish to place on record our unswerving and total support for the many hundreds of schools—local education authority-maintained and grant-maintained—in the county. We recognise fully the dedication of teachers, governors and parents who service the range and variety of schools in Kent, thus giving local parents a range of choice second to none in England and, therefore, giving Kent's children the opportunity of a first-rate education: the best start in life possible.

I am pleased to see my hon. Friends the Members for Medway (Dame P. Fenner), for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Dover (Mr. Shaw) supporting me today. Those of us who represent Kentish constituencies have wasted no opportunity at any time to praise Kent schools, not as a matter of form, but for genuine reasons of pride and admiration.

Until recently, there was a symmetry of interests between the local education authority, schools and parents. That symmetry of interests and working together to improve standards in Kent has been ruthlessly destroyed by the advent of the Lib-Lab pact at county hall. It is to that regime in Maidstone that I want to direct my charges. I charge it with wilful politicisation of the education bureaucracy, a total and cynical disregard of pledged commitments made while in opposition about open government and the need for transparency and accountability, a manifestation of complete hostility to the range of national policies, which allow Kent to enjoy the variety of schools and to permit the greater involvement of parents in the running of their children's school, and financial incompetence. The Lib-Lab pact in Maidstone is trying every which way to avoid owning up to financial irresponsibility of the like never before seen in Kent at county level.

The final straw for us in Kent since the loss of control by the Conservative party in May 1993 was that, a few weeks ago, the director of education services issued under his name a leaflet paid for by the council tax payers of Kent, which contained nothing more than a political, anti-Government message. The leaflet was issued at a cost of several thousand pounds to each local education authority-maintained school in Kent. No consultation was allowed with the governing bodies of those schools, although it is said that some governors, at some meetings, asked for some information about the future budget.

Copies of the leaflet simply arrived one afternoon at local schools and the teachers, staff and heads were told to distribute them. Many chairmen of governors, not only Conservatives, have expressed great concern over the use of teaching staff to pass on to parents in our communities a clearly political message. I am glad that a number of head teachers in north-west Kent refused to send out the leaflet because they felt that it was a political message and not part of their duty and responsibility.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Does my hon. Friend accept from me as a chartered accountant that the figures quoted in that leaflet were highly selective and designed solely for a political purpose? We must question the basis and the appropriateness of a director of education issuing such a leaflet under his name and whether he is able to continue to be an independent director of education, or whether he should get out of his bureaucrat's office and admit that he wants to play politics and become a politician.

Mr. Dunn: The director of education in Kent has made known on several public occasions his hostilities to the policies of this Government. I am sure that he will read with interest the comments of my hon. Friend.

With regard to the leaflet, none of us in this Chamber objects to the political masters and mistresses of the county of Kent issuing a message if they wish to do so. What is unparalleled in my 16 years in the House is the use of the director of education for the purposes of party political activities. That is wrong. What is more interesting about that particular unfolding of events is that I was told by the chief executive of Kent county council—a professional man indeed—that he did not see the leaflet in draft form until it had gone out. That is a significant development. What is going on between the different arms of the county bureaucracy?

I am fully aware that that development is not new. All of us—I welcome my right hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken), the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, to the debate—remember that, in the county council election campaign in April and May of 1993, neither the Labour or Liberal parties, nor any of my local Labour or Liberal Democrat candidates, made any reference whatever to their opposition to GM schools, although there was a reference to it in their manifesto kept in Maidstone. Many of them have since refused to back their local schools in ballots to become grant-maintained.

Kent council is bypassing the governing bodies, has made a commitment since 1993 to do nothing to assist in the forward movement of Government policies and, of course, as we know, last week descended into the sort of anarchy that we used to associate with central London Labour-controlled boroughs, by refusing on a number of occasions to allow members of the Conservative group on the county council to speak on important issues. That led to a walk-out by the Conservative group, which, of course, has the full support of my right hon. and hon. Friends.

What was significant about the budget debate the other day was that there was no publication of staffing levels for the years ahead. Over the past two years of Lib-Lab control, central staff numbers in Kent county council have risen from 14,694 to 15,556 persons. Thus, we are concerned about the reduction in KCC's commitments, while the level of bureaucracy has risen.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Does my hon. Friend agree that the most shameful result of that swelling bureaucracy, as the council increased numbers of central staff, was that at the same time it was hacking savagely at three particular areas of education: discretionary grants for those over 16 years old who complete their A-levels

[Mr. James Couchman]

and foundation courses at colleges of further education, travel expenses for the over-16s and the adult education service, much prized in Kent?

Mr. Dunn: My hon. Friend is right in his interpretation of those matters. Of course, there are other examples of waste, not least conferences, the Kent partnership programme, leaflets being issued, and attempts to force schools on local communities that do not want them. All hon. Members can find examples of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money being spent in Kent for quite the wrong purposes. It is the nature of the beast at county hall to want to cut high-profile services in the way that my hon. Friend mentioned.

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): The matter must be set against the background of half our secondary school pupils now in grant-maintained schools, for which Kent county council will have no budget at all, of no funding for further education, which is now the responsibility of the Further Education Funding Council, and of no careers service, and yet there is an increase in staff, and of the educational core staff in Maidstone. That is set against the background of a much declining role in education budgeting.

Mr. Dunn: My hon. Friend is right. I shall quote the comments of the leader of the Conservative group, Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, who, on 23 February 1995, said:

"The KCC has lost much of its responsibility and role; 50 per cent. of our secondary school children are in Grant Maintained schools out of KCC control; we have lost Further Education and now Careers and Police. Despite this loss KCC has not reduced its central administration accordingly".

It is Conservative Members' duty to make every school, every grant-maintained school, every grammar school, every high school and every city technology college aware of the hostility of the Lib-Lab pact on KCC. KCC is not serving the people; it is frightening the people.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Surely one of the most shocking figures concerns the pay rises that the administrative staff have been awarded. They have totalled 7.1 per cent. over the past two years, which is 1.5 per cent. more than the teachers are receiving. Were not our Conservative colleagues on the county council right to oppose that increase?

Mr. Dunn: The Conservative group on KCC put forward its own budget proposals, which could have funded the teachers' pay increase, restored the cuts that the Lib-Lab pact has made, and given Kent the familiar robust financial competence that had existed for more than 100 years. If it is a matter of the people or of Kent county council, it is our job, duty and pleasure to back the people every time.

1.41 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) on raising this important subject. I can do no better than deal with the ill-informed comments of the signatories to early-day motion 708, which was tabled last night by six hon. Members, none of whose constituency is within 100 miles of Kent. Indeed, most are in the north of England. I shall deal with their specific points.

First, the signatories claim that 1 per cent. had been provided by the Lib-Lab pact for the teachers' pay increase in Kent. What they fail to state is that, simultaneously in the education budget papers, the Lib-Lab pact cut 1 per cent. from schools' delegated budgets, thereby taking them back to zero—in other words, no increase. Only last week, the Lib-Lab pact took a leaf out of the Conservative budget proposals to fund a 1 per cent. increase by drawing down from the over-provided GM schools common formula provision.

Secondly, in my speech on 7 February, I thanked the Government for a 2 per cent. increase in Kent's external funding—that is, revenue support grant and the business rate allocation—from £754 million to £770 million for KCC and Kent police combined. The Lib-Lab pact has claimed a £5.5 million cut. It does that by bringing in other specific grants, and including one year's figures but not the next, to produce the cut that it wishes to allege. That is quite bogus.

One can do anything if one is prepared to massage figures. In fact, I could create a massive funding increase for Kent county council by adding in the windfall of £20 million that KCC has saved from lower interest rates and £10 million from land sales, £30 million of which, incidentally, it has already blown.

Thirdly, I refer to conferences. The early-day motion mentions the Great Danes conference at a four-star hotel, which cost £30,000. The signatories are very coy about the other KCC conferences, which cost the Kent council tax payer 10 times as much. The Great Danes conference was addressed by, among others, Roy Pryke, the most effective politician of the left-wing troika running Kent education, the others being the Lib-Lab co-chairs, who have been notably hiding behind Roy Pryke's skirts as the flak has rightly flown of late. Another speaker was Professor Ted Wragg, a consistent opponent of Government education policies. He has said:

"The free market plans in curriculum and testing will restore and extend the stigma of premature failure."

Professor Wragg has also said:

"As the league table philosophy begins to predominate the less able will increasingly be seen as cripples."

He further said:

"Statethink was unknown in this country until 1988. It will be the norm in future."

I cannot help but think that that party political stuff, if repeated at the conference, was no help at all. It was a Lib-Lab political fun day, but it wasted vast sums of council tax payers' money.

Fourthly, the signatories to the early-day motion speak of cuts in the county council administration due to the departure of further education colleges. How do they know? As we have heard, the Lib-Lab pact has mysteriously left staffing numbers out of the budget book for the first time ever in Kent. All that we have to go on are the gross staffing numbers of the central organisation, which have risen from 14,694, when the Lib-Labs came in, to 15,556 today, an increase of 862.

In fact, as has been mentioned, with the departure of further education colleges, 88 GM schools and the careers service and with contracting out, administration costs and staff numbers should have fallen sharply. In practice, they have not. The county auditor, Price Waterhouse, has reported that

"This will not be sustainable."

I contend that millions of pounds, which are tied up, could have gone to our school budgets.

Fifthly, the signatories to the early-day motion claim that there are £1.8 million savings in central management costs. I have looked at the details. The Lib-Lab pact claims that £600,000 will come from income generation proposals, but no details of that are revealed, and that a further £416,000 is saved from cutting contingency funding. In other words, £1 million of savings is bogus. I could even further reduce the original savings figure of £800,000.

So much for the early-day motion. My hon. Friends from Kent, in early-day motion 710, were right: the Lib-Lab Members' arguments are as remote to Kent as they are to their own constituencies.

Mr. David Shaw: On the point that there were no staffing numbers included in the budgets that were put before Kent county council, is my hon. Friend aware that the council's accounts since the Lib-Labs have taken over have not been signed off by the auditors and that a number of people have raised questions about those accounts? Is he further aware that the accounts contain no information about directors' remuneration or the chief executive's remuneration? We live in an age of openness, supposedly, and the Labour party is trying to encourage openness, but much information about the levels of staffing and bureaucracy in Kent is not available.

May I finally put to my hon. Friend the point that grant-maintained—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. That intervention was quite long enough.

Mr. Arnold: My hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) seems to make the point that the Lib-Lab pact councillors do not have a clue about how to run a vast organisation. We are talking about our children's education and an organisation that has a turnover of more than £1 billion a year.

The debate has the elements of a tragedy. The Lib-Lab pact has underfunded our schools, slashed adult education, and hit discretionary grants, school transport and the youth service. It is all so unnecessary. I cannot make up my mind whether it is due to the breathtaking incompetence of the Lib-Lab pact or political malice to incite ill-informed Government-bashing. It is probably both.

In a cavalier fashion, the Lib-Labs first tried to gag the Conservative KCC alternative budget, then they voted it down. That budget would have fully funded teachers' pay, protected the schools budget, and reversed cuts in adult education and the other services that I mentioned. Why can Conservatives on the county council do that? It is because they, the Conservative county councillors, have years of experience in managing that vast organisation. They have produced a realistic budget with the front line as the priority. It is a tragedy, because education in Kent has been making so much progress. In 88 schools, parents and governors have already opted to become grant-maintained, and I shall cite three rapid examples.

St. George's comprehensive school in my constituency has a chairman of governors, Joe King, who is a Labour party supporter. But in his enthusiasm for grant-maintained status, he said:

"GM schools are so much cleaner and tidier looking".

He has also said that extra money is available because schools do not have to support central services and can buy what they need, and that the culture is not dependency based, but results from the self-confidence that comes from recruiting a good team and enabling it to seek the best for the school in its central task of teaching and learning.

The Northfleet school for boys is in the strongest Labour ward in Kent, yet John Hassett, its headmaster, has said:

"The freedom from KCC petty interference, and its politicians in Maidstone, who have far less awareness of local needs and of our pupils, has allowed this school to set its own local strategy—we are now a real community school".

The results for that high school have improved so that 20 per cent., rather than the previous proportion of 10 per cent., achieve five grade Cs and above.

Lastly, in Southfields school, a high school with a difficult catchment area, the redeployment of resources has improved its performance so that, whereas before it became grant-maintained 1 per cent. of its pupils achieved five GCSEs and more, 8 per cent. achieved that goal last year, and the school expects the percentage to double this year.

Those educational advances are what the debate in Kent should be about. Either the Lib-Lab pact on Kent county council could not run a whelk stall or it is using the children of Kent as a party political battering ram. Which is it?

1.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Mr. Robin Squire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), who has done a service not only for his constituents but for everyone living in Kent, in drawing the attention of the House to the problems that he has identified within that county. He was eloquently backed by my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold), who rightly took the opportunity to demolish just about every word in early-day motion 708, and also by the presence of and the interventions by my hon. Friends the Members for Dover (Mr. Shaw), for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) and for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier). *[Interruption.]* And, of course, by the presence of several more of my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman).

I hope and trust that the wise words uttered by my hon. Friends will be widely read after the debate and will be digested by their constituents. Understandably, by taking a significant amount of time, my hon. Friends have left rather less time at my disposal, but I do not complain on that score because the quality of their contributions merited full and frank exposure.

I shall begin by commenting on the general issue uppermost in the minds of many parents and teachers—the education budget. The first aspect of education expenditure about which everyone in the House must be clear is that Kent county council, like every other local authority, is responsible for setting its own budget and for deciding its own priorities between and within services. It is the council that has the final say on how much is spent on education and how much on other services.

It has been alleged elsewhere that Kent has been forced to cut millions of pounds from its education budget for the forthcoming financial year. But there is no reason why

[Mr. Robin Squire]

that should happen. Kent's education standard spending assessment will increase, and under the capping rules it will be able to spend more in 1995-96 than it is spending in 1994-95. In total, Kent will be able to spend more than £955 million—nearly £1 billion—on all its services.

So where does the talk about cuts come from? The county council is not cutting what it is actually spending; it is drawing up a shopping list of additional spending, then cutting what it would ideally like to spend if it could buy all the items on the list.

I know that Kent schools, like schools in other areas, will be concerned about the teachers' pay award. The Government have accepted that award, subject to consultation, on the recommendation of the independent schoolteachers review body. The review body acknowledges the fact that financial provision has been set on the basis that pay increases should be offset or more than offset by efficiency gains and increased productivity.

Of course I acknowledge that the award will place local authority budgets under pressure. Ministers have made that clear in recent weeks, and I reiterate it from the Dispatch Box today. But local authorities are large, financially complex organisations, and they have a variety of means at their disposal to realise the efficiency gains needed.

To draw a fairly obvious parallel, the Government expect the Further Education Funding Council to make efficiency gains of 5 per cent. over the coming year. That will be tough but we are confident that the council will make it, and we are entitled to look to local authorities to examine their budgets in a similar way and to learn to live within them, prioritising appropriately.

Schools and parents will want to ask the county council other important questions. How much of its total budget does the county intend to spend on education? What proportion of its schools budget will it delegate to schools? I shall not bandy comparative figures about, because that would be tantamount to telling the council exactly what it should do. But I can say that it has some way to go to catch up with what many local education authorities are already doing on both those fronts. Governors are entitled to look to local authorities to give priority to front-line services such as schools, and I hope and trust that Kent county council will do that.

My hon. Friends, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham, moved on to the general question of grant-maintained schools. As he is well aware, devolving power to institutions is one of the central themes of our education reforms. Our commitment to devolution is not the product of ideology or of some esoteric theory but is based on the commonsense principle that giving more power to managers who are closer to the customers is likely to produce a better service.

Mr. David Shaw: While he is talking about the devolution of power, and the way that that can happen with grant-maintained schools, will my hon. Friend congratulate St. Edmund's school in Dover, which opted out of Kent county council control, became grant-maintained and has now increased the number of its teaching assistant staff by six to provide more teachers in the classroom? It needed no additional resources to do that.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend has graphically, in one sentence, explained precisely the sort of reason why grant-maintained schools are so popular. Of course I join him in congratulating that school and many other grant-maintained schools, especially in Kent, where the concept of self-government has taken off so strongly. As has already been said, half the secondary schools in Kent are now self-governing.

The aims of our policy on grant-maintained schools are clear. They are to raise education standards in GM schools—

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): What about all the rest?

Mr. Squire: I hear what the Opposition education spokesman, who has just joined us, says—but another of our aims is to encourage LEAs to be more responsive to the needs of the schools that they continue to control. For both those aims, the signs are promising.

It is clear that the grant-maintained option, combined with local management, has prompted LEAs to switch from a control to a support mode. There is also clear evidence that GM schools are achieving better results than their LEA counterparts and, not surprisingly, that they are popular with parents.

Sadly, ever since the change of control in Kent county council, the LEA has made it clear that it does not support the policy of encouraging grant-maintained schools, selective schools or city technology colleges. I understand that Kent has decided to freeze building maintenance, other than essential health and safety work, for schools that are balloting parents on GM status. If that is so, it is unjust. GM status is aimed at extending choice for parents and allowing them to decide on the way in which their schools should be managed. It is morally wrong that when they are offered that choice, their school is discriminated against, especially when it is the pupils who suffer.

Perhaps there is some confusion in the minds of the members of the Lib-Lab pact in Kent. Two weeks ago, the *Daily Express* reported that the leader of the Labour party was studying plans to allow all state schools to opt out of council control. I have news for the leader of the Labour party, which I am willing to give today, free of charge. That plan is unnecessary—the opportunity already exists. If the Labour party could, in the words of Lord Wilson, "take their tanks" off the lawns of schools up and down the country whose only crime is wanting to run themselves, there would be a large increase in the number of grant-maintained schools. That would be popular with parents and with teachers. It would also be popular with a growing number of Labour and Liberal Democrat activists, including Members of Parliament. My hon. Friend made a passing reference—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mine Workings (Northumberland)

2 pm

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I am grateful to have the opportunity to raise a problem that has existed for some time, but which is raising its head a little more. That problem is stythe coming from old mine workings in Northumberland. I might add that Northumberland is one of the oldest coalfields in Britain, and there are thousands of miles of underground roadways in Northumberland, and also in Durham, where mining has taken place.

Stythe is a common oxide which eats up the oxygen in air. It is not methane, which is a poisonous gas which kills quickly. When I worked in the mines, we called stythe blackdamp, and it is very dangerous. The problem occurs throughout Northumberland, not just in my constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) are in the Chamber, and I am sure that they have stories to tell as well.

The problem arose in a big way in 1985 due to the closure of the last remaining colliery on our side of Blyth, and began when the pumping of the water at the colliery stopped. All the people concerned with stythe in mines have buried their heads in the sand, and nobody has wanted to take the responsibility. My local council had to take British Coal to court to try to get it to do something about stythe. It did—as a matter of good will—but then said that it had no responsibility, because the areas concerned were not its responsibility.

Perhaps the Minister can answer this question. Who is responsible for the old mine workings? It seems that the pits below the old mine workings where some of us worked are now filling up with water for the first time in years, and that is pushing the stythe up into the workings near the surface. The enormous pressure of the water coming in slowly over a period is pushing up the stythe.

I received a letter this morning from Mr. R. Robertson, who was a ventilation engineer with the National Coal Board and with British Coal. He wrote to say that he had seen me on television making a statement, and that I was right. Mr. Robertson is now retired. He said that the situation will get worse due to the rising water coming into the workings where the pumps have been switched off. He was an engineer who began working on the problem in 1988. He mentioned the Pegswood site, where he was involved in an advisory capacity.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Is my hon. Friend aware that there is evidence that stythe is under some houses in Pegswood? The problem arises because of the good neighbourly attitude adopted by British Coal, and now by the Coal Authority. I have just spoken to Castle Morpeth council, and I was told that any costs incurred in surveying the problem in the borough will fall on the shoulders of the local authority. Would my hon. Friend like some funding to be made available to deal with the problem by carrying out research and by providing a monitoring system throughout the county?

Mr. Campbell: I could not agree more. Mr. Robertson's letter goes on to say that stythe is a serious matter, and it is getting more serious as time goes by. He has raised his concerns with me, and I am pleased to be able to put them to the Minister today.

As I have said, the rising water is pushing stythe up the old workings. Where the strata is loose, the stythe could find a path anywhere.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Gentleman will know of the tragic death only a few weeks ago of Donald Tollett, who was overcome by gas fumes at Widdrington station in my constituency. He had gone there with a young child to prepare feed for a horse. The gas escaped from mine workings through an old drift. The hon. Gentleman will know, as I do, that there are old drifts and drift entrances all over the county. Does he agree that they must be carefully monitored if we are not to have a repeat of that terrible and tragic incident?

Mr. Campbell: I knew about that tragic death, and it is a shame that a life had to be lost because somebody somewhere has not taken responsibility. That is my argument. Who is taking the responsibility? The Coal Authority has now said that the problem is not its responsibility, but it must be someone's responsibility.

We need a survey to be carried out, because the position is getting worse. Where pits have been closed and pumping has stopped, the water is rising underneath and is pushing the gas up. It could come through anywhere. We do not know where, as some of the old workings are 100 years old and are not on any charts or maps.

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): In my constituency we have 12 mines, and Seaham Harbour is a town founded on three mines with perhaps nine pit shafts. My village of Murton was founded upon Murton colliery, which has three large pit shafts, and that area is due to be reclaimed for a housing development. Does my hon. Friend have information that the Government now no longer agree with the "polluter must pay" principle? Does he think that mining communities which have suffered from dirt, filth and noise for 150 years must now stand the cost on their council tax to carry out surveys of what remains of redundant coal sites?

Mr. Campbell: That is the thrust of my argument. British Coal said before that it would do that as a matter of good will. It said that it would put a fan in where it was needed, and possibly do some grouting here and there. But it would not accept responsibility.

I want to refer to what happened in Cramlington at the same time as the man died in Widdrington in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. The incident was serious enough for the police, mines rescue and environmental health people to be called out. What appears to have happened—it has happened once before—is that the fan did not pull in the gas. There is another argument there, because we discovered following the incident that the fan there had been contracted out from one mining company to another mining company. We do not know who has got the contract. We know that British Coal has given the contract as a matter of good will, but it still will not accept responsibility.

Has the contract been maintained properly? There was a high level of gas in houses in the area on that day, as atmospheric pressure was light and allowed it to come out of the ground and into the houses. At the environmental health meeting, it was said to be a fairly serious gas leak.

[Mr. Campbell]

We have found out that the nearest seam was only 15 m below the surface where the houses were built. There is only 2 ft of clay, which is a good barrier to gas. Stythe will not get through clay, but below that is porous sandstone, which the gas will get through—as an ex-miner, I am well aware of that. We found that some of the sewerage and waste disposal pipes were dug into the sandstone and that there was a crevice under the pipe—a path along which the stythe could travel to the manhole cover, up the pipe and into the house.

People experienced great difficulties because they could not strike a match in the house or light the gas if the pilot light went out. They had no central heating. Hon. Members will understand the enormity of the problem. It has happened before, but it is happening more often because the water level is rising in the old mine workings, where we worked many years ago, and is pushing the gas up. As the workings are only 15 m below the houses, we can grasp the seriousness of the problem.

The more the pressure builds up in parts of Northumberland, the more the gas will leak and the more we will want an early warning system. I am not an engineer, only a politician, and I do not know what can be done. I initiated this debate because the problem needs to be aired. Too many people are burying their heads in the sand. There has already been one death and I am sure that the Minister will agree that we do not want any more.

If it is true that the problem is getting worse, the Minister has a responsibility to issue some sort of statement and to say whether the Government are trying to get some action or to have the areas of Northumberland where there are problems surveyed. I am afraid that it is our legacy. Unfortunately, Northumberland is one of the oldest coalfields in the country. The problem is there and it will not go away, so we need to tackle it. We need advice and we need mining engineers. I am sorry, but if it is going to cost money, the Coal Authority will have to take responsibility. Mine workings do not belong to anyone but that authority—I do not know about 100-year-old workings, but I think that the authority took over responsibility for old mine workings, so it is still up to the authority. That responsibility does not belong elsewhere.

Environmental health officers have told me that since 1987 we have had 29 gas warnings in Blyth Valley. I do not know about Castle Morpeth, Berwick or other areas. We have had 29 scares in our area and the number is increasing all the time. Usually, it happens in spring or autumn, when the atmosphere is light and allows the gas to come out of the ground. That is okay if it happens in the middle of a field, but unfortunately, if there are houses or an industrial site, the stythe can find its way in and obviously it can kill. The symptoms are easy to overlook. One feels fluey, tired and nauseous and wants to lie down and sleep. One lady did fall asleep on the couch. She was lucky to be awakened by one of her family. She was lying on a low couch and the stythe was well above the average and reached couch level. Perhaps she would not be here if she had not been woken. That just about sums up the seriousness of the problem and I hope that the Minister can come up with some answers.

2.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I thank the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) for setting out thoroughly the problems facing parts of Northumberland, which arise from stythe gas emissions predominantly from old coal mine workings. He has shown the particular concern that we all feel, not only for the plight of his constituents but for those in other areas who may be affected. We also heard a little about them.

I join the hon. Gentleman in offering my condolences to the family and friends of Mr. Donald Tollett whose death he mentioned. Unfortunately, he lost his life in February as a result of stythe gas emission.

Blackdamp, as stythe is also called, is a mixture of oxygen-deficient mine gas—predominantly carbon dioxide. As the hon. Gentleman explained, it is known as stythe in Northumberland. Blackdamp and firedamp, or methane, have long been a concern in coal mines. There have been a number of disasters in coalfields throughout Britain and elsewhere in the world as a result of those gases. Much effort has been spent by mine operators and the regulatory authorities to reduce the risk to miners, but that research effort has been focused primarily on improving the safety and efficiency of underground coal mining operations. More generally, much of the attention has been focused on methane, because it is explosive, rather than on carbon dioxide.

As the hon. Gentleman knows and has explained, carbon dioxide is an insidious source of danger. It is colourless and odourless, but is an asphyxiant and is toxic. Breathing becomes difficult in air containing 3 per cent. of carbon dioxide and slight headaches may be experienced. At 10 per cent. by volume, headache, palpitations and breathing difficulties occur and can lead to unconsciousness after about one minute of exposure. In addition, carbon dioxide has a greater density than air and, as he said, that means that it can accumulate readily in confined, poorly ventilated places, forming a layer at floor level into which the unwary may stray without warning. Since it is not generally obvious why the initial victim has become unconscious, rescuers are often put at risk, and it was fortunate that the recent event in Northumberland did not claim more than one life.

Problems of mine gas emissions are by no means restricted to Northumberland. Indeed, mine gas incidents have been recorded in all the major coalfield areas. Perhaps it would be helpful if I explained the Government's general approach to considering them.

A "Review of the significance of natural contamination to planning and development" was carried out for my Department by the British Geological Survey. One of a series of reports which are to be published shortly by the BGS is entitled "Natural methane, carbon dioxide and oil contamination: relevance to planning and development". It deals with the relevance of natural strata and mine gas emissions in the overall context of surface gaseous hazards and concludes that the most significant actual and potential occurrences of surface methane and carbon dioxide emissions from mines are in areas of shallow coal mining.

The report also concludes that the relatively small number of recorded mine gas emission incidents suggests that the hazard is relatively minor and of local significance compared, for example, with the extensive

problems associated with mining-related subsidence or the gas problems associated with landfill sites. Individual instances can cause severe and sometimes expensive or life-threatening problems, however. The report recommends further studies of the importance and surface impact of gas emissions from abandoned coal mines.

Further to the BGS recommendation, research is under way on "The planning response to methane and other gases from disused coal mines". That research is being undertaken for my Department by Wardell Armstrong and aims to establish the role of the planning system in reducing hazards due to gas emissions from disused coal mines and to prepare a detailed framework of advice for planners, developers, land and property owners, insurers and others. The research is due to be completed later this year.

The research by Wardell Armstrong has included a technical review of mine gas sources, migration pathways and emissions. A study of a specific area, involving the gathering of all available data relating to the occurrence of mine gases and the mining, geological, and hydrogeological setting, has been undertaken at Gateshead.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): If the survey to which the Minister referred shows that extraction devices should be fitted to some of the mine shafts currently in my constituency, for example, is he telling the House that his Department is prepared to put up the money to have those devices fitted?

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman must recognise that the cause of the problem must be found before we look to the source of the solution. It would be appropriate for us to wait for the results of the research, which are expected later this year.

Mr. Cummings: Will the Minister make it crystal clear whether the Government still subscribe to the policy that the polluter must pay, whether it be for surveys or the installation of fans or other associated equipment necessary to drain polluted areas of toxic gases?

Sir Paul Beresford: We have made it clear that the polluter must pay, but in this case we must also work out the cause. Part of the survey will give some indication of that.

Current research and guidance will be reviewed to assess its relevance to mine gas emissions and key legal and planning issues will be examined. The hon. Gentleman has jumped the gun. Although that research is not yet complete, much of the basic data have been gathered and are currently subject to analysis and reporting. Some interesting results are becoming evident.

There may be little problem if the gas stays within an abandoned mine unless people enter that mine. In some cases, however, factors cause the gas to migrate from one place to another. Thus every mine gas incident requires three basic ingredients: obviously, an accumulation of gas within the mine; a migration pathway to the surface; and a triggering event.

Mr. Jack Thompson: The Minister was present when I said earlier that monitoring equipment is being installed in the village of Pegswood in my constituency because of an incident in December 1993. That equipment was provided by the local authority with some help by the Coal Authority on a good neighbourly basis. Does he recognise that, while all those useful surveys and research are going on, we cannot stick pieces of paper on the ground to prevent the stythe from coming up? What we can do is monitor the problem and, if an alarm goes off because oxygen levels have fallen to below 80 per cent., we can at least warn people. We need help in monitoring now.

Sir Paul Beresford: The hon. Gentleman may agree that the problem is so widespread, even though it occurs in isolated areas, that we need to understand it and find out where it is likely to occur before we move in that direction. That is the most constructive thing that we can do.

First, it is worth pointing out that carbon dioxide occurs naturally in soil and rocks and is generated by the oxidation of coal. The formation of stythe in old mines is a relatively slow process, but the gas is likely to be present in any unventilated or abandoned mine workings. Secondly, the processes and physical factors that may influence gas migration are varied. Those may include displacement of gas as water levels rise due to seasonal rainfall variations or the cessation of mine de-watering. Conversely, de-watering of a mine may allow gas to accumulate. The density differs between mine gas mixtures and air influence movements, as do variations in barometric pressure. Thirdly, the extent to which the mine voids are sealed off from the surface, for instance where mine openings have been capped or plugged, or if fissures in the rock are beneath a cover of homogenous clay, has an important influence.

While any, or all, of these factors may be involved in a mine gas incident, a poorly ventilated space within which the gas may accumulate and which is entered by people is central to the existence of a hazard. However, it is by no means easy to define all the factors that lead to a mine gas incident because of the complexity of mined ground, which may contain numerous old workings at different levels. Some may have collapsed but others remain open. Mines may have broken through into neighbouring workings to aid ventilation or water control during working. Different levels are connected by numerous shafts and adits. Many old shallow workings and mine openings are unrecorded, as the statutory duty for mine owners to keep mine plans was not introduced until 1850 and the requirement to register abandonment plans was not introduced until 1872. For those reasons, it is also difficult to predict where mine gas incidents may occur, except in a general manner.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: I have listened carefully to the Minister, who has given details of the gases and so on. But he has not touched on the nub of the problem, which is the possible loss of life. I explained the dangerous position in Blyth Valley. We must try to eliminate that, but the Minister has not yet dealt with the matter. He must give assurances to my constituents and those of my hon. Friends that nobody else will die as a result of those gases and that someone will come to our constituencies and put the matter right.

Sir Paul Beresford: I am trying to explain the difficulties and why we need the research. I realise the urgency, which is demonstrated by the fact that, although the research is not yet complete, we are already working on the details that have come in. The full research is expected some time this year.

[Sir Paul Beresford]

The researchers, Wardell Armstrong, have collected details of mine gas incidents at 77 sites throughout the coalfield areas of Great Britain. About 25 of those related to carbon dioxide emissions, compared with about 72 per cent. which related to methane. As the effects of carbon dioxide emissions are less easily detected than those of methane, it is possible that more emissions occur than we recognise. Some 50 per cent. of the incidents were found to be linked, or probably linked, to emissions from abandoned mine entries. Another important means of passage of mine gas to the surface is through cracks in hard layers of bedrock.

Most mine gas incidents have been detected because of chance events. While there has been an increasing incidence of reports over the past decade, our preliminary analysis suggests that that may well be due to an increasing awareness of gas hazards and to monitoring of landfill gas, rather than a real increase in the occurrences of emissions from abandoned mines.

We must examine what may be done about hazards due to mine gas emissions. It is the responsibility of the developer to determine the suitability of land for a particular purpose. In particular, the responsibility and subsequent liability for safe development and secure occupancy rests with the developer and/or landowner. The local planning authority may treat the possibility of mine gas emissions as a material planning consideration and refer to that in development plans. In addition, the authority may wish to satisfy itself whether any land allocated for specific purposes in such a plan may be subject to mine gas problems. However, it remains for the developer to make adequate investigations including, for example, monitoring gas levels in boreholes or mine voids that may exist beneath a development site.

The building regulations require precautions to be taken to avoid danger to health and safety caused by substances found within the ground to be covered by a building. While those mechanisms control new development and changes to the use of land, there is also the issue of existing development, which may be subject to problems.

The Occupiers' Liability Acts place responsibilities on the occupier of land for the safety of employees, legitimate visitors and trespassers on their land or premises. In addition, health and safety at work legislation places responsibilities on employers for the safety of their employees. The same legislation also places on employers a responsibility for maintaining a safe place of work at working mines, including the protection of the public.

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 gives local authorities the means to abate a statutory nuisance and to recover the costs from the landowner. This could include escapes of gas which may affect surface properties. A major constraint on early action is, however, the limited extent to which it is possible to predict where and when the gas may escape.

Since the Coal Authority came into being, a single reporting procedure has been implemented irrespective of—*[Interruption.]* I am trying to answer the hon. Gentleman. Since the Coal Authority came into being, a single reporting procedure has been implemented irrespective of where the responsibility ultimately lies. International Mining Consultants Ltd. has been appointed by the Coal Authority to deal with reported surface hazards. IMCL will investigate reported incidents thoroughly and will liaise with local authorities and emergency services as necessary.

Where the possibility of a problem is recognised, it is possible to take action in several ways. Mine openings may be treated so that gas is vented away from any existing or proposed structure. Precautions can be taken to prevent the ingress of gas into buildings by ensuring that confined spaces are ventilated adequately.

Caution needs to be exercised when carrying out new activities that may provide routes for gas to the surface, such as the drilling of boreholes. The Health and Safety Commission recently issued a consultative document in respect of minimum requirements for the health and safety of drilling operatives in the mineral extractive industries.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: I ask the Minister again, who initially has responsibility for the old mine workings? Whose responsibility is it—the local authority, the Minister, or the Coal Authority?

Sir Paul Beresford: As I am trying to say, it is a mixture. I shall write to explain to the hon. Gentleman, if he has not picked it up. The hon. Gentleman must recognise that many of the sources of the gas date from the middle of last century, and there is the additional difficulty of predictability.

The Health and Safety Commission recently issued a consultative document in respect of minimum requirements for health and safety of drilling operatives. Account needs to be taken, where appropriate, of mine gas emissions in proposals for new development and changes of use.

Many of the general issues of which I have spoken apply to Northumberland. It would not be proper to comment on the sad event at Widdrington station, as the circumstances are still—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, pursuant to Order [19 December].

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

South Africa

1. **Mr. Nigel Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with South Africa.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): Our links with South Africa are strengthening rapidly through trade, aid, sport, science, culture, military help and parliamentary contacts. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister paid a successful visit to South Africa in September. Her Majesty the Queen's state visit this month will be a strong symbol of the warmth of our friendship.

Mr. Evans: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is a tremendous amount of good will in South Africa towards this country, as was demonstrated by the visit of our right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the President of the Board of Trade to South Africa? Does he agree that the Government and British companies will have to work hard to ensure that they build on the good will which already exists in South Africa?

Mr. Hurd: I entirely agree. Our exports had increased by 15 per cent. in the first 11 months of last year. They are more than £1 billion now, invisibles are a further £1 billion approximately and we are the biggest overseas investor in South Africa, so those links are strong and becoming stronger all the time.

Intergovernmental Conference

2. **Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress he has made on drawing up proposals for the 1996 intergovernmental conference.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. David Davis): We are developing our approach to next year's intergovernmental conference, based on the principles outlined by the Prime Minister. We are determined to play a positive and constructive role in it, and to ensure a successful outcome which promotes British interests.

Mr. Whittingdale: Is it not increasingly obvious that the convergence criteria set down in the Maastricht treaty and the timetable for achieving them are now utterly discredited? Does my hon. Friend agree that although the convergence criteria in themselves are sensible objectives of economic policy the timetable is a political tool and should be taken out of the treaty altogether?

Mr. Davis: I have some sympathy with what my hon. Friend says about the timetable, and that is reflected to some extent in the Government's stance on the 1996-97 aspect of that timetable. We emphasise the criteria as being more important than the timetable itself, and we are not alone in that. That attitude is also taken, for example, by the head of the Bundesbank, Mr. Tietmeyer, who has made it very clear that the criteria are the key issue and that we have to hit those before any further progress is made.

Mr. Worthington: I have noted with interest what the Foreign Secretary and the Defence Secretary have said recently about co-operation between Britain and France on defence measures. Following the withdrawal, in effect, of the United States from United Nations peacekeeping operations and the lack of logistical support, do the Government regard the intergovernmental conference as a suitable framework in which there might be more European co-operation to give logistical support to peacekeeping operations in Africa?

Mr. Davis: That sort of thing is happening anyway, but the hon. Gentleman is right inasmuch as the sort of things being countenanced as the defence component of the IGC are what are called Petersburg-type actions, which involve peacekeeping and other similar measures, not as a replacement or in any way a supplanting or weakening of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Mr. Colvin: I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that it is important that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary should go to the IGC with the whole-hearted support of the House and the people we represent. Does he agree, however, that if there were a referendum on any subject before the IGC, he would go to the conference not with our support but in a straitjacket and that any referendum—if there is to be one—should therefore be after the IGC and not before?

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend has a good point. Any referendum would have importance only in the event of a change that is of constitutional significance. To hold a referendum in advance would imply that we intended to negotiate such a change. That is not what we have in mind.

China

3. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently made to the Chinese Government regarding their human rights record.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Alastair Goodlad): We frequently raise human rights issues with the Chinese authorities, both bilaterally and with our European partners. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did so during his meeting with the Chinese Foreign Minister last September and I shall be doing so later this afternoon with the Chinese ambassador. At the UN Commission on Human Rights this year, the European Union is co-sponsoring a draft resolution on China.

Mr. Sutcliffe: Although I welcome that answer, I hope that we shall keep up the pressure. As the United Kingdom is the largest European investor in China and trade is increasing in both directions, will the Minister ensure that human rights are kept high on the agenda? I think in particular of the plight of the Tibetan people, the fact that 55 offences carry the death penalty, and the increasing number of attacks on anyone who argues with the Chinese Government. Will the Minister ensure that the right balance is struck and that our vigilance is kept up?

Mr. Goodlad: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. We of course share his deep concern about abuses of human rights in China, including imprisonment for religious and political beliefs and the repression in Tibet. We regularly raise those matters with the Chinese

authorities; but we think it in the interests of the Chinese people as well as everyone else that the healthy trade to which the hon. Gentleman refers should continue.

Lady Olga Maitland: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that this Government have done more than any other in the world to promote human rights and good government?

Mr. Goodlad: Yes.

Western Sahara

4. **Mr. Mudie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the latest situation in Western Sahara.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): The United Nations Secretary-General stated in his report to the Security Council in December that, subject to further satisfactory progress, he hoped to be able to recommend in March that the referendum on Western Sahara be held in October this year. Security Council resolution 973, adopted in January, provided for the reinforcement of the UN's identification commission, which should enable the compilation of the voter list to be speeded up.

Mr. Mudie: The House will be delighted with that reply. I should be grateful if the Minister would assure the House that he will instruct our representatives at the United Nations to take any necessary initiative if there seems any likelihood that the date will not be adhered to.

Mr. Hogg: I am pleased to be able to give the hon. Gentleman pleasure. There is, however, a problem with the speed at which voter identification is taking place. The commission is processing voters at a rate of about 2,000 a week, so it might be difficult to make the October date, but we would most certainly like the referendum to take place at the latter end of this year.

Sir David Steel: Is the Minister aware that since the United Nations peacekeeping effort in Western Sahara began about three and a half years ago, £87 million has been spent on the operation and there has been a great deal of foot-dragging? Will he note the evidence given by Ambassador Ruddy to the United States congressional committee in respect of this foot-dragging; and will he do his level best to ensure that the date does not slip?

Mr. Hogg: I very much hope that the date will not slip. The Ruddy allegations are serious and the United Nations has sent a team to investigate whether they have substance.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Apart from the problem of registration of voters, has the Foreign Office detected any other problems which may impede the referendum? There has been quite a lot of opposition hitherto.

Mr. Hogg: The identification of voters is a substantial obstacle to holding the referendum in October, although I hope that it will be possible to hold it then. I do not immediately call to mind any other problems, but knowing the nature of the business I suspect that there are some. However, the identification of voters is certainly the principal difficulty.

Chechnya

5. **Mr. Eric Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Russian Government concerning events in Chechnya.

Mr. Hurd: We have told the Russian Government that we want to see early progress towards a political resolution of the conflict in Chechnya and full access for humanitarian relief. In Russia as a whole our main concerns are continued press freedom, continued economic reform and adherence to the electoral timetable.

I raised those matters with the Russian Foreign Minister in Stockholm on 14 February and we shall take the opportunity of the visit of the Russian Prime Minister, Mr. Chernomyrdin, who arrives today, to reinforce that message.

Mr. Clarke: Will the Foreign Secretary assure the House that he will do everything in his power to form an Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe mission to Chechnya? If he agrees with me and others, can he say whether any efforts have been made to press the Russians to form such a mission?

Mr. Hurd: Two days ago in Vienna I saw Ambassador Gyarmati, who led the OSCE mission into Chechnya a few weeks ago. A second mission is there now under Swiss leadership. They are seeking to press for observance of human rights, with all that that means, and access for humanitarian relief. That the Russians allowed the OSCE mission into the area is one of the few good signs to come out of Chechnya in recent weeks.

Sir Peter Emery: In any negotiations with the Russians, will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind that a successful conclusion on Chechnya and the points that he raised initially in answering the question have considerable effects on other members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and are therefore of great importance for the rest of the world as well as for relations between ourselves and Russia?

Mr. Hurd: I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend. The first to have suffered are, of course, the Chechnyans themselves, but the anxiety which has spread from that tragedy into all the countries of the former Soviet Union, and the controversy in Moscow itself, puts a cloud—a passing cloud, I hope—over the prospects for reform.

Mr. Corbyn: When the Foreign Secretary meets the Russian Prime Minister, will he tell him that millions of people around the world found the behaviour of the Russian army troops and the bombing in Chechnya abominable and the destruction of civilian life disgusting? Will the Foreign Secretary ask the Russian Prime Minister whether his Government are prepared to meet representatives of the Chechnyan people who are now expressing a view that there can be no peace while there is no independence in that part of the world? What is the British Government's attitude towards that?

Mr. Hurd: I have certainly made it clear in private and in public to the Russians that the House and the British people have been appalled and depressed by the brutality of Russian action in Chechnya. With regard to the hon. Gentleman's second point, one of the difficulties is to know who are valid representatives of the Chechnyans.

We do not think that Mr. Dudaev and his regime are, but one of the difficulties is precisely to identify who could speak representatively for the Chechnyans.

Middle East

6. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the middle east peace process.

Mr. Hurd: We are concerned by the slow progress, in particular on the Palestinian track. During his forthcoming visit, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will urge all the parties to carry out what has been agreed and to renew their efforts to reach a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement.

Mr. Field: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Syrians providing a safe haven for the Damascus Ten terrorist group is completely at variance with their stated commitment to reaching a peaceful solution and accommodation with Israel? Will he tell the House and the Israeli Government what we are doing to put pressure on the Syrian Government?

Mr. Hurd: We are making two things clear to the Syrians, and to all concerned, in that respect. The first is the one to which my hon. Friend refers. The Palestinian part of the peace process cannot succeed if Hamas and those who encourage Hamas manage to disrupt it by violence. Secondly, on the Syrian track itself—the discussions between Syria and Israel—progress at the moment is invisible.

Mr. Gerrard: Will the Foreign Secretary ask the Prime Minister to raise with the Israeli Government the continued harassment of Lebanese fishermen off Tyre and Sidon by Israeli gunboats, which is preventing them from earning any sort of living? That appears to be a response to the Lebanese army increasing security on the borders between the UN security zone and Lebanese-controlled territory. Such action is likely to do considerable harm to the peace process.

Mr. Hurd: The House will understand the concerns of Israel about its security and the threats to its security from southern Lebanon. We have already urged the Israeli Government to cease their blockade of the Lebanese fishing ports.

Denmark

7. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited Denmark to discuss bilateral relations.

Mr. Hurd: I visited Denmark on 7 and 8 February. I met the Danish Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister of the Faroe Islands.

Mr. Knapman: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is there any common ground between our two countries on cohesion funding, budgetary discipline and fraud within the common agricultural policy? If so, will that help us to win the arguments in the approach to the intergovernmental conference?

Mr. Hurd: Yes. I found in both Denmark and Sweden—and, indeed, in Austria the day before yesterday—quite a wide welcome for some of our ideas about the future course of Europe. The Danes and the Swedes have no intention of agreeing to centralising moves based on the assumption that the nation states will wither away. They are also very strong against fraud, for the same reasons that we are, and on budgetary discipline.

Mrs. Clwyd: Did the Secretary of State raise with the Danes and others our concerns about reports that the French Government are encouraging non-humanitarian commercial links with the cruel regime in Iraq? Given that Saddam Hussein continues to execute, torture and mutilate his own people, as confirmed by the United Nations rapporteur on human rights—

Madam Speaker: Order. The question refers to Denmark. Is the hon. Lady coming back to the subject of our bilateral relations with Denmark?

Mrs. Clwyd: Yes, Madam Speaker. I am anxious to know whether the Secretary of State raised our concerns with Denmark and the other partners in the European Union, which he mentioned, about the business links that many countries are trying to establish once again with Iraq, in the light of the fact that at Geneva the Danes and other countries were very concerned about the UN rapporteur's report that Saddam Hussein continues to execute, torture and mutilate his own people. Will the Secretary of State unreservedly dissociate himself from those groups—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. That is a total abuse. It does not relate at all to the question on the Order Paper. I have already cautioned the hon. Lady. The question must be more related to discussions and relations with Denmark. I am afraid that the hon. Lady is all over the world other than in Denmark. I really cannot allow that question to continue and I am sure that the Foreign Secretary would find it impossible to give an answer to such a roundabout question.

I call Mr. George Foulkes to ask Question 8.

UN Fiftieth Anniversary

8. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit the United Nations in New York to discuss plans to celebrate the 50th anniversary.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no plans to visit the United Nations to discuss plans to celebrate the 50th anniversary.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Minister as fed up as I am at right wingers such as Rosemary Righter of *The Times* using the 50th anniversary to rubbish the United Nations? Will the Government support the idea of a United Nations parliamentary assembly to bring some democratic accountability and scrutiny unto the United Nations system so that the agencies and the UN can be looked at by parliamentary representatives?

Mr. Hogg: I certainly deprecate efforts to rubbish the United Nations, although I am bound to say that I am not particularly troubled by the writings of the journalist to

whom the hon. Gentleman referred. I did not find the hon. Gentleman's particular suggestion very constructive and I would not support it.

Mr. Jopling: When my right hon. and learned Friend next meets the United States ambassador to the United Nations, will he make clear the House's concern about proposals in the US Congress to reduce contributions to the United Nations, which would have a disastrous effect on peacekeeping around the world?

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend is entirely right. The fact that the United States Congress proposes to put a cap on the peacekeeping contributions by the United States of 25 per cent. is unwelcome and I would hope that it might be possible to persuade Congress to take a different view.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: As the Minister knows, the cap to which he has referred takes effect on 1 October and is now part of the domestic legislation of the United States. Clearly much work must be done to persuade the members of the more Republican-dominated Congress that any further reduction would be substantially against the best interests of the United Nations and, indeed, those of the United States. May we assume that the Foreign Secretary will take the earliest opportunity to make those points—not to the American ambassador here in London, but to people on Capitol hill?

Mr. Hogg: I share the hon. and learned Gentleman's concern. The attitude of Congress towards peacekeeping is a matter of considerable anxiety to us all. Naturally, our ability to persuade the members of another legislature to change their minds is limited, but we shall try to find ways of expressing our anxiety about the approach to which the hon. and learned Gentleman refers.

Mr. Lester: The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs conducted a serious study of the future of the United Nations, and as we travel around the world we find that the Canadians, Americans and Australians—and other countries and their Parliaments—have done the same. Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider setting up a conference—something short of a parliamentary assembly—enabling parliamentarians who produce serious reports about the future of the United Nations to meet and discover what common ground can be used to ensure the survival and better use of the United Nations in the next 50 years?

Mr. Hogg: I am not sure that I want to promote a large number of additional conferences, but my hon. Friend—and the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes)—made an important point in stressing the need to reinforce the basic propositions that the United Nations contributes to peace and stability in the world, that it will do so increasingly, and that the Security Council is working constructively and as it was intended to do for the first time since its foundation.

Mr. Cousins: I am sure that the whole House is thinking today of the Pakistani troops being withdrawn from Somalia. I echo what the Minister has said about peacekeeping, but will he acknowledge that there is now a real crisis in UN peacekeeping in Somalia, Angola, Burundi and Yugoslavia, with costs and material requirements rising five and sevenfold?

Will the Minister assure us that—Prime Minister to President—the House's view will be made clear that the dangerous right-wing UNO-sceptics in the American Congress who are imposing this limit on peacekeeping provision must not be allowed to prevail?

Mr. Hogg: As I have said, I consider the cap to be extremely unwelcome. I also believe that the United Nations has a major contribution to make to world peace and tranquility through peacekeeping, among other policy measures.

I do not believe that there is a crisis in peacekeeping of the kind that the hon. Gentleman has suggested. I see a fundamental difficulty, however, which I think will remain a difficulty for as far ahead as we can see. I refer to the unwillingness of member states—with which I have some sympathy—to put national troops into the front line when the nation in question has no direct interest in what is going on in the country experiencing civil strife. That is an inevitable fact of life of which account must be taken.

Mr. Fabricant: May I suggest that, instead of travelling 5,000 miles to New York to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, my right hon. and learned Friend should travel just 400 yards? Is he aware that the UN's first meeting was held in the Methodist central hall right here in London?

Mr. Hogg: Indeed I am, and perhaps I may take this opportunity to remind you, Madam Speaker, of the invitation for 26 June, which I know that you will accept.

Social Development Summit

9. **Ms Church:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department is making in preparation for the world summit on social development in Copenhagen in March; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tony Baldry): With colleagues from other Departments, we have attended the four preparatory meetings held in New York over the past year.

The Government are committed to achieving a successful summit. Our principal priority is to improve the focus of the international debate about the issues of development.

Ms Church: I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he accept, however, that a number of charities—including Oxfam—believe that the Government are not taking the summit seriously enough? In view of the Rowntree report on the growing inequality in Britain, should the Government not use the summit to address the inequalities in this country as well as others?

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Lady has made two bad points. First, in answer to her point about Oxfam, we have a substantial aid budget—some £2.2 billion—which we put to very good use throughout the world. Poverty is also a bad point for the hon. Lady to raise as average incomes in the United Kingdom have risen by more than a third since we came to office. Average incomes are up for all family types. The less well-off have enjoyed a rise in the

possession of consumer durables, and vulnerable groups have been much better protected. The hon. Lady will have to find much better points.

Mr. John Marshall: When my hon. Friend goes to the summit, will he remind it that the road to hell is paved with good intentions, that minimum wage legislation destroys jobs and that youth unemployment in this country is much lower than in Spain, which has a minimum wage?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend makes extremely good points. There has been much misinformation about the nature of the summit and some mischief making in seeking to confuse its purposes with those of the EU social chapter. They have nothing whatever to do with each other. The summit is about improving development throughout the world.

Mr. Robin Cook: Is the Minister aware that the social summit will be attended by the Heads of Government of all the G7 countries except America, which is sending its Vice-President, and by the Heads of Government from all of Europe from Poland to Portugal except Greece, which is sending three Cabinet Ministers? Why are the British Government not sending the Prime Minister or even one Cabinet Minister? Does that not demonstrate the utter indifference of the Conservative party to fighting poverty at home or abroad?

Mr. Baldry: We shall be sending my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker of Wallasey, who stands equal to anyone in the world with her knowledge of social development and overseas aid issues.

European Union

10. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the French Foreign Minister to discuss the future of the European Union.

11. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet his French counterpart to discuss matters on the EU presidency agenda.

Mr. Hurd: I meet my French colleague regularly at the Foreign Affairs Council.

Mr. Dunnachie: Will the Foreign Secretary state whether the Government's policy is to veto proposals which would significantly change the British Commonwealth's relationship with the European Union? Is it their policy to veto proposals which would make any change in that relationship?

Mr. Hurd: I think that on the whole British Commonwealth countries have benefited from the links between this country and the rest of Europe. If the hon. Gentleman has specific points in mind, no doubt he will let me know.

Mr. Dykes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there would be much value in getting national Parliaments and the European Parliament working together, a subject about which I believe that the French presidency is enthusiastic? Will he raise that subject at forthcoming meetings if there is time?

Mr. Hurd: We must try to make some progress on this. The difficulty is that it is not for Governments to decide. It is essentially for national Parliaments to decide how and whether they wish to come together to ensure that they play a democratic part together in monitoring what happens in Europe. The House has no difficulty in chivvying and making life difficult for Ministers when it feels the urge. I think that it is generally felt that national Parliaments as a whole should exert a greater influence over what goes on.

Mr. Gapes: Will the Foreign Secretary impress on the French Government his strong commitment, unlike some of his colleagues, to continuing integration in Europe? Will he emphasise that this country will soon have a change of Government which will mean that integration will continue at a faster pace?

Mr. Hurd: I do not know—and I do not think that the hon. Gentleman knows—what is meant by "continuing integration". We believe, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will shortly expound authoritatively, in a Europe of nations working more effectively together than they have ever done in history. I doubt whether we shall get similar light from the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Elletson: Has my right hon. Friend had a chance to discuss with the French Foreign Minister the French Government's decision to expel five American citizens from France on the ground that they were spying for the Central Intelligence Agency? What lessons does that teach us about the prospects for a common European security policy?

Mr. Hurd: No. I think I had better keep my nose out of that matter. I do not think that it has any implications for our work together on foreign policy.

Mr. Robin Cook: While the Foreign Secretary was considering the future of the European Union, did he have time to see the appeal from the hon. Member for Reigate (Sir G. Gardiner) to the Whipless Conservatives, urging them to acknowledge the gains they have made on Government policy towards the European Union and to rejoin the fold? In order that those rebels and the whole House may be clear what policy gains they have achieved from the Government, could the right hon. Gentleman tell us what he thinks they are?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman is almost as bad as his hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), who collapsed so singularly when she asked a question earlier in our proceedings. The exchanges between my hon. Friends are fascinating, but not matters that I would dream of discussing with the French Foreign Minister.

Mr. Cash: Does my right hon. Friend accept that with the first round of the French presidential elections coming up on 23 April, there is a great deal to be said for our Government having a clear and decisive policy on the single currency, so that when the French realise that the British are not going to accept a single currency, the French electorate, as compared with the French elite, can

respond accordingly? We would then have a real opportunity to renegotiate that hopeless failure, the Maastricht treaty.

Mr. Hurd: I know that my hon. Friend has close contacts with some aspects of French political life, but his comments are astray. I had a fascinating conversation with Mr. Pasqua this morning and he confirmed that he does not think that European issues will be dominant in the French presidential election.

Israel

12. **Mrs. Jane Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British-Israeli relations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Our relations with Israel are excellent.

Mrs. Kennedy: Does the Minister agree that British-Israeli relations, good though they are, will be improved on every occasion that the British Government can do something concrete to assist the peace process? As I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would agree about that, will he give urgent and sympathetic consideration to the request from the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan for a 50 per cent. reduction in its debts to the United Kingdom?

Mr. Hogg: On the question of our bilateral relations, upon which the hon. Lady concentrated, when Prime Minister Rabin met my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last year, he commented that Anglo-Israeli relations had never been better. As to the question of making concrete contributions, we have made many such, for example, we are spending around £75 million over three years in support of the peace process and Palestinians.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: When the British Prime Minister goes to Israel, will he take the opportunity to build on those cordial relations with that country and totally condemn the 10 per cent. increase in settlements on the west bank and close to Jerusalem, which endanger the peace process and which give great support to Hamas and all it is trying to do to undermine Chairman Arafat and the peace process?

Mr. Hogg: As we have often made plain to the Israeli Government, we regard the settlement policy as an obstacle to peace and we would like to see it stopped.

Intergovernmental Conference

13. **Mr. Charles Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards a post-legislative referendum on the outcome of the next intergovernmental conference; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: We do not exclude the use of referendums for decisions of major constitutional significance, but we do not expect the outcome of next year's intergovernmental conference to involve such decisions.

Mr. Kennedy: That is very interesting. Can the Minister clarify that a little more, because the Prime Minister was somewhat more explicit in his famous Frost interview at the beginning of the year, when he said quite clearly that if issues of constitutional import arose, he would not hesitate to use the British veto? Is that the Government's position in the run-up to the IGC? If so, why are so many people in the Tory party suggesting, not least via the airwaves today, that we will have a referendum?

Mr. Davis: The Prime Minister put exactly the position of the British Government. The hon. Gentleman has it right.

Sir Terence Higgins: The question referred to a post-legislative referendum; does my hon. Friend know what that is? In any case, is not it just as bad as a pre-legislative one?

Mr. Davis: A post-legislative referendum would be called only in the event of major constitutional change. My right hon. Friend has made it clear that such an occurrence would not arise after the IGC.

Ms Quin: Did the Minister agree with the Prime Minister when he said that he was not in favour of a referendum in a parliamentary democracy and did not propose to put one before the people; or did he agree with the same Prime Minister when he said that, if the circumstances were appropriate, he would hold a referendum? With which of the Prime Minister's two opposing views does the Minister agree?

Hon. Members: Just say yes.

Mr. Davis: The hon. Lady makes a semantic point. It is extraordinary because, last Friday, during the debate on a referendum, she said that she thought the opt-outs were foolish. One of the options open to the Government arises solely because of those opt-outs, so she cannot give anyone lessons in semantics.

British Council

14. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the work of the British Council.

Mr. Baldry: The British Council, with its worldwide presence and high reputation, has greatly enhanced our international standing and influence; done much to promote the worldwide acceptance abroad of British standards, services and goods in culture, education and science; helped to promote sustainable development in poor countries; worked with much success to improve the spread and standard of English taught overseas; and added greatly to the perception of Britain as a vibrant, cultured, innovative and liberal society.

Mr. Fishburn: Is not one of the great assets that we have as a country the English language, and is not the British Council to be congratulated on the way in which it teaches it around the world efficiently and, more to the point, profitably?

Mr. Baldry: Yes. The achievements of the British Council in this regard were best summed up in a recent leader in *The Times*, which stated:

"The British Council can claim . . . to be probably the most effective pump-priming cultural organisation in the world . . . it has both boosted the demand for English language teaching and satisfied it. That industry is now worth some £500 million a year to Britain".

In fact, the British Council has 75 teaching centres in 39 countries and teaches 100,000 students a year at no cost to the taxpayer. That is a very significant achievement.

Mr. Janner: Sharing as I do the Minister's view, will he tell the House what he is proposing to do to enable the British Council to continue its work and improve its functions because the council is very worried that the Government will cut its money further and prevent it from doing the job that the Minister praises?

Mr. Baldry: The council has no basis for such a belief. Funding to the British Council has risen by about 30 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79. In addition to the substantial increase in Government funding to the British Council, I am glad to say that the council is no longer dependent only on the grant in aid, which now amounts to just half its income. The British Council is much to be congratulated on the increased range of its activities which serve our national interests without additional cost to the taxpayer. I am thinking of things such as English language teaching, the organisation of examinations and the management of aid projects and scholarship schemes. The British Council is an excellent example to many other bodies in the United Kingdom of what can be achieved in this regard.

Pakistan

15. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on British relations with Pakistan.

Mr. Baldry: We have good relations with Pakistan. We look forward to deepening and extending our political, commercial and cultural contacts.

Mr. Couchman: Will my hon. Friend impress on the high commissioner for Pakistan when next they meet, the grave concern felt by hon. Members of all parties at the persecution of Christians in Pakistan? Will he tell the high commissioner that to contemplate putting to death a child on a trumped-up charge of blasphemy is the sign of an uncivilised country? Finally, will he contrast the treatment of Christians in Pakistan with the treatment in this country of Christians from Pakistan such as the Rt. Rev. Michael Nazir-Ali, who was recently welcomed to north Kent as our diocesan bishop of Rochester?

Mr. Baldry: The whole House shares my hon. Friend's concerns and will have welcomed the judgment by the High Court of Pakistan which overturned the verdict to which he referred. We have regularly urged the Government of Pakistan to protect minorities against discrimination and intimidation. The rights of minorities are legally protected under Pakistan's constitution but there is real concern about the significant increases in sectarian violence and extremism in the past year, not only against non-Muslims, such as Christian groups, but between different Islamic sects, as we have witnessed recently. These are matters of concern that we continue to raise, although it is fair to observe that the Prime Minister of Pakistan has publicly reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to improve the situation.

Mr. Watson: When the Minister next meets the high commissioner in Pakistan, will he raise the question of Kashmir, not only the part occupied by India, Jammu Kashmir, but Azad Kashmir? Will he remind the high commissioner of the various United Nations resolutions, which call for a referendum to allow the people of Kashmir to have a say in their future? Will he insist that that referendum includes a third option for an independent Kashmir?

Mr. Baldry: Our position on Kashmir is well known and well established. We believe that the best way forward in Kashmir should involve simultaneous progress on discussions between India and Pakistan, as provided for under the Simla agreement of 1972. There must be improvement in human rights in Kashmir, a genuine political process and a clear cessation of external support for violence in Kashmir.

Mr. Waller: While stressing the need to stand up against the persecution of minorities in Pakistan, will my hon. Friend emphasise his support for the stance of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in resisting those among the Islamic extreme minorities, who have persecuted Christians very much in contrast with the essential message of Islam, which is perhaps more conciliatory in reality towards other religions than any other faith?

Mr. Baldry: It is right to remind ourselves that any persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan is the work of individuals; it is not the work of the Government. We continue to provide a substantial aid programme in support of Pakistan because poverty is a contributory factor in the rise of sectarianism and religious extremism. We believe that if we can help Pakistan continue to promote literacy and its economy, those factors will help combat the problems of sectarianism and intolerance in the longer term. Certainly this is not the time to turn our backs on Pakistan.

Council of Europe

16. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will next meet the President or the Prime Minister of France to discuss the policy of that Administration to the partial travel arrangements now in place and their effect on members of those EC states which are members of the Council of Europe.

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. Friend has no current or immediate plans to meet either Mr. Mitterrand or Mr. Balladur.

Mr. Hardy: Is the Minister aware that, in October, the Committee of Ministers at the Council of Europe agreed to investigate travel arrangements and that, since then, it has been established that the travel concessions for Members of the European Parliament are in place as a result of an instruction from the French Government? That hardly represents an acceptable situation since the taxpayers of member states have to pay twice as much as Members of the European Parliament when travelling to Strasbourg on official business.

Mr. Davis: I am well aware of the problem raised by the hon. Gentleman. I understand that my noble Friend Lord Finsberg raised it at the February plenary session. The chairman of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers has undertaken to pursue the matter with the French authorities and I am perfectly willing and happy to take the matter up with my opposite number when I see him.

Overseas Posts

17. **Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is taking to create new posts overseas and to reinforce United Kingdom commercial efforts abroad.

Mr. Hurd: With the help of efficiency savings and reductions in work of lower priority, I am planning a significant strengthening of the FCO's support for British overseas interests. This will involve more than 100 new commercial staff abroad and the creation of 14 new posts in the former Soviet Union and in emerging markets in Asia and Latin America. These comprise four new embassies, three new consulates and seven new trade offices with locally engaged staff. The reductions that I mentioned include the replacement of three consuls in Italy by honorary consuls and completion of the programme begun in 1994 to abolish more than 500 support staff over three years. Full details of these changes are being placed in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Lait: I thank my right hon. Friend for that statement, most of which will be of great interest to our exporters. Will he confirm that the staff who will be in place to help our exporters will be highly trained and experienced in commercial work and that there will be close co-ordination between our export promotion in this country and that in other countries?

Mr. Hurd: That is exactly the point. The announcement that I have made means an increase of more than 9 per cent. in front-line commercial staff to match the increased activity of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, and all those under his command, to stimulate exports from home. We are in an export-led recovery. Our embassies, consulates and trade offices can help to stimulate and sustain that recovery. What I have announced today is a redirection of our overseas effort to enable them to do that.

Mr. Dalyell: The Foreign Secretary does support, does he not, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in his recent support for the British trade delegation to Baghdad?

Mr. Hurd: I do not think that it was a British trade delegation. It was a number of people going to see how the land lay. They did not go there on behalf of Her Majesty's Government in any way.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that his answer is very welcome indeed? Does he accept also that an increase in commercial representation abroad can be justified in its own right and that it does not have to be funded out of efficiency savings, as he put it, because staff can earn very much more than the cost of their salaries and overheads overseas? Will he take on board the fact that it is important that posts be extended, rather than staff being moved away, when staff are in the middle of a successful commercial posting?

Mr. Hurd: I agree with both my hon. Friend's points. On his second point, I am against moving people around too fast. There has been rather too much of that in recent years. My hon. Friend's first point is an argument that I have used with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but not always successfully; perhaps my hon. Friend will help me.

European Union

19. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the German Foreign Minister to discuss future developments in the European Union.

Mr. Hurd: Next Monday, 6 March.

Sir David Madel: In all the diplomatic and other contacts that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has with the German Government, has my right hon. Friend noticed that they have any less enthusiasm for and optimism about the possibility of a single currency this century?

Mr. Hurd: In recent weeks, German Ministers have emphasised that their support, which is undoubted, for a single bank and a single currency must not be taken to imply any support for a weakening of anti-inflation policy in Germany or any weakening of the criteria on convergence in the treaty. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State has already pointed out, they are powerfully supported in that view by the president of the Bundesbank, who said that, regardless of timing, the strict application of the criteria is essential. That has many implications for the timetable laid out in the treaty.

Mr. Pike: When the Foreign Secretary meets the German Foreign Minister, will he discuss with him how Germany sees the reform of the common agricultural policy to allow widening of the European Union to admit countries such as Romania in the years ahead?

Mr. Hurd: I tried to stimulate a little German discussion on that matter when I spoke on it in Berlin yesterday. I made the point that—I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree—it is not possible to imagine extending the common agricultural policy in its present form to cover the farmers of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and others. We in the existing 15 have to work to reform and change the policy substantially before we can consider enlargement.

China

20. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit Beijing to discuss Anglo-Chinese relations.

Mr. Goodlad: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans at present to visit China.

Mr. Key: When my right hon. Friend meets the Chinese ambassador later today, will he tell him that there is growing interest in this country in trade relations with China, and that we should move as quickly as possible to reduce and remove cultural, industrial and economic barriers to such trade?

Mr. Goodlad: Yes, I shall say that. As my hon. Friend will know, we have experienced an enormous increase in our trade with China. We are the largest European investor in China; we have more than 600 joint ventures there. The trade delegation in September was the largest ever. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will go to China in May.

Mr. Flynn: Will the Minister promise that, when he makes his efforts to improve cultural and commercial relationships, he will not confine them to Anglo-Chinese

relationships but will extend them to Britannic-Chinese relationships? Many people who have great interest in the burgeoning economy and culture of China regard themselves not as English but as Irish, Scottish or, on this day of all others, Welsh.

Mr. Goodlad: I am delighted that the Scottish economy, the Northern Irish economy and indeed the Welsh economy have benefited from the great increase in British-Chinese trade. As someone who is not English either, I rejoice at those benefits and hope that they will continue.

Mr. Forman: Can my right hon. Friend tell the House whether any good came of the recent visit to China by the Archbishop of Canterbury?

Mr. Goodlad: I very much hope that the mission to China by His Grace will increase tolerance for Christians in China and will have an overall beneficial effect on relations. *[Interruption.]* His Grace has indeed been there, and I hope that his visit will have had a beneficial effect on the lives of Christians in China.

Human Rights

21. **Mr. Denham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what methods his Department uses to monitor human rights in other states.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We gather information from a wide variety of sources in monitoring human rights in other countries. Our missions report on human rights and we share information and assessments with other Governments, in particular our European Union partners. Committees and experts from the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe produce many reports on human rights. We regularly receive reports and representations from non-governmental organisations.

Mr. Denham: But is the Minister aware that when right hon. and hon. Members write to raise human rights issues in the context of arms exports and other concerns, we frequently receive bland and uninformative responses, simply saying that the human rights situation is improving, or is acceptable, or is giving rise to concern? Those assurances are often at variance with what the non-governmental organisations in the countries concerned and organisations such as Amnesty International say. Is it not now time to bring proper openness and transparency into our assessment of human rights in other countries—for example, by formally inviting submissions from human rights organisations and others to the British Government, and making a formal response to the concerns raised therein?

Mr. Hogg: The Government's reputation for openness and transparency is well established. As regards the answers given by my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself, they are full and informative.

Sir Cranley Onslow: When the Government monitor human rights in Burma, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that nothing would do as much to restore democracy in that country as the release of Aung San Suu Kyi?

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend is entirely right.

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Gary Waller.

Mr. Waller: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for his earlier reply to my question on Pakistan, and I shall forgo a second bite of the cherry.

European Union

24. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on possible future enlargement of the EU.

Mr. David Davis: Not everybody is allowed a second bite of the cherry, Madam Speaker. Further enlargement of the European Union is an essential element in the extension of security and prosperity to our east. We have also agreed that Malta and Cyprus will be involved in the next phase. That will all require institutional adjustments and policy reform both in the applicant countries and in the EU.

Mr. Winterton: I welcome my hon. Friend's response, but does he not accept that the accession of the Baltic states—Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia—to the European Union would be a most desirable step? Are we positively moving in that direction, and giving those three important countries the encouragement that they need?

Mr. Davis: The straight answer to my hon. Friend is yes. I believe that we shall discuss European association agreements with those countries in the near future, and that is the first step towards their eventually joining the European Union.

Mr. Cox: In view of what the Minister said about Cyprus, can he give the House any idea of the time span within which Cyprus, with its close association with this country, will be able to think that it will really be admitted to the Union?

Mr. Davis: As with all potential applicants to the Union, it is important first to meet the conditions for joining, both within the applicant country and within the Union. The latter will involve modifications to the constitution of the Union itself. The hon. Gentleman will know that under the current French presidency there is a major initiative to attempt to clear the way for Cyprus to join the Union. We are all watching that initiative for signs of success.

Mr. Bill Walker: When my hon. Friend meets with those nation states that wish to become a part of the European Union, will he take the opportunity to remind them of the experience of Germany and the United Kingdom of operating a single currency, which involved moving large sums of money from the wealthy areas to the poor areas while moving large numbers of people from the poor areas to the wealthy areas?

Mr. Davis: I am not aware that we have had any experience of a single currency.

Mr. Trimble: Will the Minister confirm that—as things stand at the moment—it would be contrary to the independence treaty between Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom which established the Republic of Cyprus for Cyprus to accede to the European Community?

Mr. Davis: The initiative being taken by the French presidency is an attempt to bring together the Turks,

Greeks and Cypriots to achieve Cyprus's entry to the European Union, and the initiative will deal with the problem to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

"Partnership for Peace"

25. **Sir Dudley Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made in developing the NATO "Partnership for Peace" proposal; and what practical military co-operation has flowed from it so far.

Mr. David Davis: "Partnership for Peace" is developing very well. Twenty-five countries have become partners, many of which have already negotiated individual programmes of activities with NATO. Three PFP military exercises have taken place so far, with UK forces participating each time. An extensive range of practical co-operative activities, including 20 exercises, are scheduled for 1995. The United Kingdom hopes to participate in many of these.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is my hon. Friend aware that many of the central European countries are carrying on apace where the "Partnership for Peace" is concerned, and that they are becoming closely involved in peacekeeping efforts? Will he and the Foreign Office continue to do everything that they can to encourage such activities?

Mr. Davis: Before I respond to my hon. Friend, may I take the opportunity to commend his activities in the Western European Union and other areas?

We are doing all we can to make "Partnership for Peace" productive, and to ensure that it gives a useful outcome to the countries involved.

Mr. Wareing: Does the Minister agree that it would be much more appropriate to develop the "Partnership for Peace" among eastern and central European countries than to develop NATO further in that direction, as the enlargement of NATO would undoubtedly cause much more unease inside Russia? Would not it be better to have Russia and the eastern European countries together in a European security pact?

Mr. Davis: While the hon. Gentleman has a point in saying that the matter must be treated with care, the "Partnership for Peace" process should enable the accession to NATO of those countries that wish to—that is the key point—at an appropriate point in the future.

Mr. Jenkin: Given our declared policy of giving primacy to NATO in the formulation of a European defence policy, why have we just agreed with France to joint command of air services outside the NATO command and control system? Does not that send the wrong signals to the Americans, who are already thinking about disengagement?

Mr. Davis: The agreement to which my hon. Friend refers was made at Chartres in November last year, and relates to items outside the article 5 issues of NATO.

Scholarships

27. **Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the amounts raised from the private sector by his Department for jointly funded scholarships.

Mr. Baldry: The private sector has generously contributed some £14 million towards the FCO's jointly funded scholarship programme since it began in 1986. Thanks to these joint ventures we can now offer nearly 800 co-sponsored scholarships a year to overseas students on top of those fully funded by the FCO.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend agree that the importance to British industry of the scholarships is shown by the fact that it is prepared to contribute so substantially to them? Will he give the House his assessment of what effect the scholarships have had on the huge expansion of British exports during the past two or three years?

Mr. Baldry: The scholarships will have made a lot of friends for Britain because, in addition to the jointly funded scholarships, the Department for Education, the Department of Trade and Industry and the British Council are between them funding about 21,000 scholarships and training awards each year, at a cost of about £150 million. That provides large numbers of overseas students with invaluable training and education opportunities here, but it also provides Britain with friends for life and will often lead to commercial and business opportunities in years to come.

European Union

29. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if border controls will be one of the issues on the agenda of the next meeting of EU Foreign Ministers, which he will attend.

Mr. David Davis: The next Foreign Affairs Council meeting is on 6 to 7 March. Border controls are not on the agenda.

Mr. Riddick: Will my hon. Friend confirm that he and the Government will take whatever action is necessary to ensure that Britain's border controls are retained into the indefinite future?

Mr. Davis: I can confirm that. My hon. Friend is virtually quoting the words of the Prime Minister. I take this opportunity to remind the House of something that was effectively said in public on 19 July 1994 by the House of Lords Select Committee on European Communities, in paragraph 109 of its report on visas and the control of external borders of member states. The Committee was chaired by Lord Slynn, who was a member of the European Court. He said:

> "We have not however changed our opinion that the Single European Act does not impose a legal obligation on member states to abolish controls on people at internal Community borders."

That is an independent and highly authoritative view of the real position.

Sita Kamara

3.30 pm

Mr. John Austin-Walker (Woolwich): I am grateful for your indulgence and that of the House in this matter, Madam Speaker. I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the impending deportation of an Ivorian refugee, Sita Kamara."

It is one of the strengths of the House that, while there may appear to be many greater issues on the agenda, we can find time to discuss the rights of, and threats to, an individual. My immediate concern is for the safety and well-being of an 18-year-old woman who has been in detention for seven months. My second concern is the general issue of the treatment of people fleeing oppression, and my third concern is the position of asylum seekers from the Ivory Coast.

Sita Kamara sought refuge in this country from the Ivory Coast and was refused, along with 320 other applicants—all from the Ivory Coast—refused last year. At the age of 17, she was detained by the Home Secretary at the Group 4 detention centre at Campsfield. Last week, I visited Campsfield, where she had been on hunger strike for some weeks. I found her in a weak and emotionally stressed state, terrified of returning home and alleging ill treatment and sexual abuse on the part of the Ivorian authorities.

I raised questions with the Home Office Minister, who said that he intended to remove Sita. I raised my concerns about her physical and mental well-being and was assured by the Minister that she was fit to travel. The deportation did not take place the following day because of medical advice that, although she was fit to travel, she was fit to do so only with a medical escort, which could not be provided.

Sita was not deported the following day either. It was alleged that there was an attempt at suicide. The Minister disputes that it was attempted suicide, but whether it was suicide or parasuicide, that young 18-year-old attempted deliberate self-harm and I cannot believe that a young woman in her position would have done so had she not been in real fear for what would happen if she returned to the Ivory Coast.

None of the refugees from the Ivory Coast whose applications were considered last year has been granted asylum, despite reports by Amnesty International and the American State Department on abuses of human rights in that country.

I hope that the House will find time to debate the rights of Sita Kamara and the wider implications for others. I hope that we will have time to discover the depths to which this country appears to have sunk, as we are not prepared to grant shelter to a vulnerable young woman in such a position.

Madam Speaker: I listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman said. I must give my decision without stating my reason for so doing. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter that he raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 20 and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

BILLS PRESENTED

Atomic Energy Authority

Mr. Secretary Heseltine, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Gummer, Mr. Secretary Lang, Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew and Mr. Tim Eggar, presented a Bill to make provision for the transfer of property, rights and liabilities of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority to other persons; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 61.]

Gas

Mr. Secretary Heseltine, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Gummer, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Secretary Portillo, Mr. Secretary Redwood and Mr. Tim Eggar, presented a Bill to amend Parts I and III of the Gas Act 1986; to make provision for requiring the owners of certain gas processing facilities to make them available to other persons; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 60.]

Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) (Wales)

Mr. Barry Jones, supported by Mr. Paul Flynn, Mr. Martyn Jones, Mr. Rhodri Morgan, Mr. Win Griffiths, Mr. Roy Hughes, Mr. Ray Powell, Dr. John Marek, Mr. Gareth Wardell, Mr. Alan W. Williams, Mr. Donald Anderson and Mr. David Hanson, presented a Bill to make it unlawful in Wales to discriminate against disabled persons in respect of employment and in other circumstances, and to establish a Disability Rights Commission for Wales; to make provision for access to polling stations and voting by disabled persons in Wales; to place certain duties on local authorities, education authorities and other bodies in Wales in relation to disabled persons; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 March, and to be printed. [Bill 62.]

Government Paperwork Reduction and Electronic Information

3.35 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to introduce a programme for the development of secure electronic information systems within Government, to reduce reliance on paperwork and hard copy files, and to ensure easier public access to certain information.

I am grateful to the House for the considerable interest that it is showing in the Internet and the information super-highway. My Bill would increase the accessibility of central and local government; increase the openness of Government, in which great strides have already been made; improve and develop necessary security systems within Government; help people in terms of education, training and employment; reduce paperwork within Government; improve the efficiency of Government; and maintain the United Kingdom Parliament as the leading Parliament in Europe and the world.

My Bill is timely because technology has advanced during the past 10 years in a way that enables people to have on-line access to worldwide information in their homes. Some 3.3 million households in the United Kingdom have home computers but only a small proportion are on line. The current growth in the number of people with access to on-line information is 1 million a year.

Last weekend, a G7 conference took place in Brussels on the information super-highway. It was attended by my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Technology, who admirably put the United Kingdom's position and, as a result, obtained for us an important role in developing a Government on-line system. We are now responsible for the worldwide development of Government on-line systems.

Last October, the UK Government also went on line with a World Wide Web server known as http:\\www.open.gov.uk. In the past four months, some half a million people have gained access to that server, which is under the responsibility of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science. The Public Record Office is the most recent Government Department to provide information and has gone on line this week to join some 30 Departments and agencies of Government which are currently on line.

Three local government councils are on line, the most impressive being Conservative Brent council, which has published the Audit Commission information on its performance. One can find out how quickly Brent will reply to letters now that it is on line. The National Audit Office report published today also makes my Bill timely because it deals with information technology security in Government Departments. Public awareness of that matter is growing. The Internet is a worldwide network of telecommunications and communications access. It enables people, by direct or telephone access, to get on-line information. Many people around the world—some 30 million to 40 million—have access to it.

The World Wide Web, through which people can gain access to databases through the Internet, is a British invention. It was developed by British people at the CERN nuclear physics laboratory in Geneva. It has enabled easy access to on-line databases. The only skill required by users is the ability to read a page and press a button on the computer.

One of the main reasons why I believe that my Bill is necessary is that it will result in the Government helping to create new opportunities for Britain and British business. The White house went on line recently, and started receiving 40,000 electronic mail letters a month. The President and his staff could not cope with American systems, so they employed a British company to develop British software to deal with the mail that the White house receives.

That British company, known as Kinesis, is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs). My hon. Friend is giving full support to that company in obtaining international contracts. It is a successful British entrepreneurial company, marketing world wide and showing the White house in America how British business works and how to make the White house work better.

I believe that there are other opportunities for British business as a result of the information super-highway. Software companies in Britain lead the world in many fields. Hardware companies and systems design opportunities offer tremendous opportunities for British business.

I shall now briefly outline the clauses of my Bill.

There will be an accountability clause, which will require all Ministers' offices to be capable of receiving and replying to letters from Members of Parliament by electronic mail within 12 months. All Government Departments will publish their annual reports and accounts on the Internet within 12 months. All Government Departments should set up systems to receive and reply to electronic mail from the public within two years. Local councils will be required to make their accounts, their Audit Commission information and the telephone numbers of their major staff available on the Internet, so that our constituents can speak to real human beings at the other end of the telephone.

The security of Government systems will be required to be improved, so that there cannot be unauthorised hacking and so that data protection can be ensured. One hopes that British companies will bid for new contracts, in which computer fire walls will be properly set up and methods to prevent external hacking will be implemented.

The Public Record Office should be responsible for taking and securing historic back-ups of data, and Government Departments should be required to implement other back-ups.

Education, training and employment are covered in a separate clause. We have Super-JANET, a world-beating computer network, developed in Britain by our universities as a result of the Government's support. I propose that schools training information should go on line, and my Bill will ensure that access to Super-JANET and university computer systems is available to United Kingdom primary and secondary school pupils. I also believe that training and skills opportunities might be developed as a result of the Internet and access to the Internet.

I pay tribute to schools in my constituency which are helping their students to go on line, and the Kent training and enterprise council, which is supporting that.

There will be clauses in my Bill to cover paperwork reduction, openness and efficiency of Government. Paper is slow and inefficient, and it requires large numbers of typists in Whitehall. It is time that we had type-your-own civil servants.

There are about 6 million files in Whitehall on paper. Whitehall is awash with millions of pieces of paper. We could speed up the processes of Government if Whitehall went electronic. I propose that many files should go electronic, and that more information in those files should be made available to the public.

Finally I propose that Parliament should go on line, that Members of Parliament should go on line, that we should all have electronic mail addresses within 12 months, that *Hansard* should be on line within 12 months, and that anyone in the world should be capable of reading what we say. Information about this Parliament, the mother of Parliaments, should be accessible to our constituents and to anyone in the world.

Yesterday evening I was able to dial into the House of Representatives from my home in London to see what Congressmen were saying. I believe that Parliament should be on line. Ours is the leading Parliament in the world, and we should maintain our lead by going on line. My Bill proposes just that.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Shaw, Sir Wyn Roberts, Mr. John Butcher, Mr. Michael Fabricant, Mr. Alan Haselhurst, Mr. Nigel Waterson and Mr. Nick Hawkins.

Government Paperwork Reduction and Electronic Information

Mr. David Shaw accordingly presented a Bill to introduce a programme for the development of secure electronic information systems within Government, to reduce reliance on paperwork and hard copy files, and to ensure easier public access to certain information: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 21 April, and to be printed. [Bill 63.]

Opposition Day

[8th Allotted Day]

European Union

Madam Speaker: I have two short announcements to make before we begin the debate. First, I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister. Secondly, so many Members want to participate in today's debate that I have put on a 10-minute limit from 7 o'clock; but I would hope that Members fortunate enough to be called before then will voluntarily limit their speeches. I want to hear as many voices as possible in this debate.

3.45 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I beg to move,

That this House does not support Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the European Union and does not believe it promotes the interests of the British people.

The case that we make today is that it is in Britain's interests to be fully at the heart of Europe. So far from pandering to Conservative Members who may take a different view, let me say at the outset that I intend to try to deal with their arguments head on. Let me also tell our Ulster colleagues that I support the Government's position on Northern Ireland and that that support will not change. The crux of this debate, therefore, is not the parliamentary arithmetic but the policy towards Europe.

At each stage I shall set out the Labour party's position, and I shall then ask the Prime Minister to clarify the Government's. Let us dismiss straight away, however, the bogey of some federal united states of Europe. The choice is not between a federal and a non-federal Europe. The true choice is whether Britain's interests are best served by remaining at the heart of Europe, engaging constructively with further European co-operation; or by retreating to a different relationship altogether with the European Union. Both are logical and sustainable positions, but they imply quite different visions of Britain's future.

At one time the position of the Government was clear. It was the Prime Minister himself who said, just a short time ago:

"It is absurd to believe that Great Britain would voluntarily separate itself from the mainstream of European development . . . Great Britain stands at the centre of Europe and will remain as such."

Indeed, at an earlier stage he even said:

"There is no more important issue facing the European Community than the path we choose towards economic and monetary union. We are all committed to this goal. That is no longer news."

Of course the right hon. Gentleman was right to want to be at the centre of Europe. Europe and NATO have given Britain and Europe peace. The single market, now combined with a proper social dimension, offers huge opportunities to British business. British businesses such as ICI, British Steel and British Telecom can only gain if competition rules are enforced across Europe. The European Union acts as a powerful magnet to inward investment. And British people—we support this—have been given rights: decent health and safety, equality for women, fair treatment for part-time workers. In our view at least they would gain more were we to join other Governments, Labour and Conservative, in the European social chapter.

[Mr. Tony Blair]

Britain has enhanced its voice in the world through Europe, especially in trade. It offers, therefore, a range of chances across a range of areas, from research to the environment to technology and infrastructure, to act and co-operate where the nation state is insufficient.

The question is: do the Government still believe that we should be at the centre of Europe in future co-operation, or has their position changed? That is the question in the debate.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Will the Leader of the Opposition clarify one point? In recent years, the party that he leads has changed its mind five or six times on its attitude to Europe, and in his time in the House he has himself changed his attitude to Europe several times. How can Europe or Britain take the Labour party seriously on the matter of Europe?

Mr. Blair: For those who do not know it, this is all set out in the Conservative research department brief. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I will answer it. I would prefer to be leading a party that was anti-European and is now pro-European than leading a party that was pro-European and is becoming anti-European.

Mr. Norman Lamont (Kingston upon Thames): Will the right hon. Gentleman comment not just on his party's position but on his own position and the views that he put forward in his election address in 1982 and 1983, when he actually stated that the EEC removed Britain's freedom to pursue its own economic policies? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether that reflected his own view and, if it did not, why could he not have pursued the course taken by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), who made no mention of the European Community in his election address?

Mr. Blair: I can think of no one worse to level the charge of inconsistency than the right hon. Gentleman, who took Britain into the exchange rate mechanism and the Maastricht treaty. With all due respect, he is the one who has to explain the changes—*[Interruption.]*

I was asking whether—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. That includes the Government Whips.

Mr. Blair: I was asking whether it was the case that the Government's position of being at the centre of European co-operation has effectively changed. I think that it has and, with gathering force, the centre of gravity in the Conservative party is shifting and shifting fast.

Just consider it. The nine Whipless Tory Euro-rebels publish a separate manifesto calling, in effect, for withdrawal from the European Union. What was remarkable was not that document but the reaction to it. Almost immediately the Chief Secretary took to the airwaves to say that there was much common ground between the rebels and the Government. Not one single Minister condemned it.

Indeed, at times over the past few weeks, the Euro-rebels have appeared to be almost like some alternative Cabinet. Perhaps in time they will be. Perhaps the fate that awaits the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) is to become the Foreign Secretary in a future Portillo Government, or the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) is to become the Chancellor in a future Government. At least, I suppose, that would mean that the top two economic spokesmen in the Government agreed.

Sir Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: Later.

The former Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that we should contemplate withdrawal from the European Union. A former vice-chairman of the Tory party says that he wishes that we had never joined. Daily, there are fresh converts to that cause, most noticeably recently the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson). On Monday, another sceptic document was published. It was rewarded with a Prime Ministerial foreword no less, praising it as a lively contribution to the debate. The only people, apparently, who cannot debate Europe, are the Cabinet who have responsibility for it.

Lord Tebbit, Baroness Thatcher: their views are well known. I thought it most interesting that, at the Tory youth conference a couple of weeks ago, when the row was at its very height, not a single Minister was called to defend the pro-Europe position—not one. The Home Secretary went. What did he do? He pandered to them. There was no defence of the Union, no explanation of its benefits. One can tell a lot about a party from the buttons that the politicians press for applause.

There remains, of course, a group of pro-Europeans, but they are increasingly beleaguered. Indeed, Lord Tebbit, when asked whether the nine Tory rebels were not damaging the party, said, "There are nine MPs damaging the party, but unfortunately they are all in the Cabinet." *[Interruption.]* They may wear the badge with pride, let us say.

The result of all that, at best, is immobility in policy, and, at worst, retreat. That is most clear over the single currency, to which I shall now come.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Is the right hon. Gentleman really seeking to persuade the House that he, surrounded by the hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), and by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), leads a united party on Europe?

Mr. Blair: In my speech I shall deal specifically with the issues of division in both parties. But let me tell the hon. Gentleman what the difference is: my position is clear. Is the Prime Minister's?

That is most clear over the issue of the single currency. Let us remind ourselves: at the beginning of February, the Chancellor was calling for an open, sensible debate about the single currency and its merits. Is that not right? Within two weeks, such was the disarray that the entire Cabinet was asked to undertake some Trappist vow of silence. We are therefore in the extraordinary position that Ministers, including the chief economic spokesman of the Government of Britain, cannot speak on a vital issue of national importance.

Indeed, let me draw attention to the Secretary of State for Employment, who, the day after the injunction not to speak, attended a Rotary club lunch at the Marriott hotel. I read from *The Times*:

"Mr. Portillo toned down his usual Euro-scepticism so much and refused to comment on so many points, that guests were forced into asking him questions about the food they were eating."

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): They probably got better answers.

Mr. Blair: As my right hon. Friend says, they probably got better answers.

These issues do not demand to be suppressed. They demand to be answered and the principles governing them resolved.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blair: I have taken some interventions from one wing of the Conservative party. It is only fair to take one from the other.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): As the Leader of the Opposition rightly pointed out, there are divisions on both sides of the House, as we well know. He accepts that the issue is important. He must also accept that people have changed their minds. Is the right answer, when we are very near the edge, simply to seek the views of the people of Britain as to which way they want to go? In a democracy, is not that the right way to go ahead, instead of throwing things across from one party to another?

Mr. Blair: I am coming to the referendum issue. I have already said that, if progress is made towards the establishment of a single currency, it must be made with popular consent, whether that consent is established by a referendum or by other means. I must tell the hon. Gentleman, however, that a referendum will not ultimately absolve the person concerned of the need to decide what his position is. A referendum is a means of obtaining popular consent; it is not a substitute for government.

The single currency raises three sets of issues—economic, political and constitutional. Let us take them in turn. In the context of the economic conditions, it is correct to say that if there were monetary union without real economic convergence, a single currency would be bad. If economies were locked together when they differed widely in strength and performance, unemployment in the weaker ones might result. If there were real convergence, however, a single currency could have benefits. That is the Labour party's position—and, indeed, following his recent speech, it seems that it is effectively the Chancellor's position.

The political question concerns the issue of popular consent. Again, some agreement is possible in that regard.

The key question, however, is constitutional. Is a single currency, as a matter of principle, inconsistent with our identity as a nation state? Does it imply a federal Europe? Is there, therefore, a constitutional barrier? If there is, we should not join, even if the economic conditions are right.

On that issue, many Cabinet Ministers have expressed a concluded view. The Chancellor of the Exchequer says:

"It is quite possible to have monetary union without political union."

and again, in *The Daily Telegraph*, that a single currency is not

"a threat to the nation state."

A few years ago, the President of the Board of Trade wrote:

"No truly unified market can exist without a single currency. A close association of monetary policies will be needed if the single market itself is not to be put at risk."

Those two views are quite clear. So is the view of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who said a few weeks ago:

"I don't want to see a single currency, period, for as far as I can possibly foresee. I would hesitate for an eternity before I came out and said I would vote for a single currency."

When asked whether he wanted a single currency, the Secretary of State for Employment replied, "No." He said:

"A single currency is a long way towards political union. No British Government can give up the government of the UK. That is impossible."

That could not be plainer either. No one would dispute, surely, that those views are diametrically opposed.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington) *rose—*

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham) *rose—*

Mr. Blair: I will give way in a moment. [HON. MEMBERS: "What is your view?"] I am about to say what our views are. There is no sensible halfway house, because although the economic issues may vary, the constitutional issue is clear as a matter of principle. It does not alter over time. The question is, given that Cabinet Ministers have expressed concluded views on the constitutional issue—although they differ—which of the two opposing views is the Government's? That is what we need to know from the Prime Minister today.

I will put five questions to the Prime Minister. What is more, at the conclusion of each question I shall answer it and then ask the Prime Minister to answer it. I cannot put it more fairly than that. First, does the Prime Minister agree with his Chancellor that a single currency is not a threat to the nation state? I say that his Chancellor is right; I assume that he says the same. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] He cannot say.

Let me put this question to the Prime Minister. Does he agree with his Employment Secretary that having a single currency is a long way to political union, and would mean giving up the government of the United Kingdom? May we have an answer to that? I say that the Employment Secretary is wrong; what does the Prime Minister say? Thirdly—this is a question that he must surely be able to answer—

Mr. Lamont *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) appears not to be giving way; is that correct? In that case, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) must resume his seat.

Mr. Blair: I shall conclude this passage and then give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

The Prime Minister has been unable to agree with either of those two Cabinet Ministers. If he is re-elected, can the Prime Minister say whether a single currency will be a possibility in the next Parliament, assuming that the economic conditions are right? It must logically follow from signing the Maastricht treaty that the answer to that

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question is yes. But what is the Prime Minister's answer? Is it a possibility or not? He cannot say. Let me put another question. *[Interruption.]*

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman has said that he will give way later. Hon. Members should not persist.

Mr. Blair: Conservative Members say that this is not a quiz, but it is precisely to hold the Prime Minister to account that we called this debate. Anyone would think that I was asking the Prime Minister to do something quite extraordinary. I am merely asking him to agree with his Chancellor. We have a situation, do we not, where I as the Leader of the Opposition can agree with his Chancellor, but he cannot get up and agree with him.

The fourth question is that if the economic conditions were right, would the Prime Minister be in favour of persuading the country that it was right to join a single currency? He must be able to answer that.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Mid-Staffordshire): Would you?

Mr. Blair: I say yes to that. Is the Prime Minister able to answer the question? With all due respect, that is the position of his Chancellor. That is what the Chancellor said in his speech a couple of weeks ago.

Finally, let me ask the Prime Minister whether he can agree with this statement:

"Some observers hope—and others fear—that economic and monetary union as set out in the Maastricht Treaty will be a step in the direction of a federal Europe . . . I believe that such hopes or fears are unrealistic."

Can the Prime Minister agree with that? I can; can he? Shall I tell the House the author of that statement? It was the Prime Minister. That is the position to which he has reduced the Government. I find it odd that he cannot agree with his Chancellor, I find it strange that he cannot agree with his Secretary of State for Employment and I find it unbelievable that he cannot agree with himself.

The Prime Minister says that he cannot decide this constitutional issue now. But the point is that he decided it then. He was prepared to say expressly that it was not a step to a federal Europe. Now, of course, he cannot say. The truth is that this issue of constitutional principle is being postponed not because of circumstances that the Cabinet cannot foresee. The issue as a matter of principle is there: it is being postponed because the Cabinet cannot agree on it. Members of the Cabinet do not have open minds on the issue. They are not sitting round the Cabinet table wondering about the answer. They have the answer: it is just that there are two different answers for the different factions in the Cabinet.

Sir Peter Hordern: If the Maastricht criteria were met in full, would the right hon. Gentleman sign up to a single currency?

Mr. Blair: If the economic conditions are satisfied, the economic conditions that we have set out for real economic convergence; and if people can be persuaded on the necessary political consent—those are the two conditions—then I say yes. I also say that there is no constitutional barrier to joining. The question is whether that is the position of the Prime Minister. When the Prime Minister speaks, perhaps the right hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) will put the same question to him and see whether he can get a straight answer.

On this point I totally agree with the former Chancellor. He said the other day, and I think that he is right, that the issue of constitutional principle can and should be decided now. If, in truth, there is a constitutional barrier, such a decision makes a dramatic difference to our future foreign and economic policy. Not merely does it render void—indeed, in some sense deceitful—our participation in all the formulation of the institutions for monetary union, but it means that the whole of our future relations with Europe, the United States and others would change. We should prepare for that change now. It would be appalling to drift into a decision that there was, in fact, an insuperable constitutional barrier, without thinking through the consequences of that.

Let me take that one step further.

Mr. Lamont: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: No.

The Chancellor recently made a speech on the single currency, and spoke about its potential benefits.

Mr. Lamont *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is a long-standing Member of the House and he knows that when another Member will not give way, he should not persist. I must ask him to remain in his seat for a while until the right hon. Member for Sedgefield is prepared to give way.

Mr. Blair: If I have time, I shall give way in a moment.

Recently the Chancellor gave a speech about the potential benefits of the single currency. Could the Secretary of State for Employment make such a speech? Would he make such a speech? Of course not. Has he made such a speech? Of course not. Have the Chief Secretary, the Secretary of State for Wales, the Secretary of State for Social Security or the Home Secretary made such a speech? They are not people postponing the decision on a single currency; they are merely postponing the fight over which side wins. That is not in the interests of Britain.

Think for a moment that the Government were re-elected. Can anyone imagine the negotiations during the next Parliament and the state of our discussions with other countries in the run-up to monetary union? It does not bear thinking about. One day, our European colleagues may meet the Chancellor; the next day, the Chief Secretary; the day after that, the Secretary of State for the Environment followed by the Secretary of State for Employment. They would need not more interpreters but more psychoanalysts.

Precisely the same problems beset our attitude to the intergovernmental conference. The Government are driven, once again, to raise the phantoms and bogeys of a federal Europe. In fact, there is little support for co-opting the intergovernmental pillar on defence, for example, into the treaty. There is support, of course, for extending the role of the Western European Union. The IGC needs to make progress on closer co-operation on foreign policy and defence. We have long urged that the role of the WEU should be reinforced as the defence component of the

European Union and as the European pillar of NATO. The WEU Heads of State and Government might meet at a WEU summit in parallel with the European Council. Those bodies could be strengthened. We do not favour a European army, but we can see a case for greater use of co-operation between European forces. That would be a modest but worthwhile step.

No one wants, or is suggesting that the Commission should run defence policy or that we should give up the national veto. There will, however, need to be change, primarily because of enlargement. A body of 20 members or even 15 is plainly different and requires a different form of decision making from a body of 12 or fewer.

The Prime Minister said on the Frost programme that he would oppose and not countenance any extension of qualified majority voting. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I note the cry from the troops behind him. With all due respect, such a stand is absolutely foolish and not in Britain's interests. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Let me give hon. Members an example. On trade or the common agricultural policy, qualified majority voting is plainly in Britain's interests; we do not want small countries to be able to block change that is in our commercial interests. Sir Leon Brittan made that very point the other day. A sensible policy would be to approach such issues, piece by piece, on their merits.

Perhaps most absurd of all was the attack launched on me the other day in an early-day motion signed by 100 Tory Members. They launched it because I am in agreement, on some issues, with Mr. Santer, the European Union President. Who is responsible for Mr. Santer? [HON. MEMBERS: "You are."] I am, apparently. Next time, we may be responsible for the appointment of that President, but the Prime Minister was responsible this time. And why? For all the usual reasons. Mr. Dehaene was proposed, but he was then pilloried as someone who would impose a united states of Europe upon us. The Government panicked and opposed him. Mr. Santer stepped forward and was sold to us on the basis that he was something completely different. Literally within 48 hours, he was saying that his views were indistinguishable from those of Mr. Dehaene.

Is it any surprise that in those circumstances our credibility in Europe is close to zero, or our influence minimal? A Danish diplomat was apparently recently quoted as saying:

"When we saw Hurd last time, he could hardly say anything."

Or, according to Geoffrey Howe—Lord Howe, I should say—writing in the *Financial Times*:

"The ratchet effect of Euroscepticism now risks doing huge damage to British interests. For too many months, the debate on Europe within the Conservative party has been shifting destructively in the direction of disengagement and isolation."

That is the view from all around.

Of course, there are differences over Europe in every party. In a sense, it would be a poor reflection on our democracy if there were not because these are questions of fundamental importance. It is right that politicians do not treat them lightly or regard them merely as matters of party, but the view of the Government must be clear. There may and will be debate as to what the policy should be, but there must be a policy. There is only one choice—to be at the heart of Europe or to be in retreat from it. Both are coherent positions, but they take the country in different directions. What is unacceptable is to have no direction at all.

In truth, the Government can have unity without clarity or clarity without unity, but they cannot any longer have both. Now is the time to decide. This decision is too vital to be pushed aside. In that I agree with the Thatcherites and the sceptics. The danger is that their view of Britain in Europe will prevail if it is not challenged. I challenge it, and I challenge it at its fundamental point.

Recently, in a robust assertion, the Employment Secretary talked of what he called the defeatism of those who saw Britain's future as lying in closer co-operation in Europe. I say that, on the contrary, what is defeatist is to believe that Britain's identity is so fragile, its character so weak and its will so unimpressive that we cannot co-operate in Europe without destroying ourselves as a nation. I reject that view, and I say that this country should be and can be a leader of nations in Europe. That is its destiny. It should be leading in Europe and it can lead in Europe, but only under a different Government.

4.17 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"this House rejects the policy of Her Majesty's Opposition towards Europe, which would destroy United Kingdom jobs, erode the United Kingdom's competitiveness in world markets, place new bureaucratic burdens on business and industry, destroy the veto and diminish the role of Europe's nation states and their national parliaments."

In the 20-odd years since we joined the European Community, as it then was, our membership has always been controversial, so I welcome this debate to set out what our policy is, what the choices are and what those choices may mean for this country in the future.

None of those choices is easy, none of them is without risks and none is without opportunities, but the belief that those choices are simple, and the belief that those choices can be made without a detailed examination of all their implications for living standards in this country, is not something that I accept. I shall deal with those choices in detail when I come to the question of a single currency later in my speech, as I promise the House I shall most surely do.

Some hon. Members on both sides of the House have always been instinctively hostile to our membership of the European Union. Others are uncritical supporters of the European Union, but most of us in this House—I believe on both sides of the House—believe that we are right to be in the European Union and that it is overwhelmingly in our national economic interest to be so but that we should be cautious about the way in which it evolves in the future. That is my belief and that is the Government's position.

Over recent years, the benefits of the European Union have tended to be taken for granted and many of the negative aspects of the Union have been highlighted. The result has been that the debate over recent years has become more sour and public opinion has become more hostile than once it was to our membership of the Union.

I think that there are essentially three reasons why public opinion has moved in that direction. The first is that people fear, not only here, but out in the country, that some aspects of the Community have changed from the Community that we originally joined. Secondly, they resent in many cases what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has referred to as

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"the nooks and crannies interference"

of the European Union. But, above all, many people fear the direction in which they believe the European Union may go in future.

I do not believe that we would be wise to ignore those fears—I shall address them directly in a few moments—but I think that, to put them in a proper context, it is worth recollecting precisely why we joined the European Union in the first place. We joined it because it was in our national interest to join it. It was not idealism or romanticism and it was not just because it seemed an appropriate thing to do at the time. It was a hard-headed decision to join because we saw that membership meant jobs, investment, prosperity and potentially greater influence and would make a contribution to peace right the way across western Europe.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall make a little progress first.

The United Kingdom is perhaps more dependent on trade than any other large industrial economy. The European Union is the world's largest trading bloc. We trade far beyond it, of course. We have interests in every part of the world, and they are growing interests. We are not dependent on the European Union, but it is a very large slice of our trade and very important to us. We are the world's fifth largest importer and exporter and the Union now takes more than one half of our visible exports. The single market was fought for by a Conservative Government leading in Europe to change the nature of Europe from the heart of Europe.

The choice that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) gave us on the future of Europe was only a partial choice about being at the centre. Being at the centre does not mean automatically agreeing with what everybody says. Being at the centre means fighting to move the European Union in the direction that we believe is right for this Parliament, as we did with the single market, as we did with enlargement, as we did with reform of the common agricultural policy, as we did with subsidiarity and deregulation and as we did with much else.

The single market offers huge opportunities to this country and we are taking them, in car exports, at record levels—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Prime Minister: In a few moments I shall give way to the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson).

We are taking those opportunities in record earnings from financial and business services, in record levels of inward investment, which have led to more than 600,000 well-paid jobs in the past 16 years that we would not have had but for our membership of the European Union, and in record business and increasing business for the City of London. Nine out of every 10 European cross-border equity deals now go through London. Even the Deutsche bank has moved its foreign investment banking to London from Frankfurt.

Most important of all—a point often overlooked, but it ought not to be by a nation such as ours—the European Union, together with the NATO alliance, has delivered a prize without precedent to those of us in western Europe: 50 years of peace across Europe; the western democracies working together in world affairs to maximise their influence, and war between them made utterly unthinkable. They are huge benefits.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Accepting all that, does the Prime Minister agree that we did not join a static Europe, a Europe which will stand still? We joined a dynamic Europe and the choice for us is either to be part of that dynamism or to be moved into a second category, a second division. Is the Prime Minister prepared, by his negativism, to contemplate that for our country?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman could not have been listening. Of course it is not static. If we thought that it were static, we would not have been seeking enlargement. If we thought that it was static, we would not have promoted the single market. If we thought that it was static, we would not have changed the position on subsidiarity, deregulation and much else. If we thought that it was static, we would not be promoting the matters in the intergovernmental conference, which I shall come to in just a moment. The question is not whether it is static but what sort of Europe we wish to build in the future.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: Let me refer—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I propose to give way. If hon. Members will give me the opportunity to continue, I will make a little more progress. There will be occasions when hon. Members will wish to intervene on substantive matters.

The often unspoken fear of many people—we should address it honestly and clearly and examine it—is that Europe might develop into a super-state, an overarching Government with no national veto, no control over our own borders, prescriptive decisions, a single currency imposed and the nation state retreating to a wholly subordinate role. That fear exists out there in the British nation, and we should recognise the fact that it exists.

I am sure that in Europe there are a few people who have ambitions for that sort of European Union; rather more people do not have any such ambitions for it. I for one would find such a Europe wholly unacceptable for this country. I do not believe that it is remotely likely, but, if that were to be the future, it would not be a future that would be suitable for this country.

In 10 months' time, the intergovernmental conference will formally begin. The preparatory work begins earlier, but, in 10 months the conference itself will begin. Frankly, it is too early. It is too soon after the Maastricht treaty, and Governments right across Europe themselves know that it is too soon. The fact that it is too soon reinforces my view that there will be no majority for ambitious plans for centralisation in the intergovernmental conference. There will be no such plans because such schemes would not be ratified not just by the Government but by other Governments across Europe.

Dr. Reid: Does the Prime Minister agree that the timing of the IGC, whether it is too soon or too late, does not alter the fundamental question that he has refused six times to answer in past weeks and as late as yesterday,

when he said that he would answer it today? Does he agree with his Chancellor that a single currency is not a threat to our nation state? Will the right hon. Gentleman now take the opportunity to agree fully with his own Chancellor or to dissociate himself from that statement, but, for God's sake, go one way or the other and show some leadership?

The Prime Minister: I indicated a moment ago to the hon. Gentleman that I shall refer at length to a single currency, and I will deal with those issues in my own way at that time.

Europe's pre-eminent task for the coming years will be further enlargement of the European Union—enlargement to bring in the countries of central and then eastern Europe, and to bring in Cyprus and Malta. I believe that that is desirable to spread the benefits not just of the free market further across eastern Europe but of security further across eastern Europe, and to discharge what I believe most people in this country would regard as our historic obligation to the people of central Europe who, in many cases, have suffered so much in the past half century.

That enlargement is now agreed. It is agreed overwhelmingly because of British pressure for that enlargement. What everyone recognises across the European Union is that a Union of 20 or more states—we can now foresee the date when there may be up to 25 or 27 members of the European Union—is bound to be more flexible and less prescriptive than the original tenets of the European Community when it began with a handful of nations. Unbending centralisation will simply not be feasible in a wider Union, and many of the fears that people have about it will be seen to be fantasy fears as the European Union develops.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): My right hon. Friend refers to unbending centralisation. He is, of course, aware that the Maastricht treaty contains detailed recommendations—indeed, a legal requirement—for a central bank. What could be more centralising than that? If my right hon. Friend rejects centralisation, why does he not therefore make it crystal clear in principle now that he objects not only to a central bank but to the single currency that goes with it?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows of the position in the Maastricht treaty regarding a central bank. He knows that we have the option to decide whether to join a single currency at a later stage. As I said to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), I shall deal with that matter in a few moments.

I shall speak first about the intergovernmental conference, which will begin in just a few months' time. I do not believe that it will make huge changes in Europe. No one can be absolutely certain what our partners will bring forward, but I doubt whether any serious significant changes will be proposed.

However, the conference can and should usefully improve the way in which Europe operates, and we shall present a range of our ideas at the conference. We shall suggest ways of developing the common foreign and security policy, and ways of stepping up the fight against organised crime and terrorism. We shall set out ways of achieving a stronger role for national Parliaments, and more subsidiarity. We shall build on the steps agreed at the Essen summit to crack down on fraud.

Under qualified majority voting, a larger say should be given to the larger states, and we shall set out our plans for that. At the intergovernmental conference we shall also seek to reinforce the democratic authority of the Council of Ministers. For reasons that will become apparent as my speech proceeds, we shall not accept the end of the national veto, or significant constitutional change that would impact adversely on the House.

We shall argue that foreign, security and home affairs must continue to be agreed between sovereign Governments, and must not be collapsed into Community competence. On that basis they can, and in many ways they should, be expanded to the benefit of countries and people throughout the European Union.

Reform of the common agricultural policy is bound to feature, but not at the IGC, for it is not a matter for treaty revision. But it will inevitably happen before enlargement proceeds, because the present CAP is unsustainable as we move towards a larger EU.

Europe does not have just one agenda, as hon. Members sometimes seem to assume. There is not one agenda set by others that this country must blindly follow or reject. That is the choice that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield tried to put before people, but it is a false choice. We have the opportunity to set out how we think the Community will develop, and there are areas in which the United Kingdom has led and will lead in future.

The right hon. Gentleman touched briefly on one central matter—the question of defence. The Western European Union, of which 10 European Union states are full members, is both NATO's European pillar and the vehicle for European defence co-operation. The intergovernmental conference will review that arrangement and we shall make our own proposals. I have written today to the European Heads of Government about the way in which we might develop those ideas at the intergovernmental conference, and I have placed a memorandum in the Library.

The approach that we propose is both practical and intergovernmental. Some points are incontrovertible: NATO has been the most successful defensive alliance in history, it must remain the bedrock of Europe's security and its capabilities should not be duplicated. However, we also need a stronger Western European Union so that European countries can take on their proper share of the burden and act effectively in situations in which the United States may not wish to be involved.

Our proposals fall into three parts. First, we must define the tasks that European countries could realistically take on themselves. The defence of member states and major combat operations will of course remain the task of NATO, but the WEU should be able to deal with lesser crises. It should be able to engage in support operations and handle embargo or sanctions enforcement, and it should be equipped for humanitarian operations of the kind seen in Rwanda, and for rescue missions such as the evacuations that we have twice undertaken in Yemen. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members want to know how the European Union will develop; they should listen and find out.

Secondly, new arrangements are needed to mobilise European collective capabilities. A separate European force would be wasteful, and might diminish NATO. NATO has proposed that we draw on, rather than duplicate, its own capabilities. We agree that that should

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be achieved through the concept of combined joint task forces, which NATO developed last year. NATO's resources would then be available on a separable—not separate—basis wherever that was necessary.

Thirdly, we need to take high-level decisions of policy and military action involving western European countries at summit level. That would keep co-operation on an intergovernmental basis, and not on the basis of Community competence.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): I am sure that the House would welcome closer alliances within Europe and closer collaboration in terms of Bosnia-style operations and in the development of our high-technological defence industry in projects such as the European fighter aircraft and the future large aircraft. Will my right hon. Friend allay the fears of hon. Members on both sides of the House that the Western European Union may be integrated into the European Union? Can he assure us that that will not occur, and that the Government's capability to run our defences independently when required will be maintained?

The Prime Minister: I can give my hon. Friend both those assurances. It is necessary to co-operate on an intergovernmental basis, and it will operate on an intergovernmental basis. There is no question of the WEU being integrated within Community competence. It is precisely to make sure that that is the case that we have set out the proposals for greater co-operation, and that is the way in which, intergovernmentally, the Community will develop, not just in defence but on a range of other matters as well. That is the right way for European co-operation to develop.

Let me now turn directly, and at length, to a single currency. I say at the outset that I still believe that Europe would have been wiser in its own interests to proceed first with a parallel currency—a common currency—which could have circulated alongside national currencies. It would have had the advantage of being market driven and, in my view, would have been far more likely to deliver worthwhile economic convergence. I believe that it was not wise not to proceed on that route. I still believe that Europe may find itself being forced to return to that route as it faces up to the necessity of economic convergence—which, when one comes to seek it, will not be easily obtained across Europe even among a small number of nations—and when it faces up also to the sheer technical difficulties of introducing a single currency. But we will see what Europe decides as it approaches the possibility of a single currency.

As far as a single currency is concerned, I reiterate today what I have made clear before. Britain will not join a single currency in 1996 or 1997 and, frankly, I increasingly doubt whether anybody will be ready to do so. Europe is not ready for it, and the sooner that is universally recognised, the better. I see no chance whatsoever that the economic conditions set at Maastricht, or the other economic conditions which are also necessary, will be met, and I see no one suggesting that they should be weakened at present.

Quite apart from the other arguments, the economic conditions are absolutely crucial to the success of a single currency. If a single currency were used to bind together artificially countries which were not marching in step economically, the strains upon the economies of Europe would be immense and unsustainable. I have been making that clear since 1990, and I am glad that the Opposition have finally caught up. That is relevant. *[Interruption.]* I was saying that while the Leader of the Opposition was still saying that he did not want to be in Europe. Those economic points are relevant—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister is on his feet. He knows that hon. Members are attempting to intervene and I am sure that, if he feels so inclined, he will give way, but it is up to him. He does not need help or indications from Opposition Members.

The Prime Minister: That is relevant because there are huge differences between the European economies. Italy, Sweden and Belgium have Government debts that are at or above their annual national income, whereas in Britain, Germany and France the ratio is only half that. Unemployment is 24 per cent. in Spain, 15 per cent. in Ireland and 12 per cent. in France, whereas it is 9 per cent. in Germany, 8.5 per cent. in Britain and 7 per cent. in the Netherlands. There are also big differences in labour market flexibility, which may leave some countries poorly placed to respond to the shocks that would inevitably occur in a single currency in future.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I will give way in a moment.

There is a large body of opinion across Europe that believes that a single currency could proceed around the turn of the century.

Clearly, all 15 members of the European Union could not join such a single currency around the turn of the century—there is no chance of the economics being right—but a core group of countries could conceivably be ready to go ahead then, a small group of nations that, economically speaking, could include the United Kingdom.

If that core went ahead, it would radically change the nature of the whole European Union. At this stage, no one can safely predict what that would mean for those within the core and, equally important, what it would mean for the majority of members of the European Union, who would remain in the Union but beyond that core number of nations.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford): My right hon. Friend clearly laid out where the real problems in the convergence criteria lie, should people try to move down those roads without following them correctly. Furthermore, he pointed out that those are essentially good management techniques. Surely the key factor is that the real problem lies in establishing a timetable that makes people drive to a point that they might not have arrived at naturally. Does he agree that at the 1996-97 intergovernmental conference we should do our level best to take out the timetable mechanism completely and to leave it so that countries may or may not converge?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right that the timetable is arbitrary but, under the provisions of the Maastricht treaty, the economic criteria set out in the treaty supersede the timetable. If those are not met in 1999, 2009 or 2019, the provisions of the Maastricht

treaty are such that no one would proceed. That is not merely the view in this country—it would certainly be the view of the Bundesbank or others.

Mr. Lamont: Does my right hon. Friend agree with Mr. Paul Volcker, the former chairman of the American Federal Reserve Board, and my right hon. Friend Lord Lawson of Blaby that monetary union inevitably means political union, or does he agree with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that it is possible to envisage monetary union without political union?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not—*[Interruption.]* With one important qualification: I believe that it is possible to move forward to monetary union without necessarily moving forward to political union, but the qualification depends on the nature and style of monetary union and I will deal with that in a moment.

If the core went ahead, it would need to determine very carefully what that would mean for the rest of the European Union. To consider whether we should join that core at some future date means that we should consider the practical implications of joining it and, equally important, the practical implications of not joining and letting other nations go ahead without us.

Let me set out in detail what those implications might be, because I believe that both this House and the British nation concerned in that argument beyond this House need to know the practical implications of what going into the Union or staying out of it would mean for them, their political institutions and their economic future.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield) *rose—*

The Prime Minister: First, I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Benn: I listened carefully to the Prime Minister's arguments about the possible effect on the Union of two tiers, but has he turned his mind to the effect on the domestic democracy of Britain if two fundamental principles that have existed over many centuries are broken: first, that there is a route through the ballot box for electors to choose the policies and laws under which they are governed and, secondly, that no Parliament can bind its successor? If the right to tax, borrow and set interest rates is transferred out of this country, we face the serious danger that people will lose confidence in the ballot box as an instrument for remedying the problems that confront them.

The Prime Minister: It is an interesting illustration of the unity on the Opposition Benches to have had that point put to me by the right hon. Gentleman.

On his first point about a two-tier Europe and its implications, I think that, with respect to the right hon. Gentleman, he oversimplifies the position of the two tiers. What we are seeing develop—it is not new but has been developing for some time and will accelerate—is not just a first and second tier but a much more flexible European Union that does not base itself simply on one tier or two tiers but is wholly flexible across a range of subjects. That is bound to become more necessary as the Community gets bigger. Frankly, it is both unrealistic and impractical to imagine that 15 nations—soon to be 19 and, within a decade or so, up to 27—will operate inflexibly on the basis of rules determined entirely centrally. That simply will not happen in the future.

Let me consider what it would mean if we were to decide that we were to go into a single currency at some future stage. If we were to join, we would need to lock exchange rates with other members; agree what the single currency should be—perhaps the ecu; and possibly abolish the pound and the Scottish and Northern Ireland pounds. I say "possibly" because—

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): Oh no, no; you cannot do that.

The Prime Minister: When I referred, a moment or so ago, to some of the practical implications of moving towards a single currency, I had not expected, in trailing my coat, that I would get such a splendid response from the Opposition. But the reality is that one can see the turbulence and difficulty of moving forward in that direction. The relevant difficulties in terms of absorbing the Northern Irish pound and the Scottish pound and just having the pound sterling are absolutely trivial compared with the difficulties of replacing sterling with a single currency across 15 nation states, so perhaps the large number of Scots in the shadow Cabinet might address their minds to the possible—

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian) *rose—*

The Prime Minister: Ah, I shall give way to a Scot.

Mr. Home Robertson: Can the Prime Minister grasp the fact that Scotland and England have had a single currency since 1707?

The Prime Minister: That is because Scotland and England are part of a single Union, and I am determined that they will stay so.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Surely the question at issue is: could Scotland and England currently have different currencies and still be part of a single Union?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman recalls what I just said, he will know the answer to his question.

Let me reiterate the changes that need to be made. They are: locking exchange rates, agreeing a single currency, abolishing domestic currencies, making the Bank of England independent and passing control of interest rates and monetary policy as a whole to an international bank, on which this country would be represented as one among many. Those are the practical implications of going forward to a single currency, and the House and the country should be aware of them.

In addition to that, we should accept the possibility—perhaps even the likelihood, although no one can be certain about that—that a unified monetary policy would require a far greater alignment both of spending and of tax rates. If the House were to proceed with them, such changes would be the most sweeping changes in fiscal and monetary management that the House, with its history of control of supply, had ever considered and accepted in all its long and proud history.

The House knows, from the Maastricht negotiations and the opt-out that I negotiated there, that I am wary of a single currency for those economic reasons—wary of its economic impact and of the serious political and constitutional implications. However, if some of our partners do go ahead, there will be implications for this

[The Prime Minister]

country in any event, albeit different ones. There is no way in which we can sit out that argument without affecting us in one way or another.

If we go in, we shall have the changes that I have set out, but if we stay out there are other serious implications to consider, and I shall spell them out to the House. No one at the moment can be entirely certain what the implications of staying out might be. We cannot know what the impact of a single currency might be on the pound sterling if the pound were outside it. We cannot know what the impact would be on the reputation and work of the City of London as the pre-eminent European centre if we were outside a single currency. We do not know what the impact would be on domestic or international investment in this country if we were outside a single currency, and we cannot know what the impact would be on employment.

Crucially, no one can possibly know at this stage the way in which market forces would react to the decision either to go in or to stay out of a single currency.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South) *rose—*

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall make a little progress.

The purpose of spelling out those implications is to communicate the fact that at the moment those matters are necessarily unknown. They will become clearer as we move towards the point of decision; that is beyond doubt. We shall be in a position to know more of those. However, as of this moment, the answer to those questions cannot possibly be known, except as a matter of hunch. It is for that reason that I believe that it is in our own national and economic interests to keep open the option of going into a single currency—*[Interruption.]*—and equally to keep open the option of deciding that it will not be in our national interest to go in.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Prime Minister: I shall give way in a moment to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson).

I make no apologies now, nor will I in future, for deciding as an act of policy, in the interests of the country, that we should not make such a decision without the facts at our disposal to know the right answer. If a future Government decide to go ahead, they will need the consent both of Cabinet and of the House. They may also need the consent of the country in a referendum because, as the right hon. Member for Sedgefield said, we shall need to carry the opinion of the country with us, whichever way we proceed, but most definitely if we decided that we were to go into a single currency.

If a decision of great constitutional significance were to arise over a single currency or, for that matter—although I do not for a moment expect it to be the case—from the intergovernmental conference, a referendum could be necessary; it could be desirable, and I am prepared to keep that option open.

Mr. Stevenson: The Prime Minister has expressed his caution about entering a single currency, but will he answer a question? If the conditions are right and if the criteria are met, would he then agree to join a single currency—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been for the past 10 minutes—he has clearly not understood a single word. No wonder he is in favour of going in: he does not understand the implications of going in or staying out.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. Friend has said categorically that we will not seek to enter the single currency in 1997. He will know that article 109j of the Maastricht treaty states that if we were to join on 1 January 1999 there would be a two-and-a-half year lead time. That means that, to keep the option open, we should have to join the exchange rate mechanism by 1 July next year. Is it conceivable that my right hon. Friend would put such a proposal before the House?

The Prime Minister: I certainly do not anticipate joining the exchange rate mechanism in the lifetime of this Parliament.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Prime Minister would have us believe that he has not made up his mind and that he wants to leave his options open. Does he not understand that what we object to is the fact that he is prepared to tolerate the activities of members of the Cabinet who have made up their minds? They are saying no, no and no again. How long will he put up with that dissent?

The Prime Minister: I think that the hon. Gentleman will find, when we get to 10 o'clock tonight, that the line that I have set out for the Government will receive the consent of the Conservative party—he need not worry about that.

It is important over the next few months that people understand what this debate means. In recent months—from time to time in this House too—far too many people have been playing off against one another as supporters of Europe, opponents of Europe, nows, nevers, wets and drys and those who have been implacably for or against a single currency. Every phrase has been analysed, every nuance noted, every speech dissected to see whether it represents a shift in one direction or another.

I must tell those concerned that such an artificial tournament is nonsense. I passionately believe that the freedom of choice which I obtained at Maastricht must be fought for and held in the interests of this country. It is by far the best vantage point from which to conduct a single-minded and successful campaign for our national interests in the European Union.

We are going to maintain the option because the decision that may have to be taken will be the single most important economic decision to face this country this century. To take it at long range, without knowledge of the circumstances, without knowledge of the daily details, without an examination of what is happening in the markets or without anything else besides would be folly in the extreme.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): May I gently chide the right hon. Gentleman for his failure to thank the Leader of the Opposition for his assurance that in the lifetime of this Parliament the Government will not be defeated—unless, Madam Speaker, you are invited to discount nine votes?

May I return the Prime Minister to the point about sovereignty, which he may touch on later? It was always clearly understood that there would be a pooling of

sovereignty by all the member nations. May I ask the Prime Minister for an assurance that there will be no horizontal transfer of sovereignty to any other member state on a bilateral basis?

The Prime Minister: From the moment we entered the European Community—now Union—there have always been areas in which we have pooled sovereignty and also to some extent lost sovereignty. But we also gained sovereignty over the actions of some other nations. There have been semantic arguments about that question, but it is a fact that there has been a pooling of sovereignty in some areas. That has not applied to issues of great national concern, and I do not believe that the concerns which clearly activate the right hon. Gentleman are ones that he need worry about. I do not believe that we are going to face the difficulty that he envisages.

I come now to some of the related fears about the Community that I mentioned earlier. Let me address directly some of the fears that people have.

Mr. Blair: The Prime Minister was describing what he saw as the balance of economic advantage one way or another which would progress over time, but if, over time, the balance of economic advantage is, in his view, in favour of entering a single currency, is he in principle in favour of doing so?

The Prime Minister: It is a matter of practice, not principle. What matters—*[Interruption.]*. It is a serious point. The right hon. Gentleman asks a serious question and he deserves a serious answer. What is relevant is what the practice of entering would mean for Britain—*[Interruption.]* Of course, predominantly, in economic terms. We have to make a judgment about what is in the national interest. I repeat what I have said in the past. If I reach a decision that it is in the national interest to stay out, I will stay out. If I reach a decision that it is in the national interest to go in, I will recommend to Cabinet and the House that we go in. But we cannot reach such a decision without having the information in front of us; the right hon. Gentleman has done so. I decline to do so as an act of policy because I believe that we need to make that judgment when we have that information before us.

Mr. Blair: Will the right hon. Gentleman now say whether he sees a constitutional barrier to it? Does he agree with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that it is a threat to the nation state or not? Now let him answer.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is trying to tie this up into tiny little parcels. It is a serious point. What is relevant is what the whole package means for the House, the country and our future. If the whole package says that it is in our interests to go in, we go in, and if the whole package says that it is not, we stay out. But there is no point dancing round semantically on these points. At the end of the day, the only thing that matters is the British national interest. We cannot judge that except in the round. We cannot judge that until we have all the information available and we know the consequences of going in and the cost of staying out.

I come now to the fear that I mentioned earlier that many people in Britain have—whether there will ever be what some refer to as a European super-state. In the sense of a European Government, I believe not, and personally I would prefer to leave the European Union before I accepted a European Government, but the degree of integration in Europe is a matter of dispute, not least between Government and Opposition in the House.

Upon some things we are agreed. The Government are not prepared to lose the border controls that we have at present and the Opposition have said that they will support us in that. I hope that that proves to be the case. In any event, particularly to protect our improved race relations, we are not prepared to weaken our immigration and other controls for non-European citizens. The Heads of Government across Europe pledged their word on that years ago and we expect them to keep it. We shall take whatever steps are necessary to that end.

The right hon. Gentleman accuses us of divisions. He should look behind him a little more carefully before he levels that charge at us. We know what he has had to say about his Members of the European Parliament, but what is his attitude to his nearly 60 hon. Friends who opposed the Second Reading of the Maastricht legislation? What is his attitude to the 40 who rebelled against his leadership over the European finance legislation?

What is the right hon. Gentleman's attitude to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), who believes that

"the nation state is outdated"

and wants us to

"accept the increased jurisdiction of a centralised European authority"?

Does he agree with his right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who said:

"I personally am in favour of a single currency"?

Or does he agree with his right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who says:

"I am not a fan of a single currency"?

Not only is the Labour party divided, but the right hon. Member for Sedgefield failed to explain all the aspects of Labour's policy. He promised to, but he failed to keep that promise. I am not prepared to give up Britain's national veto. I am not prepared to give up the right to say no.

Mr. Blair: Neither are we.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman says, "Neither are we," but he is. The right hon. Gentleman did not mention that Labour would undermine the veto by making majority voting the rule. The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head but it is in the European socialist manifesto, co-authored by the right hon. Member for Copeland, who said, subsequently,

"We stand by everything in this document."

It is no good the right hon. Gentleman shaking his head and looking embarrassed. That is what the right hon. Member for Copeland said. With whom does he agree—his right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland, his right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, socialist Members of the European Parliament or the European socialist partners whom he goes to visit and signs things with so often? Whom does he agree with? Does he agree with himself on this issue? Do we know?

If we gave up the veto we could not only be outvoted on own resources, tax harmonisation, foreign policy, immigration policy, protected areas of environmental policy and any policies which, in the words of the treaty, are deemed

"necessary to attain . . . the objectives of the Community".

[The Prime Minister]

[Interruption.] It is a spirited discussion. If it were possible, I would give way to let the right hon. Member for Copeland intervene upon the right hon. Member for Sedgefield, but I am sure that they can discuss it elsewhere.

Dr. John Cunningham: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way. [HON. MEMBERS: "Resign."] If anyone should resign around here it is the Prime Minister and his right hon. and hon. Friends.

The Prime Minister should withdraw his allegation that either the European socialist party manifesto or our own manifesto for the European elections last year said that we should abandon Britain's veto. Neither document did so and to suggest otherwise is to tell an untruth.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman said that the Labour party would make majority voting the rule. If it is the rule, what else could it be other than the abolition of the veto? He can wriggle and wriggle and wriggle, but he is on the hook and he knows it. Without that veto how would the Labour party protect our interests?

The right hon. Member for Sedgefield had some other memorable omissions as well. He did not mention the memorable indication by the shadow Chancellor to have some renegotiation on our rebate. Our rebate was protected at Edinburgh. It saved the country billions, but without the veto it might not be possible to save it.

Neither did the right hon. Gentleman mention those Labour Members of the European Parliament who voted to double the European budget and dramatically increase Britain's net contribution. I do not know whether that is Labour party policy or whether they were simply being infantile again. He did not mention that Labour wants

"to avoid a tax-cutting competition between member states".

What does that mean? At the moment British taxes are lower than those of our European partners. Does he want to raise British taxes to higher European levels or does he believe he can negotiate with the Europeans to bring their taxes down to our level when they all have fiscal deficits in their countries?

We know that the Labour party would impose the social chapter and drive out investment and competitiveness. We know that the right hon. Gentleman has said that he will

"never allow this country to be isolated . . . in Europe".

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not. I have given way on a number of occasions.

How will the right hon. Member for Sedgefield win battles in Europe that are in our national interest if he is too frightened to be isolated in those battles? Does it mean that he would never be prepared to stand alone, never be prepared to defend any position, any principle, any vital interest, if it would mean offending his socialist colleagues across Europe?

What happens if Europe wants to do something that is genuinely against our national interest? How would the right hon. Gentleman prevent it? He does not want to disagree. He does not want to use the veto. The fact is that the Labour party's policy is one of weasel words and soundbites. It is not a policy for Britain. It is an abject surrender by the right hon. Gentleman.

We have fought for the changes that we want—the single market, enlargement to the east, a new accent on competitiveness and free trade, less new European legislation with national action as the norm and development of the Union through intergovernmental consent. None of that suggests that the Government would be dragged along by others in a direction in which we do not want to go. That may be the stuff of tabloid tales, but it does not stand up to detailed examination of our record.

We are prepared to be isolated and fight our corner, and the House does have to choose—between our hard-headed, commonsense, pragmatic approach to Europe or the politically correct federalist posturings of the Opposition. It should not be a difficult choice and I invite the House and all my hon. Friends to make that choice tonight.

Madam Speaker: Before I call the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) I have some good news for the House. Because the right hon. Members on the two Front Benches have co-operated so well, for which I thank them, I can now bring the 10-minute limit forward to 6 o'clock. That means that I can call more hon. Members today.

5.10 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The Prime Minister, in a speech that will, I suspect, in some of its places, come back to haunt him later, asked us at the end of it to express our confidence in the policies of the Government on Europe. To do so would require either blind loyalty to the Conservative party or a suspension of our judgment—probably both. The Government's policy on Europe has been a catastrophe for the Conservative party and a tragedy for Britain.

The question of Europe, as the Prime Minister rightly said, and this country's part in the development of the European Union, is, in my view, without question the single most important issue now facing this country. That question should be the subject of a widespread public debate about the long-term best interests of our country. But it has instead been dragged down into an internal spat in the Conservative party about how far the Prime Minister is willing to appease a tiny minority of his own right wing, whom, so far, he has not had the courage to face down.

The Prime Minister has brought this present predicament on himself. Right from the start, in the Maastricht Bill, he had the chance to lift Europe above party politics. If he had done so, he could have mobilised a cross-party majority in the House, which would have isolated the hard-core minority of anti-Europeans in his own party, who are now his scourge.

Lord Howe put it clearly and fairly in an article in the *Financial Times* on 30 January, when he said:

"When the UK joined the EU in 1973, and during the referendum of 1975, the governing parties of the time included"—

as they do now—

"irreconcilable cores of opposition, anxious to thwart membership. They were defeated by the determination of those governments to mobilise a wider majority in Westminster and in the country."

He concluded:

"The current government could have pursued the same approach. It had the opportunity to do so in 1992, when the Commons overwhelmingly endorsed its achievement at Maastricht. But this position of strength has been progressively undermined . . . by a willingness to concede ground to those expelled from the parliamentary party in late 1994."

Quite so. That is exactly what has happened. Or, to put it another way, the Prime Minister chose to put party before country and is now paying the price. Like all who venture down the road of appeasement, he has ended up not master but servant to those whom he has sought to appease.

What is the Government's European policy, for which the Prime Minister now asks for our support? It is a policy driven not by the best interests of the country but by the divisions in the Conservative party and in the Cabinet. It is a policy that depends on internal appeasement and external obfuscation. It is a policy, the aim of which extends no further than to enable the Government to survive by any means until the next election, when they can wrap themselves in the flag and play the English nationalist—no, the Essex nationalist—card, not because they believe it to be right, but because they know very well that it is the only means to ensure the survival of the Conservative party.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: In a minute.

So, as we heard in the Prime Minister's speech, he is now condemned to an eternal search for new words to describe a non-position. We heard that at length during his speech of nearly 45 minutes. He has become a Prime Minister permanently impaled on the fence, because he dare not get off it. While he sits there, his party drifts closer and closer to outright opposition on Europe, his Government remain divided, his authority continues to be weakened and Britain's influence in Europe is unquestionably damaged.

The truth is that the Government are now so split and at war with themselves over Europe that they are no longer capable of governing effectively at home or of representing Britain's interests in Europe in the intergovernmental conference of 1996-97.

The Liberal Democrats are clear about what the European Union must now do, and about what Britain's role in that process should be. After a thousand years of war and conflict on our continent, the purpose of the European Union is absolutely clear: to bind the nations of Europe more closely together to ensure peace, prosperity and new opportunities for Europe's peoples.

Liberal Democrats are also absolutely clear about the way in which we want Europe to develop.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: If the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) will give me just a few moments, I shall give way to him, and then to the hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Duncan Smith).

We want to see a democratic Europe in which the bureaucracy in Brussels is held to account by the European Parliament, and in which national Parliaments have greater control over the Council of Ministers. But that cannot be done without strengthening the powers of the European Parliament and without strengthening the powers of scrutiny of the House of Commons.

We want reform of Europe's institutions, starting with the programme of the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy. But that cannot be done without an extension of qualified majority voting in the Council. It cannot be done if Britain is always sitting obstructively on the periphery, instead of working constructively with others to secure the changes that are in our nation's interest. The Government must understand that it is no good calling for reform without willing the means that make reform possible. If they stick to no further extension of qualified majority voting, the consequence will be that the CAP will not be reformed, and that is not in this nation's interest.

Mr. Spearing: Of course the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that Ministers should be more accountable to the House for their actions in a secret Council of Ministers, but does he agree that, whatever we did, we would still be only advisory, because Ministers act there as our representatives, not our delegates? Are not the treaties an authority above all parliaments, including the European Parliament, and is not what he wants when he talks about more accountability and vision limited entirely by the treaties as they are?

Mr. Ashdown: There is an interesting contradiction between what the hon. Gentleman said and what the leader of his party said just a moment ago, which, no doubt, will be noted by all those who read the record. Wherever power resides, whether it be in a local council, in this place, or pooled with others in the European Union, it should be made accountable to the democratic process. That is why we must strengthen the powers of accountability, and of scrutiny, not only in this place but in the European Parliament. It is hypocritical of the Government and others to say that they oppose the decisions that are handed down by bureaucrats in Brussels, and then to say in the next breath that they are not prepared to see strengthened the powers of the European Parliament that would hold them to account. Those are contrary positions.

We Liberal Democrats want a decentralised Europe in which power resides as close to the people as possible, but that cannot be achieved without a clear constitutional settlement of powers between the institutions of the Union and those of the nations, regions and local communities that make it up. We want a Europe that integrates its defence and foreign affairs more closely—and some of what the Prime Minister said was very welcome, if it meant that the Government are at last moving towards such a position.

We want that closer integration in our defence and foreign affairs to ensure that our voice is heard in the world, and so that we can project our power around our borders to secure peace in our area; but it cannot be achieved unless we are prepared to move towards a common European foreign and security policy. We want a Europe that opens up new opportunities for its citizens—opportunities for work and, perhaps especially, for education—that can be taken up throughout the Union;

[Mr. Ashdown]

but that cannot be achieved unless we establish new rights for our citizens, and provide for free movement within the Union itself.

We want a Europe with clean beaches, less polluted waters and cleaner air, but we will protect our shared environment for future generations only by working together and sharing the immediate costs of high environmental standards. My party wants a Europe in which—yes—our economies are more closely integrated, because that makes for a more efficient internal market within the Union and a better chance to win external markets outside it. But that cannot be done unless we strengthen the single market and work constructively towards a single currency.

That leads us straight to the question on which both the Government and the Labour party are so uncertain and ambivalent. Having listened to the speech of the Leader of the Opposition, I am bound to say that I do not believe that he is personally ambivalent on the matter: he has staked out his position, and has done so with admirable clarity. He knows as well as I do, however, that the question is not what he wants but what his party will vote for—and it must be said that his party has more rebels against his view on the single currency than even the Government. The question is not what the right hon. Gentleman stakes out, but whether he could carry it through if his party were in government. That is the question to which he and his party must address themselves.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I must return the right hon. Gentleman to the subject of peace in Europe. He constantly talks of achieving and keeping peace in Europe through ever-closer union and integration. Within the boundaries of the present European Union, which countries does he expect to go to war with each other if we do not adopt that course of ever-closer union? How will such integration achieve much?

Mr. Ashdown: I can give the hon. Gentleman a very clear answer. First, however, let me say that we know very well—having seen it far too many times in this and in previous centuries—that, if Europe is seen simply as a collection of competing states, competition will turn into confrontation. The rise of nationalism and of fascism in some European countries should cause considerable concern about the way in which matters will develop.

If the hon. Member for Chingford wants a straightforward answer to his question, let me give it to him: Greece and Turkey. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that the developing situation in Bosnia could lead to European nations moving towards war with each other.

I do not underestimate—and nor does my party—the pain that monetary union might entail for Britain. It would be folly to underestimate that, not least because monetary union will force us to accept disciplines that we have ducked for half a century. I am certain, however, that whatever the difficulties of being part of monetary union when it comes, the cost of being outside it would be immeasurably greater. If this country can be part of monetary union if and when it comes, it is clearly in its interests to be so.

The Prime Minister has told us that we cannot assess the advantages and costs at this stage. He is wrong: there are four clear reasons why such an assessment can be made. The first is investment. As the world moves towards a truly global economy, industrial nations such as ours will depend increasingly on inward investment. If monetary union comes, the bulk of that investment is likely to flow into the core single currency area, not into countries that choose to be outside it. Both the *Japan Times*—speaking for Japanese car manufacturers—and Ford have recently warned of the effects on their operations and investments in this country if it chose to be outside the core of Europe. The cost will be measured in lost jobs, lost trade and lost opportunities; we know that now.

Secondly, being within a monetary union will almost certainly mean lower interest rates and lower inflation. We know that now. Our long-term interest rates are already at least 1 per cent. higher than those of Germany because of the market's uncertainty over the Government's ambivalence on Europe, and question marks over their determination to keep inflation low. Our inflation record may have been good over the past two years, but the markets have a long memory. Over the past 25 years, inflation in Britain has averaged 8.7 per cent.—double the German average.

Even if the price of being outside monetary union were no more than the present 1 per cent. risk differential, according to the Chancellor's own figures £25 billion a decade would have to be paid in extra costs associated with debt servicing by British industry. That cost would be met by British firms and British jobs, and added to the price of British goods in the global market. We know that, and we know it now.

Thirdly, staying outside monetary union will not increase our control over our economy; it will decrease that control. We shall continue to have sovereignty over our short-term interest rates, but that will be largely illusory, for the markets will continue to have sovereignty over our exchange rates. That means that the markets will dictate long-term interest rates too. That is the practical reality—words used by the Prime Minister—of our theoretical economic sovereignty in a go-it-alone Britain. As a periphery economy outside monetary union, we would have as much control over our macro-economy as a cork has over the wake of an ocean liner. Inside monetary union, we would certainly lose the illusion of sole national control, but we would gain the reality of a share in genuine economic power strong enough to withstand the speculation of world markets.

Lastly, keeping Britain outside monetary union would mean a further major loss of British influence in Europe and abroad. Our capacity to shape and reform Europe's institutions, including the common agricultural policy and monetary union itself, would be greatly diminished. As was made all too clear to me in Washington last week, so would our influence with our closest allies abroad, particularly those in the United States.

For all those reasons, we Liberal Democrats are clear about where Britain's interests lie. We understand that the ambivalence of both the Conservative party and the bulk

of the Labour party arises not from a calculation of national interests, but from a need to cover internal party divisions.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not.

Of one thing I am sure: Britain needs a clear lead on Europe, and it will not get it from this divided, uncertain, weakly led Government. That is why they should be defeated tonight—and afterwards, as soon as possible, in the ballot box.

5.28 pm

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I know that Madam Speaker wants us to be brief, and I think that I may be able to help in that respect.

My views on Europe have not changed since I made my maiden speech on 26 June 1950. I can therefore dispense with the considerable amount of the time taken by both the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister in exchanging quotations from their own past or someone else's.

I shall come straight to the question of Europe. The Prime Minister rightly emphasised that in taking a decisive step such as entering a common currency one should do one's best to carry people with one. Of course I agree with that. I do not entirely agree that the option of a referendum should be kept open. One reason is that the Conservative party has always been opposed to referendums. We had them only when one was forced upon us by the Labour Government in 1975 and in the case of Northern Ireland where there was no Parliament. I do not want to depart from that principle because I believe that Parliament should take the sovereign decision and it is impossible to visualise the House voting against the result of a referendum. We should stick to our historic positions.

Secondly, we well know from European experience that it is difficult to get voters in a referendum to vote on the point that is wanted. It starts with one question and ends with an entirely different one, and referendums usually produce a vote against the Government if people dislike them. The argument against a referendum on a single currency is absolutely convincing in all circumstances. What will happen to our own currency while we spend four or six weeks stumping up and down the country arguing whether we should go in or stay out? If a public opinion poll suggests that we will go in what will the speculators do? The next poll a week later may say, "No, we will stay out." Barings would be child's play compared with what the speculators would do then. It is unthinkable to have a referendum on the question of whether to enter a single currency. It would be exactly the same as a referendum on devaluation of any kind. Quite apart from the time factor it is just not possible. I am against a referendum in all circumstances and particularly on the question of currency.

The Prime Minister said that the problem of carrying public opinion is now very evident, and that there are various indications that public opinion in the country has moved away from support for the European Union. He asked about the reason for that. I can give him one very sound reason. Not a single good thing has been said about Europe and the European Union by the Government or their representatives over the past 15 years. We have had nothing but quite unjustified condemnation and there has been no information for the public about the good things.

The Foreign Secretary knows how much we did between 1961 and 1963 during the first round of negotiations and how much we did between 1970 and 1972 in the second round to ensure that everybody was fed with all the details. The pamphlets which were published have never been challenged. Nobody says that we gave out wrong information: it was correct. Some of it proved to be better than we thought. We thought that prices would go up by more than they did, and that was good.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Edward Heath: Who is it?

Mr. Gill: I am flattered that my right hon. Friend should recognise me. I should like to ask him about information, or misinformation. I have a letter which he wrote in 1971—during his time at No.10—to fishermen in the west of England. The letter states:

> "For our part, as the White Paper said we are determined to secure arrangements which will safeguard the interests of British fishermen."

Does my right hon. Friend know that today there is scarcely a fisherman in any harbour in the British Isles who believes that his interests have been safeguarded?

Sir Edward Heath: If my hon. Friend looks up what happened in the negotiations and examines the agreement that we reached he will see that the fishermen got complete protection. What has happened has occurred in the past few years, not because of the treaty but because of the complete change in the fishing industry and in its technology and other matters. I hope that hon. Members with fishing constituents have the strength to point that out to them.

The other reason is that we have not taken opportunities to move into other fishing areas that were open to us. We had the Iceland crisis and we were finally kept 200 miles away from Iceland. At that time I set up an investigation into fishing on the west coast of Latin America. The report said that the fish looked a bit odd but there were plenty of them and fishing there would be beneficial. Could I persuade any fisherman even to go to look at them? Not at all. We saved fishing in 1971 and it is all on the record.

There is still much to be done in terms of the good things of Europe. At this moment the Prime Minister should set in hand a fresh campaign to tell people about the good things that come from the Union. His speech put all the questions and all the doubts but did not deal with the great possibilities that can come from Europe. Some 80 per cent. of people in business and industry want a single currency because they know that it would be beneficial to them.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (Colchester, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Edward Heath: No, I am sorry.

It would save industry much money in trading because instead of needing 12 or 15 invoices a company would need only one in one currency. It would also save businesses the cost of offsetting currencies in case they

[Sir Edward Heath]

got caught out on the exchanges. That would be a great help to industry, manufacturing and sales and it would also be a great advantage to the consumer and the traveller who would not have to stop at every border and change his money. In a journey around 12 states he would save over 30 per cent. All those are good things about a single currency and they should be taken into account when looking at the difficulties.

I should like to comment on the political side. We have heard little about the views of the rest of the Union but a great deal about standing on our own. I agree that at times one has to stand on one's own, but it is infinitely better when one has friends who will offer support and see one through. The past two years have shown that we have not had the friends. We did not have them over the devaluation of sterling or in the attempt to change the voting system. We were exposed and, diplomatically, that is not a good situation to be in. We have to make sure that when working for change we have the support of the other countries.

On the question of voting, the small countries are determined not to give up their position. When the Community was founded those countries were given a more than fair position. Germany with 60 million people had 10 votes. Luxembourg had one vote, which suggests that its population was 6 million, but it is 450,000. The attitude of the European Union is to give more than a fair share to the weaker members in the organisation and in society. We should keep that attitude.

I ask people to be realistic on the issue of new membership. The eastern countries will not be democratic by our standards and nowhere near our economic standards for a long time. To start thinking ahead and working out various projections over five years is to be out of real touch. We cannot encourage them to think that in five years' time they will all be just like us, because they will not.

I am afraid that more and more some of the people who were in the old regimes have taken hold of the new regimes. That is worrying. Some of those countries have a standard of living which is only 20 per cent. of ours. We should consider how much they have to catch up before they start moving with us. We must be realistic. We do not need to work out voting positions for 20 or 25 countries until the next century. However, we can do everything else to help them.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Edward Heath: Yes.

Mr. Nicholson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that signal of approval. I agree that there is considerable divergence, not necessarily in democracy but certainly economically and especially in agriculture, which concerns many of us. Does not that add weight to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said about the need for the Union to develop flexibly so as to take account of those divergences?

Sir Edward Heath: I shall deal with being flexible straight away; it is also tied up with the attitude of the rest of the European Union towards us. Flexible means one has no real control over what is going on. That is what it amounts to in the end, but no one is prepared to accept that. The great suspicion against us in Europe now is that all the talk of an enormous Union, flexibility and the rest of it means that we are trying to get back into the old European free trade area. The suspicion is that we want to return to that old free trade area, in which we just said what we wanted to, when we wanted to and there was no control over it. As a result, it made little progress. I sat on EFTA as the British Government representative for three years, so I know full well what it is like. One cannot get it to make any decisions. When one sees the speed at which the Community acts, the old free trade area has nothing in it.

Our European partners suspect that flexibility means gradually getting rid of all the Community's mechanisms—getting rid of the Commission, weakening the power of Ministers and weakening all the Community's powers. I notice that we heard nothing today about more powers for the European Parliament, but that is important. We treat our European Parliament Members worse than any other country in the Union. We treat them thoroughly badly and that, too, does not pass without notice.

We are subject to that suspicion from Europe all the time, but we must get rid of it. We must do so by showing that we are wholehearted members of the Union in every respect. That means getting the machinery to work fully. We must also put forward proposals to improve the Union, instead of trying all the time to take away its powers and merits. That has tended to happen.

As for defence and foreign policy, we should get as close as we possibly can in our joint policies. I am not quite sure whether I agree with what the Foreign Secretary said yesterday, because I have been unable to get a full report of his remarks. I hope that he will not try to separate everything and say that we must become so nationalistic.

Having sat in the House for 45 years, it is interesting to see the extent to which, suddenly, we are hearing about the nation state. Decades went by when no one spoke about the nation state—a form of nationalism. We were a country of which we were proud and we wanted to work with others in the Community. I wish that we could return to those days, because the Europeans do not like our remarks about the nation state. When we say, "Look what we have done," that prompts Europeans to say, "The British treat us like colonies. That is what they think we are." I was told that just the other day in Europe. We cannot possibly make friends and have successful policies if we treat those countries in that way.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney) *rose—*

Sir Edward Heath: I am not accusing the right hon. Gentleman of being a colonialist.

Mr. Shore: I do not know why the right hon. Gentleman is worried and puzzled by the frequent references to the nation state and the loss of sovereignty. It so happens in this country that our democracy is coterminous with the frontiers of our national community. It is the loss of that democratic power to European

institutions that are not democratic which is one of the principal worries of those of us who are serious about this matter.

Sir Edward Heath: I do not agree that the countries of the Union are not democratic. Most of them are pretty sceptical about some of the things done by our democracy, so I do not accept that argument.

As for the nation state, the right hon. Gentleman may be right, but when I am up in Scotland, I find that the Scots do not accept that we are a nation, nor do the Welsh. I will not mention the Irish, but the English think we are the nation. The situation is entirely different from that suggested.

We are now in an entirely different world from what it was when there were two super-powers. We now hear about the emergence of a super-state, should there be any changes in the constitution of the Union. If that happens, why should we become a super-state? We do not say that we are off to New York to visit that super-state—never for a moment—nor do we say that we are going to the super-state of Moscow. That is ridiculous propaganda, but, of course, it is perpetuated by the press.

Should our colleagues take the heavies on a Sunday, I wonder how many of them realise that 60 per cent. are foreign owned. Those newspapers do not have any interest in Europe, except to try to disrupt it and the royal family in the process, if they can. Nearly 50 per cent. of the daily press is foreign owned. Those papers are not concerned about our position in Europe and produce every sort of scandal they can make up.

I had an interesting experience the other day with *The Sun*. It related to the European Court of Human Rights, which had made an award of £59,000 to a British person and said that the Government ought to repay it because they had no right to take it away. That was reported in a stinking leader in *The Sun*, which said, "Here it goes again—Brussels and the European Union telling us to give back £59,000." That paper had no idea that the European Court of Human Rights at Strasbourg has nothing to do with the Union in Brussels. That court was founded largely by Britain, four years before the first Community was formed.

I wrote a polite letter to *The Sun*—well, the first two paragraphs were polite—to explain the true situation. It was sent on the day that that article appeared, Friday. Nothing happened on Saturday and so, on Sunday, my office rang *The Sun*. We were told that they did not realise that Mr. Heath wanted his letter published. My office said that if those responsible had read the third paragraph of my letter it said, "Will you kindly publish this letter and apologise to all your readers for misleading them?" They said that they would have to read it again. They did so, but on Tuesday I was told that they were sorry, but they did not have enough room to publish my letter. Presumably there were too many sex scandals. That letter finally appeared on the Friday. Why? Because they hoped that, by then, everyone would have forgotten what had been originally published. The British people who read that paper were misled. That is what we are up against.

I took part in a discussion on Sunday morning with Lord Lawson—it was amiable and well behaved—on that subject. A report appeared on Monday in *The Sun*, which set out what Lord Lawson had said, but not a word about my counter-arguments. Is that impartial journalism? That is what it has descended to. We were brought up on the basis that all reporting should be impartial and the leader should publish the views. That has all gone.

We are now in a new world with five powers. One is the United States, which is now having to learn a new way of life, rather painfully. Russia is still a great power militarily and behaving in a way that is absolutely unjustifiable. Have the western nations shouted about that? No, not a word. The next great power is the People's Republic of China. Of course, what happened in Tiananmen square and the 3,000 people affected is still held in horror. It has a population of 1.25 billion and the standard of living is increasing on average by 12.5 per cent. a year. It has enormous potential.

The next power is Japan, which is ahead of us all in technology. Those four countries are the four powers. What is the fifth? The European Union. What chance have we got against those powers unless we are in the Union? What chance has the Union got unless we put our hearts, souls and minds into making it the success that it deserves to be?

5.48 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I made my first point during my intervention on the speech of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), when I reminded him that the fact that our nation is coterminous with our democracy is a serious point. I did not say that we were handing over the powers of our democracy to other countries that are not democracies. That was not my point. I was saying that we were transferring them to European institutions that were far from being democratic in the way that we would accept for a mature country. That is a very different point but one that must be insisted on.

I listened with great attention to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who made a scathing and intellectually very effective speech. In terms of the argument, he certainly won hands down in the duel that then followed. However, although I applaud the speech for its form and effectiveness, on two matters of judgment I cannot fully subscribe to what my right hon. Friend said.

The first was my right hon. Friend's conclusion that there was no constitutional barrier to our joining a single currency. That is a very important matter, and I do not believe that my right hon. Friend has yet realised all the implications of transferring the powers of economic management which would certainly and necessarily be lost if we were to join a single currency. I shall develop that point a little further before dealing with what the Prime Minister had to say.

We are committed as a party to an economic policy as well as a European policy. One of our problems is that our economic policy and our European policy are now in violent contradiction. No Labour Member would dispute the fact that our economic policy is to make our first priority the attempt to regain full employment as fast as we can. That is the great aim of our economic policy, as reiterated many times in the House and elsewhere. To that end, as outlined specifically first by John Smith and then by his successor at three successive Labour party conferences, we have said that to promote the goal of full employment we would use all the major instruments of macro-economic policy—interest rates, exchange rates, public expenditure and borrowing.

[Mr. Peter Shore]

How can that economic policy be reconciled with an acceptance in our European policy that we can go along with third-stage economic and monetary union, a European central bank and a single currency? We would lose control specifically of our interest rates. Control of them would pass, of course, to a European central bank. No one denies that—it is self-evident. We would lose the possibility of using exchange rate policy to assist our own economic recovery and goals. We would be bound to do so because permanently fixed exchange rates and a single currency inevitably mean that that very important weapon, or safety valve, is lost for ever.

We have accepted, or at least the Maastricht treaty would make us accept in the provisions spelt out at great length in its protocols and articles, that the European central bank would discipline our borrowing requirement—the balance between our public expenditure and revenues—to a limit of 3 per cent. of gross domestic product.

The macro-economic powers which I have outlined are still available, although sometimes with great difficulty, to the British Government. How can we possibly surrender them to European institutions, the most important of which—the central bank—is wholly independent of any influence from national or European Governments? That is a major problem that has yet to be resolved.

The resolution may be in what was said about the economic conditions as well as the purely Maastricht treaty conditions being right. What we mean must be spelt out clearly, and the same is true for the Conservatives, too. I am thinking of what the Prime Minister said about the convergence criteria and "other conditions" that would need to be met before he could recommend that we join a single currency. It would be interesting to know what those "other conditions" were, and I hope that, in winding up, the Foreign Secretary will tell us. That is a critical point.

The Prime Minister ended a recent speech by saying that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was about to state what the additional conditions for convergence not contained in the Maastricht treaty were. In the event, the Chancellor did not explain but made a speech saying something very much to the contrary, which delighted the Europhiles in the Conservative party and offended the Europhobes.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): The unsatisfactory part of the right hon. Gentleman's argument is that it reflects the theory of economic management, the theory of supply and the theoretical ritual of independent states, with their own parliamentary activity, acting independently of others. However, in the real world, currency management also has an external value expression. Does not the right hon. Gentleman feel that people should be alarmed at the fact that, for example, the pound sterling—our national currency—has lost more than 90 per cent. of its value against the deutschmark, most of that slide having occurred under successive Labour Governments? Is that not more important than foolish theorising about a pretend world?

Mr. Shore: I should not have given way to the hon. Gentleman. As the Germans have well known since the war, it is of course better to have an appreciating rather than a depreciating currency because that reflects the growth in output and the strength of the economy. Germany is now a more prosperous country than Britain, but let us consider for a moment the events of 16 September 1992—black, or white, Wednesday. We were then frozen into an exchange rate which was costing us an increase in unemployment of about 1 million a year, and we were uncompetitive with the pound standing at DM2.95.

The present level is something like DM2.30 or DM2.35, although it might be a little better in other circumstances. The change is enormous and has made all the difference to this country's exports recovery in the past two years. To say that we should have been better off had we stuck with a permanent rate of DM2.95 beggars belief. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman, in spite of his great enthusiasm for all things European, can sustain that argument.

Sir Edward Heath: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, had the Government joined in 1985 when the then Chancellor of the Exchequer wanted to do so, the rates would have been almost exactly what they are today and we should not have had the devaluation?

Mr. Shore: I am not sure about that. I was going to mention the important fact that the convergence of the economies of member countries that share a currency is crucial. There are very great dangers in their not converging. I thought that the Prime Minister was remarkably frank in covering this ground. I give him credit for the fact that, despite much barracking and hostility, he put forward the idea not of a single currency but of a common currency. He put forward the idea of a hard ecu as a reserve currency for the growing European Union. It is a very sensible idea.

I could go along with a common currency but I, and, I suspect, half of Europe, could not live with a single currency for the reasons that I shall develop in a moment. The importance that the Prime Minister has always attached to his opt-out is, I think, a reflection of his own fears and worries about the consequences for Britain if we were jammed into a single currency when our economies had not converged.

A new and serious contribution to the argument about convergence and single currencies has been made in recent weeks. I am thinking especially of the Governor of the Bank of England's Winston Churchill lecture on 21 February. The Governor, of course, balanced his arguments very carefully, but I do not think that anyone who read what he said could fail to conclude that, in the Governor's judgment, the costs—the dangers—of going into a single currency were far greater than any possible prize that might be won through it.

The Governor made the point, which is the starting point of any serious debate, that there is a real difference in the economic performance of different countries in Europe and that nominal convergence criteria, of the kind stated in the Maastricht treaty, are simply not enough. He cited in his lecture that the lack of convergence is reflected in the current unemployment statistics. Western Germany has 6 per cent. unemployment, Britain has 9 per cent., France has 10.5 per cent., Italy has 11 per cent. and the figures lead up to Spain with 24 per cent. It is true; those are enormous differences.

The Governor went on to say that he did not think that those differences could be easily or readily resolved and that they would remain. He then, of course, made the

point that to join a single currency with such differences in economic performance would sacrifice the great safety valve—it always has been in the past—of exchange rate adjustment and that we would be faced with continuing stagnation for the less successful economies and rising unemployment.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shore: No, not at the moment. The Governor went on to say what, given that consequence, the alternatives could be. He cited two alternatives. First, he said that there would have to be a mass movement of labour from countries where unemployment was high to countries where jobs were still available. That, of course, is why we have the absurd emphasis on free movement of labour, with virtually no constraint, throughout the European continent. The second great danger which he posited—he did not posit it so much as a danger—was that there would have to be an enormous increase in the budgetary expenditure of the Community to compensate, if it were minded to do so, the regions and countries that had suffered from the consequences of a single currency.

Mrs. Currie: The unemployment rate in my constituency is 6 per cent, the unemployment rate in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency—I believe—is probably about twice that and the unemployment rate in the constituency of, for example, Liverpool, where I was born, is more than 20 per cent. How come we can run with a single currency?

Mr. Shore: It is not the same at all. If the hon. Lady were to think for the moment, she would realise that we have the resources of the British state. The 43 per cent. of our gross national product which comes to us in taxation is distributed around the country to the different areas to meet the different needs of our people. I admit that, in Europe, we are talking about a mere 1.25 per cent. That is entirely different and it would be very wrong to confuse them.

As I said, the Prime Minister knows the costs of joining a single currency only too well. His speech today was, once more, pretty sceptical about the prospects of it. I wish that he had been more definite. In fact, I wish that he had followed his own arguments to their conclusions and said that he had come to the conclusion that, as far ahead as he could see, it would not be possible on economic grounds for Britain to join a single currency. Further, since he insisted on inserting the word into statements made by the Cabinet a week or two ago, I wish that he had said that there are constitutional and, indeed, political implications of membership of a single currency and not only economic implications, even though those are very grave indeed.

The Government are divided—very obviously so. There is nothing necessarily odd about Governments being divided, but this Government have been peculiarly incoherent in their policy pronouncements on European matters. I would like that dissonance of voices to be stopped. I would like a more positive and single line to come out and I would like it to come out as a clear statement that the Government are opposed to Britain joining a single currency and that, as far ahead as they can see, it cannot be a course of action that the Prime Minister would recommend to his colleagues and the House.

I hope that, in addition, we would agree—both the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition are very near to pledging it—on a referendum. For constitutional reasons, for the importance and significance of what is involved in the transfer of democratic power from Britain to Europe if we were to have a single currency, I believe that the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition should pledge that they would hold a referendum before any further significant transfer of powers is agreed.

6.5 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): When I hear speeches about the weakness of Britain in Europe—I exclude the speech of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), to which I shall return—I have to ask why, if that is so, this country continues to attract the vast bulk of investment from overseas into the region of the European Union. Britain not only continues to do that, but, from all the evidence, is set to do so in future. That at least requires an answer from those who insist that we have completely denuded ourselves of power and influence in the European Union. I do not believe that that is so and going on and on without answering that question does not help our cause.

I am genuinely grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for securing the debate today as it has already done a number of things. It has made it pretty clear that the right hon. Gentleman and some of his hon. Friends are hell-bent on a single currency. Whether it happens or not does not seem to worry them; whether there are dangers, as I believe that there are, does not seem to worry them; what it will do to the whole of the Europe for which we have worked over 20 or 30 years does not seem to worry them; and whether it will be pro-European or anti-European does not seem to worry them. They are going that way and it is very good to hear where they stand.

It is also interesting to hear Labour's view that there is a need for leadership in Europe, although listening to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), leadership seems to imply following the rest of Europe. If that is the kind of leadership that Labour Members want, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was quite right to say that there is a different kind of leadership in Europe, which is more pro-European than merely following the Franco-German agenda, as served by whoever happens to be in power in Paris and Bonn. It is very useful to have clarified some issues.

I am less clear about why some of my hon. Friends want to continue rebelling, or being Whipless or whatever the state is, over European policy. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has set out with the most excellent clarity what may be called a Euro-realist position, which commands a great deal of support throughout the party, in many other parties and groups throughout the European Union and among member countries that are to join the Union. I cannot understand what the remaining grounds for rebellion are all about. I honour and respect my hon. Friends' views and I do not question their motives, but it is very hard to understand what on earth they are rebelling about when the Euro-realist position has been set out with such clarity.

The argument boils down to three issues, which I shall rattle through because we have so little time: the referendum, the single currency and how much muscle we put into the intergovernmental conference agenda.

[Mr. David Howell]

I do not have any great difficulties about holding a referendum. I see the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), that it would be silly to have a referendum on the single currency. However, there is a case after the next IGC, when there will be major institutional changes—perhaps not constitutional changes, but huge changes—for going to the British people and saying that, having reached that point, we should have another referendum, after the one in 1975. Provided that we were offering a Europe of nation states and not some sort of greater confection or construction that nobody—or very few people—wants, we would have the overwhelming endorsement of the British people and settle the issue for 20 years. I see no problem with that. I am one of the few ex-Ministers who have taken a referendum Bill of sorts—the Northern Ireland poll Bill—through the House, so I cannot object in principle to referendums. That is what we should go ahead and say that we shall have after the IGC in late 1996 or early 1997, or whenever.

I now refer to the single currency. The first question, after listening to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield, who is all for it, is whether it will actually happen in the way that some enthusiasts say. We know what is going to happen. Inevitably, there will continue to be a deutschmark bloc of some kind. We can see its workings in the market now, causing enormous currency disturbance. The magnetism of a bloc that has Germany at the centre of it will remain, with other countries around it—perhaps the Swiss, in a currency union, although abolishing their currency is very unlikely, as they are not even a member of the European Community; perhaps the Austrians and the Dutch; perhaps the Belgians, although they will have great difficulty in converging; almost certainly not the Italians, unless the criteria are fudged; and presumably, I hope, not ourselves. The deutschmark bloc is inevitable.

The other thing that is not so much inevitable as highly desirable is the convergence discipline. The convergence criteria are excellent aims and targets for any sensible and well-run monetary and fiscal policy, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) said in an excellent speech on Monday night. That will happen anyway, and will remove much of the freedom and so-called sovereignty that the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney, who looked back rather nostalgically to the high days of Keynesian Labour policy, seems to hanker after. That does not exist any more. Ninety per cent. of the freedom of monetary and fiscal manoeuvre has gone anyway and will remain surrendered.

Do we then move on from that, living in a world of 90 per cent. of sovereignty being surrendered to the disciplines of the global market, to 100 per cent? Do we lock the whole thing in permanently? That step is the crazy one. Any engineer, designer or architect will say that some flexibility, an element of adjustment and some freedom of movement make a structure much stronger, not weaker. Therefore, the idea that we move on from having to co-operate very tightly indeed in the global monetary system, to locking currencies in for all time, is engineering and scientific nonsense. It is out-of-date nonsense and it is centralising nonsense.

Anyone who can understand the sensitivities of the currency market must begin to comprehend that moving from the close monetary co-operation and the discipline imposed on us, certainly from common currencies of any kind—I am all for those—to a single currency, the surrender of national currencies, is a huge step and it is bound to be dangerous and to open up all sorts of new tensions. As the Governor of the Bank of England said the other night, it means that it forces adjustment on to migration, as has been said, and on to fiscal transfers of a kind far greater than anything the Community or Union budget could conceivably cope with. Worse than that, it obviously splits the European Union—the Union that we have backed and fought for over many years.

There is no way in which the Italians could meet the criteria which the Germans insist are necessary if, as they say, the new currency—not to be the ecu—must be stronger and as strong as the deutschmark. There is absolutely no way that that commitment can be squared with the state of the Italian, Belgian or several other economies.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Howell: I do not have time to give way.

It is not really in Britain's interests—it is easier for me than for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to say that—to take our own global financial system into a regional, rigid currency framework. That simply is not in our interests. I can say that; perhaps my right hon. Friend cannot, but I believe that that is the position that we shall come to. All shrewd and far-seeing business men and financial people now are realising that that is the position and are beginning to question the generalised view that, somehow, it must be a good thing to be in a single currency. That is all that I want to say on the single currency, because that is all I have time for.

On the IGC, I plead with my right hon. Friends that, although there may be no constitutional matters coming up in 1996—everyone will disagree, so the situation will be neutered—inevitably there will be major institutional matters, even if we confine ourselves only to the enlargement issues. I hope that we come forward with a very positive institutional reform agenda, which says, first, that we do not take the Franco-German line on everything as gospel; secondly, that we entrench multi-speed Europe; thirdly, that we enshrine our national Parliaments effectively in the decision-making system rather than just talk about it—we have some ideas in the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on that; fourthly, that we clarify the Council of Ministers' supreme role in the system; and, fifthly, that we limit and define the powers of the Commission.

The Commission is much too powerful. It is much too insidious in trying to make its way into common foreign security policy and defence policy, which it is not qualified to administer or to pronounce upon. If we want to keep matters democratic and to build our security system on the successes of NATO, we shall ask the Commission to support clear delineation, clear definition and clear limitation of its own powers. Also, we must ask for the reform of the highly political European Court of Justice.

Those are the things that we must do at the IGC. We should have the confidence as a nation to put forward a very positive agenda for the intergovernmental conference. Please do not let us stand back and hope that

nothing much will happen if we keep our heads down. We need to be very positive, and we need to say that we can help to shape a Europe of nation states and put ourselves at the heart of Europe, but it has to be the right kind of Europe.

6.15 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): I begin by nailing a lie that has been levelled at Labour Members. The Prime Minister said that we had abandoned Britain's veto in Europe. Labour's manifesto at the European elections last year stated:

"The Labour party has long argued for qualified majority voting in important areas such as the environment and social affairs. But we have always insisted, too, on maintaining the principle of unanimity for decision-making in areas such as fiscal and budgetary policy, foreign and security issues, changes to the Treaty of Rome, and other areas of key national interest."

In other words, we have said that we will keep the British veto, contrary to what the Prime Minister asserted.

I welcome the speech of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and join him in making a plea for a change in the terms of the debate on Europe. I am someone who voted yes in the 1975 referendum but no to the monetarist economics of the Maastricht treaty. I am pro-European, but anti-Euro-monetarism.

Europe is imperilled not by the chauvinist fantasies of the Conservative right, but because it is straitjacketed by monetarism and gripped by the mania for deregulated free markets that has been so disastrous across the world. Instead of full employment, growth, investment and redistribution being the overriding goals of European economic policy, price, currency and interest rate stability are being obsessively pursued, together with tight restrictions on public spending, public borrowing and public debt.

As a result, poverty across the European Union has shot up—53 million people were under the poverty line in 1992. Total European Union unemployment has been driven up to nearly 20 million in 1994, or 10 per cent. and, according to the OECD, on present policies, that will rise to about 14 per cent., or 30 million, by the end of the decade, with all the social disintegration that that would imply. The toehold on power that was established by the fascists in Italy, and the serious outbreaks of racism and Nazism across the European Union are disturbing enough with present unemployment levels without being fanned still further by rises in poverty and unemployment.

The goal of European unity has always been noble. There could be few more desirable ambitions than overcoming the divisions that plunged the world into two devastating wars. But the central problem is that, in practice, the political goal has always been secondary. European unification has progressed by putting economics before politics and markets before democracy. Economic integration has occurred ahead of the democratic mechanisms to hold it accountable.

European monetary union would bring undoubted efficiency gains by eliminating the costs of exchanging currencies, which are currently estimated at about £12 billion annually, eliminating risk due to exchange rate uncertainty and preventing currency speculation. Those benefits can be significant for an open economy such as that of the United Kingdom, which, in the past, was often prey to the vagaries of currency speculation. There are undoubted advantages in avoiding that through fixing exchange rates.

Monetary union would impose major restrictions upon the use of macro-economic policy instruments. Without offsetting policies, that would give rise to increasing unemployment in less competitive regions. With monetary union, each country ceases to be able to change the price of its currency and has less control over its monetary policy. With monetary union, a worsening in a member country's competitive position inexorably gives rise to growing unemployment unless there are offsetting interventionist policies.

Within existing "nation state" monetary unions there is substantial Government intervention, such as active regional and industrial programmes and redistributive budgets. Such intervention helps to offset the impact on weaker regions of the fact that they cannot price themselves back into competitiveness by devaluing their "currency" since those regions do not have a currency of their own. Intervention may be passive, through benefit payments from the centre offsetting lost income, or positive, through regional aid provision. Effectively, what happens through that process is a redistribution of income from more to less prosperous regions.

National Governments typically appropriate and spend about 40 per cent. of national income to enable redistribution of income to poorer citizens and regions to take place. The equivalent European Union budget is just over 1 per cent. of EU countries' national incomes. Of course, the remaining national state budgets mean that a literal comparison stressing the 40:1 ratio of national to European budgets is not valid. But even taking account of that fact, the authoritative 1977 MacDougall study recommended a budget of 5 to 7 per cent. at a European level.

The Governor of the Bank of England, Eddie George, pointed out in his speech last month that fiscal transfers from west to east Germany after the monetary union that followed reunification amounted to 4 per cent. of all German GDP. That represents the equivalent of a budget three times the present European one.

The implications seem clear to me. Monetary union should be supported only if there is a much larger centralised European budget—perhaps four times its present size—and/or other automatic redistributive mechanisms, as well as highly interventionist regional and industrial policies.

However, it is not desirable to shift member states' resources to the central European Union level without its thorough democratisation. That means much greater power for the European Parliament over the Commission and the Council of Ministers and also, crucially, over the European central bank. The policy, legally enshrined in the Maastricht treaty, of a European bank independent of democratic control and dedicated almost exclusively to price stability must be reversed at the next IGC. It is economically disastrous and politically dangerous.

Putting monetary integration first is putting the cart before the horse. For managed exchange rates and, ultimately, monetary union to be feasible, let alone desirable, requires convergence in the real economies of member states. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow spokesman on foreign affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook)

[Mr. Peter Hain]

said, we do not want convergence in the rate of inflation and in interest rates alone. That would be unsatisfactory and unacceptable. The right-wing monetarist policy of convergence by recession and by squeezing out demand should be totally rejected.

Monetary union can proceed only on the basis of real convergence in growth, balance of trade and employment levels. If it is argued that those criteria are utopian, it must be pointed out that they are no less so than monetary union pursued without them. Above all, without a much larger European Union budget, monetary union is not worth having. The prospect of raising member states' contributions to about four times their present level may not be practical politics, especially for us, because Britain is one of the largest net contributors.

Monetary union is also probably incompatible with enlargement. At present our taxpayers are subsidising the citizens of Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain as the main recipient countries—although I have no quarrel with that process. The three new members will be net contributors, but if enlargement includes Hungary, Poland and the Czech and Slovak Republics—indeed, the Prime Minister said that the EU could eventually include up to 25 nations—there will be real problems in imposing monetary union, because of the large size of the European budget that will be necessary.

To survive and to succeed, Europe needs to break from its current monetarist trajectory and adopt the socialist themes of full employment, economic equity, democracy and decentralisation. To achieve those aims, we need a change of Government. The Tories have no credibility in Europe. Under the Conservative Government, Britain is acting like a death's head at the feast. The Tories' miserable stance of grudging mean-mindedness towards Europe means that we cannot influence the debate. To influence it, we must be part of the European family, and our partners must feel that we are part of it. That is the only way to shift European policy.

In conclusion, if we do not change our policy, monetary union may take place, even if only for some countries—but if it does, it will happen on the wrong terms and for the wrong reasons. As has happened consistently on Europe, Britain will be left outside until the multinationals, the unelected bankers and the deregulated financiers progressively corner us into joining a monetary union on their terms, rather than on terms that might favour our people.

Sir Patrick Cormack: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Can you advise me whether the rules of the House have changed? Is one now allowed to read every word of a speech?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Strictly not. The Chair is fairly tolerant, but perhaps I ought to restate the rule that, according to "Erskine May", it is not in order for Members, apart from Front Benchers, to read a speech, although recourse may be had to fairly copious notes.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. As we have had one point of order, may I raise another? The Prime Minister said that our European election manifesto stated that we were against the veto. My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) has already mentioned that. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is not a point of order."] It is a point of order, because I wish the Chair to get the Prime Minister to come to the House and withdraw that statement—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I can deal with that now. It is not a point of order, because the Chair is not responsible for the content of speeches.

6.25 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I should dearly like to follow what my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) said about the press in the latter part of his speech, but I shall not be drawn down that road, because the most extraordinary feature of the debate is the fact that the Labour party should have had the nerve to table such a motion and to call for leadership on Europe.

Had the motion been tabled by the Liberal Democrats I might have had some time for it, because at least they have been consistent—consistently wrong, in my view, in pressing for a centralised Europe, but at least they have stuck to their guns. But who can take the Labour party seriously on Europe?

When I entered the House in 1970, Labour voted against going into the European Community, as my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Sir P. Cormack) will remember. In 1975, half the Labour Cabinet voted to come out and the other half voted to stay in. By 1981, the anti-European tide was running so strongly that most of the able figures in the Labour party left it to form their own party. In 1983, less than 12 years ago, Labour pledged that, if that party were elected, it would withdraw from the Community altogether. That is the leadership that Labour Members are talking about. If I led a party that had those credentials, I should go a bit easy on lecturing anyone on European policy.

Of course, the Labour party now tries to rationalise the issue. The smart-suited public relations men and women who now speak for the new Labour party say with a wink and a nudge that it is the older Labour Members who hold that view. "What can one expect of those poor old codgers?" they ask.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde) *rose—*

Sir Norman Fowler: I mean no personal—

Mr. Graham *rose—*

Sir Norman Fowler: I shall not give way, but at least I have woken up the debate a bit after the speech by the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain).

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) was absolutely correct about the Labour party. It was not only the older members who opposed our entry and said that we should come out of the European Community; the present Leader of the Opposition made a specific comment in his election manifesto in 1983, and I do not think the Labour party will be able to challenge this quotation:

> "We'll negotiate withdrawal from the EEC which has drained our natural resources and destroyed jobs."

The same message came from the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who now speaks for the Labour party on foreign affairs, and from the deputy leader of the Labour party, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott).

The very last set of people from whom I will take lectures on European policy are the members of the Labour party.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was entirely right in saying that the debate today is about the kind of Europe we want. It is not about whether we are in or out of Europe, but about the kind of Europe that we want to fashion. Where does the Labour party stand after its debates on whether we should be in or out and the incredible political hokey cokey it has been doing in past years? It has ended by supporting a federal Europe, with more and more laws being made in Brussels.

The Labour party's support for the social chapter is a prime example of that. There is no clearer division between the parties than on that issue. This party wants decisions on labour regulations left to individual nation states, and preferably to individual companies. We believe that European-wide laws of the kind envisaged in Brussels will add to industrial costs and unemployment, and will make European companies less competitive around the world. That is why Conservative Members welcome so much the opt-out which was negotiated successfully by the Prime Minister. I cannot think of any Tory who supports Labour's attitudes in that area.

The Prime Minister was again right in saying that being at the centre of Europe does not necessarily mean agreeing with everything that comes out of Brussels. I do not agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup who said that at no stage have the Government sought to set out positive themes in Europe. One need only think of the single market and all that the Government did with regard to that to recognise that that is simply an untrue statement of the Government's position.

It would be a mistake—here I agree with the Leader of the Opposition—to believe that every issue of policy on Europe can be decided by the normal process of party politics, and I speak as someone who, in my time, was more party political than most. We must recognise that, on some issues, all political parties—certainly the Opposition parties—contain different views but that nevertheless there are profoundly important decisions to be taken.

In my view, a single currency is one of those decisions. It is also my view that, if and when that decision is required, it would be best reached by a public referendum. I very much welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has so clearly kept our options open on having a referendum. If I were Prime Minister, I would have reservations about promising a referendum on Europe; frequently, the case against a referendum is put by his opponents on the European issue.

For all that, it would be a profound mistake to reject the case for a referendum on the grounds of guilt by association. I cannot be the only person who supports our continued membership of the European Community while believing that an overwhelming case has now grown for giving the public an opportunity to vote. A single currency, and the single European bank which goes with it, raises obvious questions of the deepest political and economic differences. No party is at one on the issue, and the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) made that completely clear in terms of the Labour party. No party is at one, and no one knows in what circumstances a decision will be asked for.

A referendum would allow industry and business to put their views, and would also allow the public to decide. A recent BBC programme on the subject of a referendum showed that the arguments can be clearly presented. It is patronising to believe that the public cannot understand the argument on the subject.

In 1991, I committed the ultimate unsceptical act of defeating my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) for the chairmanship of the Conservative party European committee. Let me make it clear that I am not prepared to change my position now that I have been liberated from officially explaining the Government's policy. I entirely support my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's European policy, and he was entirely right to keep our options open on a single currency as an act of policy.

I would say to those on both Front Benches that I do not believe that it is remotely possible for the single currency issue to be settled in cross-party deals between Front-Bench Members at Westminster. It is an issue of such importance that it deserves to be settled after a campaign of public debate which a referendum would allow.

6.34 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Hoon (Ashfield): The Prime Minister today appeared to set out his commitment to a multi-speed and multi-layered Europe. He seemed to argue that that was both inevitable and possible to achieve. That may reflect the current state of thinking in the Conservative party, but we must ask ourselves whether it is realistic.

The assumption underlying the idea of a multi-speed Europe is that different countries will proceed at different speeds towards European integration in different subject areas. That seemed to be what the Prime Minister meant before the European elections last year, when he talked about Europe being

"multi-track, multi-speed, multi-layered".

He went on, however, to give the game away by saying:

"It is a Conservative idea in line with the mood of people everywhere".

I doubt whether that mood extends far beyond No. 10 Downing street, and I also doubt whether it commands widespread support among the deeply divided Conservative Back Benchers. It is an idea to paper over the present political cracks in the Conservative party on questions to do with Europe.

Why should I be so doubtful about that? Simply because, at Maastricht, the Conservative Government negotiated an opt-out for the UK in respect of both economic and political union, as well as in relation to the social chapter. It is necessary to look at the effects of that opt-out, specifically in relation to the social chapter, on the legal and constitutional coherence of the European Union.

The opt-out allows the other 14 member states to make laws by majority vote in respect of social chapter subjects; those laws are binding on every member state, with the exception of the United Kingdom. It will leave UK citizens in a different legal position on precisely the same facts from citizens of other member states. Those citizens

[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]

might well be working on standard form contracts. Yet the European Court of Justice must try to resolve legal and constitutional issues against the background of a different legal test according to whether a member state has accepted the social chapter.

That builds a legal incoherence into the responsibilities of what is in effect the supreme court of justice for the European Union. It is difficult to imagine—even in relation to the social chapter—how the Court of Justice could apply one set of rules to 14 member states and a quite different set to the remaining member state, the UK; yet that analogy will have to apply if we are to proceed along the Prime Minister's route towards a multi-layered Europe.

That will inevitably mean that there will be different legal standards in different subject areas according to the particular subject and the number of member states that have proceeded towards greater European integration. I do not believe that the Prime Minister believes that, and it seems to me to be no more than a device to try to unite—for the moment—the Conservative party.

There is little doubt that the Prime Minister was opposed to the idea of a two-speed Europe relatively recently. In November 1990, he said:

"I don't want a two-speed Europe. I think a two-speed Europe is unequivocally bad for Europe."

In October 1992, the Prime Minister said:

"No fast track, no slow track, no one left behind".

That was his constant theme when referring to the European Union.

The Foreign Secretary has made exactly the same criticism of the idea of a two-speed Europe. How is it possible to equate that clear objection to a two-speed Europe with the concept of a multi-speed Europe about which we now hear consistently from Cabinet members? It is unclear how that division can be breached, and it is unclear how the Prime Minister can resolve the differences in the Cabinet on these questions.

The Chancellor has said:

"We shall have to ask ourselves about the dangers that could be involved in assuming a marginal role in Europe. It would be a serious mistake to exclude Britain from the major decisions concerning economic and monetary union."

On the contrary, the Prime Minister said that it was necessary for Britain to stand out and for the Chancellor to set out new conditions before we could accept the principle of economic and monetary union. He appeared to repeat the view that there were further conditions, over and above those contained in the Maastricht treaty, in his speech today. Yet, given the opportunity, the Chancellor significantly failed to respond to the invitation to set out the conditions when the country expected him to do so. Instead, he delivered a thinly disguised polemic in favour of a single currency, arguing that it was not a threat to the nation state. It is impossible to see how that view can be reconciled to the views of the Chief Secretary, who said that he would "hesitate for an eternity" before voting for a single currency.

That is an uncertainty at the heart of Britain's Government—an uncertainty that is deeply damaging to this country's best interests at a time when our economy is ever more closely integrated in the European Union. Our future economic prosperity does not depend simply on the prosperity of businesses in the United Kingdom but must inevitably depend on the performance of the European economy as a whole. That is why we must have a British Government who clearly accept the principle of a single currency. Only then can they argue the case in the European Union positively. Only by accepting the principle can we influence the nature and conditions of the development of a single currency. The Prime Minister appeared to refer to the style of a single currency in his speech. We can influence whatever he means by the style of that currency only if we accept the principle and argue Britain's case as it develops.

A practical example of the Government's failure to negotiate effectively on our behalf must be the position of the City of London. The Prime Minister talked about protecting the City as a centre of European financial activity, which it clearly is. As such, it must be the obvious place for the location of a European central bank, yet we are unlikely to be given that considerable political favour while the Government's position on the single currency is so unclear and ambiguous.

The European Monetary Institute is the central bank in embryo and it is already located in Frankfurt, which has long nurtured ambitions to become the financial capital of Europe. The attitude of our Government is assisting in that process.

Sir Archibald Hamilton (Epsom and Ewell): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hoon: No. I am sorry, but I have only 10 minutes.

That is why it is necessary for a British Government to be at the heart of Europe, but to influence the nature and development of the debate. Unless we do so, we will simply end up on the outside of a single currency. We will have had no control over its development. It will be difficult to see then how Conservative Members will be able to argue that Britain is an attractive place for third-country investors. How many companies will want to invest in the United Kingdom if we are on the outside of a single currency that involves the major countries of the continent of Europe? That is why the Labour party argues for the convergence of the real economic performance of the member states as a vital precondition of moves towards economic and monetary union. That is why we said last year in our European election manifesto—a manifesto that was overwhelmingly endorsed by the people who voted in those elections—that

"Convergence must be based on improving levels of growth and employment, and not just on monetary objectives alone".

That is why that progress towards economic and monetary union inevitably involves not only institutional questions, as the Prime Minister seemed to concede, but constitutional questions. That is why it is important that the Economic and Finance Council is democratically accountable and is developed as the political counterpart of a European central bank. We would expect that bank and ECOFIN to report to the European Parliament and to national Parliaments. In the United Kingdom, we would expect Treasury Ministers to report regularly to the House of Commons on the work of ECOFIN and the European central bank, and to a proposed European Grand Committee.

We do not agree with the Prime Minister's charge that we simply accept all that comes from Europe. We want a developed European institutional solution to the changes that we believe are in principle necessary to bring about a single European currency.

Clearly, different developments are likely in relation to that currency. Before 1996, we will discuss which countries can move to that idea. Secondly, we will discuss which countries will be ready before 1999 and whether there will be a majority. There is a clear danger that, unless we participate in that process, we will simply stand aside and watch the development of a deutschmark zone—a currency based on the deutschmark over which we will have no control or influence. I do not think that any hon. Member would be prepared to agree that Britain should accept the decision of the Bundesbank on a de facto Euro-mark or single currency based on the deutschmark. That is why Britain must play its full role—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I call Sir Archibald Hamilton.

6.44 pm

Sir Archibald Hamilton (Epsom and Ewell): It is a sign of the diversity of the debate that I find myself agreeing more with the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) than with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). Euro-sceptic that I am, I feel that far too much power has already been transferred to Brussels. Everyone in Britain, and increasingly everyone in Europe, is concerned by the lack of accountability of the Euro-institutions and about the fact that, as the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney said, our democratic institutions are very weak. I have to differ with him, however, in that he wants to withdraw from Europe, but I do not think that we should consider that option.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) has suggested withdrawal. When I discussed it with him, he pointed out that if we joined some sort of free trade area we would have to be consulted on any measure taken by Europe. That would not be enough. Let us think of the objections that the French put forward to the import of Japanese-made cars from the north-east of England. If we had merely been asked to consult on such a measure, rather than negotiate from within the European Union, we would have had difficulty in getting that decision overturned. France demonstrates very protectionist instincts all the time and we have to be in a position to combat them. Even if that were not the case, if we were not part of the European Union there would always be a perception that goods produced in this country might be excluded from Europe. In those circumstances, inward investment would be very much less than it is at present.

I am proud to be a sponsor of the excellent pamphlet that I have here entitled, "A Europe of Nations". It is remarkable for its endorsement by Members of Parliament from 28 centre-right parties in 20 different countries. I would not pretend that Europe is suddenly swinging to a Euro-sceptic stand, but this pamphlet is a good start—an embryo of a different attitude towards the institutions of Europe and a view that the nation state will have a much greater role. It is encouraging that it is not British Conservatives alone who are becoming alarmed about the powers that are being assumed by the Commission and the European Court.

It is typical of the Labour party that, having swung from one extreme to the other on Europe—it once took the view that we should come out—it should start to embrace Euro-federalism when wiser heads throughout Europe are having second thoughts, but then the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is a past master at bad timing. We only have to look at the extraordinary debate that he has created over clause IV to realise that. It has produced extraordinary left wingers in the Labour party, who have come crawling out of the woodwork to praise nationalisation, when most of us thought that the issue was dead. When we consider movements throughout the world, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is remarkable for anyone in this country to advocate nationalisation. Such policies are followed only in communist China and Cuba—I do not know whether they are communist in North Korea. The issue has even split the Labour luvvies—some of them who are failed playwrights seem to think that nationalisation is a good idea.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but he seems to be straying rather wide of the general topic.

Sir Archibald Hamilton: My comments have a European dimension because no European parties or countries advocate nationalisation at present, and I find it unbelievable that the Labour party raises that issue. I admit that I follow the advice of the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), who told the Leader of the Opposition that the issue should not have been raised in the first place.

I welcome the Prime Minister's analysis of a single currency. He referred in his speech to the "core" of nations that might join a single currency. Everything would depend on the number of countries that joined a single currency at that point. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) said, a minority of member countries may decide to do so. It would depend on how many countries joined as to whether a single currency would even survive. If it embraces the vast majority of countries in Europe, as some of those countries' economies subsequently deconverge, even if they converged when they joined, that will produce massive strains. Hon. Members have already referred to migration and the need for significant fiscal transfers across Europe.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Conservative party has been handed the most wonderful gift this evening? We have been told that the Labour party is committed to a single currency. Opinion is rapidly changing in the City of London among more informed industrialists. We now know that hundreds of thousands of jobs would have to be shed in this country to meet the convergence criteria necessary to join a single currency. Cannot we now say, honestly and legitimately, that the Labour party is adopting a policy of high unemployment?

Sir Archibald Hamilton: That would be consistent with many other Labour policies, such as a minimum wage and the social chapter, which would deprive this country of a large number of jobs.

[Sir Archibald Hamilton]

The ultimate question, when considering the effects of migration as people move from areas of high unemployment to areas where they could get jobs, is whether the people of Europe feel more European than, say, the French. There is no great evidence, for instance, that the French feel so European that they are prepared to take a broad-minded view towards Polish workers in the ferry industry. They might be equally intolerant of poverty-stricken Italians coming up from Naples to work on the ferries. Europe cannot be compared to America, which takes a much more tolerant view of its people migrating from one side of the country to the other. The difficulties in Europe would be far greater.

What is needed is a wholesale repatriation of policies that concern purely domestic matters. There is a growing agitation in the country that Europe is interfering in far too many matters for which it does not have a mandate. Foremost among those should be the common agricultural policy. There is no doubt that if we want the Visegrad countries to join Europe, the CAP must be completely overhauled. However, we are limited in our ability to overhaul it further as long as it is held by the Commission. It should be repatriated in stages, the CAP budget should be reduced, and the cohesion fund should ultimately be phased out.

The European Commission must be reduced to what it should be—a civil service to carry out the wishes of the Council of Ministers. The European Court, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford alluded, must stop making laws on the hoof.

Finally, the motion before us has been carefully drafted by the Opposition to seduce my hon. Friends on the Euro-sceptic wing of the party into supporting a Labour party motion. But, let us face it, that Labour party is even more divided than we are on Europe. It is committed to the social chapter, which will increase costs and make many of our industries uncompetitive. It cannot quite make up its mind how quickly it would go into a single currency, but it would certainly be quicker than we would be prepared to go. We have now had a great argument about majority voting, but there is no doubt in my mind that we would see a massive extension of majority voting if Labour ever came to power.

So I ask my hon. Friends—I am sad that there are not more present who are on the right of the party—to oppose this cynical measure root and branch, or they will fall into the trap that has been carefully laid for them by the Leader of the Opposition and support a party whose vision of Europe is the antithesis of everything which the Euro-sceptics, including me, stand for. I should like to see my hon. Friends back in the fold of the Conservative party tonight and I hope that they will support the Government in the Division Lobby.

6.54 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I welcome this debate and the opportunity to take part in it. I have listened to most of the debate and two speeches were outstanding. I mean no disrespect to any of my right hon. and hon. Friends, or to Conservative Members, but the speech by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition was the best that I have heard from him and I compliment him on it. I may do the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) harm if I say that his speech was another exceptional contribution to the debate. I judged it by the responses that he had from some of his colleagues behind him and I was reminded where the Opposition are, as opposed to where the enemy is. His speech was enlightening and well worthy of the debate.

Tonight's debate is about government. It is about government of the European Union, but we should not overlook the fact that it is also about government of the United Kingdom. It is about national interests and sovereignty. This country is suffering because of indecisive government. The Prime Minister is a prisoner within his own Cabinet and party. Any Government should go that extra mile for their country, but, far from doing that, they do not want to leave the starting blocks. To judge by some of the comments that I heard this afternoon, some of them do not even want to move forward from the starting block but would rather run backwards.

In my capacity as Chairman of the European Legislation Select Committee, I have a chance to meet colleagues who represent their Governments in other member states. I have just returned from COSAC, the Conference of European Affairs Committees, in Paris this week. Those who listened to the Prime Minister in the Frost interview recently will have had the impression that the intergovernmental conference in 1996 will be a status quo conference, but that is not the view of other member states. Hon. Members had better understand that they will not sit back and allow Europe to stagnate because of the domestic problems of one member state.

My Select Committee has just started its inquiry into the IGC and hopes to report before the end of the summer. I suspect—I may be wrong and the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary may disagree—that the discussion of the 1996 IGC will cause great problems for the Prime Minister, and I honestly do not believe that he has any intention of going to that conference before a general election. I welcome the notion of a general election in the summer of 1997, but I doubt whether we shall have one. I say to my hon. Friends and to my party in the country, whenever I get a chance to do so, that we must prepare for a cut and run general election. I believe that the Government dare not go to the IGC as divided as they are; no doubt there will be some pasting together.

The former chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), spoke about the Labour party coming and ebbing with its opinion on Europe. I remember him going to join his family and then coming back into the Government and then going back to join his family. He has done some ebbing in his time.

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): Cheap.

Mr. Hood: I do not think that it is cheap at all. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to criticise the Labour party, he should look in before he looks out.

On the single currency, I have to tell some Conservative Members that when they voted for the Single European Act, they should not have been surprised that the single currency was coming further down the line. When I hear the Chancellor of the Exchequer trying to say that there could be monetary union without political union, I think that he either discredits himself if he believes it, or he discredits the House if he expects us to believe it, because I suggest that it is nonsense.

When the Prime Minister talks about enlargement of the European Union, as he did today, he talks about a super 25 or 27 membership in 10 or 15 years. Does he really believe that? The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said the same thing today. Are we being realistic when we say that?

It is impossible to say that one wants to maintain one's veto, double the size of the Union and leave every small country with a veto and also to say, as did the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton), that one wants changes in the common agricultural policy. If anyone in the House tonight believes that we can change the CAP without getting rid of the veto or introducing qualified majority voting, they are kidding themselves. I do not think that those people are kidding themselves because, at the end of the day, we are all professionals. It is worse than that. They are kidding the public, and they are kidding the electorate. Of course it is impossible to reform the CAP without qualified majority voting. If the Prime Minister says that he wants to double the size of the Union and retain the veto, he argues the incredible.

At Question Time today, the Minister of State at the Foreign Office, the hon. Member for Boothferry (Mr. Davis), mentioned the French initiative on Cyprus. Cyprus was promised that it would be allowed to apply to join the Union this year, but that has now been put off until 1997 after the IGC, as has been suggested by the French. In my opinion, the fact that our Government voted for that, when they are part of that guaranteeing power, has let down the people of Cyprus. I do not accept that that is the right thing to do. They were not doing enough to get Cyprus into the Union.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is talking about. At Corfu, it was agreed by everyone that, for the first time, Cyprus and Malta would be part of the next wave of enlargement. No date was set. It is now in prospect—it may be agreed next week—that there should be an undertaking for the first time. I support that. It is a very big step forward, and the Government of the Republic of Cyprus warmly welcome it. I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is on about.

Mr. Hood: I shall help the Foreign Secretary out. *[Interruption.]* In a recent Council of Foreign Ministers, there was a 14 to one vote about the position in Cyprus, when the Greeks voted against the proposal to leave the consideration of Cyprus until after the 1996 IGC. We know that moves are afoot to postpone that even longer, into 1997. We are walking away from our responsibility to Cyprus when we repeatedly put it off, as we have done.

I am not opposed to the principle of referendums. They are part of a democratic process. However, I think that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said today that, before one has referendums, one should have leadership. It is nonsense to talk about referendums when any changes are two years away. I have been persuaded away from that point of view.

The only referendum that the Union needs, and the only referendum that the nation needs, is a general election. The sooner that that general election takes place—the sooner we have a Government who will go into Europe and represent the best interests of the people, not the interests of the domestic party—the better.

7.4 pm

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): I shall not follow the speech of the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), even the parts of it that I understood, because I disagree with most of what I understood him to say. Specifically, I think that he was less than charitable. The best speech in the debate was made from the Government Front Bench, by the Prime Minister. It was straightforward and factual. It covered all the ground, and it should have given every possible reason for every hon. Member on the Conservative side of the House, or all hon. Members who ought to sit on the Conservative side of the House, to be in the Government Lobby tonight.

I shall not be unkind about the Leader of the Opposition, because his speech will no doubt look very good on television, but if one analyses it one will realise that it is most remarkable for the things that he did not say and the arguments that he left out.

If I may make an argument that is perhaps new in the debate, a great many people in the country are sceptical about Europe. I am talking not about in the House but in the country as a whole. Some are very sceptical and some are mildly sceptical, but it does not follow that most people want us to leave the Union. Being sceptical about Europe is not the same as opposing Europe. We should clear the confusion about that.

If the Union cannot stand constructive criticism, there is something very wrong with it. If it cannot tackle fraud and cheating on the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy, there is something wrong with the Commission; we should never forget that. We should never forget, as participants in a national Government, that national Governments in the Union are giving illegal aid to their industry to the detriment of our industry. We should seek to ensure that that is put right.

I was especially glad to note the action that is being taken by the Department of Trade and Industry on the steel industry. The European steel industry is in a shambles. It is ironic that that should be so, because that was one of the original reasons why Europe combined.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Cranley Onslow: No; I will not give way. I am sorry but I have no time.

The Department of Trade and Industry has found it necessary to set up a steel subsidies monitoring committee to gather information about illegal subsidies and to pass that on to the Commission for action. The Department, I understand, warned British contractors that if they buy steel from certain fabricators overseas, they need not necessarily expect that it will meet the tariff entry requirements, because it has been illegally subsidised by the Governments concerned.

That state of affairs is not confined to the steel industry. Anyone who takes an interest in the subsidy issue at Commission level will know that there have been good grounds for criticising the Governments of Italy and Spain for subsidising their aluminium industry and good grounds for criticising the Government of France for subsidising their aviation industry. Both of those ran clean counter to the letter and the spirit for which the Union is supposed to stand.

[Sir Cranley Onslow]

I think that the scepticism about those subjects extends to others as well. Most people in this country are pretty sceptical about the European Parliament. I found it interesting that, just as the Leader of the Opposition said that the Union was important to our steel industry as long as the regulations were enforced, but did not say that they were not being enforced, he did not pay tribute to his socialist Members of the European Parliament for the work that they do to defend British interests in Strasbourg or Brussels; I have no evidence that they do anything to defend British interests. I am not surprised that people are sceptical about that.

We must recognise that there is a need for Europe to perform and to be judged by its performance, but that does not amount to a case for leaving and for turning our backs on Europe, which exists and in which we must live and fight for our own interests.

Scepticism in this country extends to scepticism about a single currency. The right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore)—I am glad to see him in his place—quoted at some length an admirable lecture given by the Governor of the Bank of England, but he did not complete the quotation by drawing on the last few paragraphs of the lecture, in which he said about monetary union:

"it must be in the interests of the European Union as a whole that that decision is informed by a careful and dispassionate assessment of the economic arguments."

If that is scepticism—it is certainly not a full commitment in either direction—then it is shared by the Governor. He went on:

"It is not a decision that can or should be taken now. We all have our work cut out to achieve economic and monetary stability, and to address the problem of structural unemployment within Europe, through our independent national efforts and through European co-operation . . . The important thing at this point . . . is that we all carry forward this work patiently and with an open mind."

That indeed is the spirit in which the House should approach tonight's opportunist motion. It is not a motion tabled by people who are prepared to be patient or open-minded. The only thing that unites the Opposition is not Europe but a lust for power and for office. All their actions are conditioned by that. I believe that they will be disappointed. In the meantime, it is important for us to support to the hilt a Government who genuinely defend the national interests of this country. They work patiently and cautiously and keep their options open. The referendum option is an important one, and I am sure that the Prime Minister is right to keep it open. It is extremely important that we show our resolution and unity in the Lobby tonight by supporting the Government amendment.

7.11 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) got just one thing right in his speech, which was that tonight's debate is about differing visions of Europe. The Opposition certainly have a distinct vision of Europe. Perhaps I may illustrate it by referring to shops. Do people want Flash Harry's cut-price shop, selling cheap goods of cheap quality, and giving no training to the staff; or do they want Marks and Spencer, selling quality goods, giving staff decent training, paying them decently, consulting them and giving them consideration when they have to be moved from one branch to another? That precisely illustrates the difference between us.

I should like to correct my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) and various Conservative Members about the social charter. I remind hon. Members of the Coal and Steel Community treaties. Fundamental to those treaties was the manner in which the workers of the European Community should be treated. The whole idea was to improve their treatment and raise their standard of living. The same idea is to be found in the EURATOM treaties, and it permeates the treaty of Rome, article 119 of which covers equal rights for women, and did so well before we started to do anything about them.

Essentially, the European Union is about people and their welfare—not just the people of one small part of the Union, but all its people. We are concerned for other people just as much as we are concerned for ourselves. Unless we hold true to that ideal, we are finished as a nation.

This evening I have heard a series of thoroughly depressing speeches containing no vision for Europe and showing a fundamental misunderstanding of how it works. Hon. Members seem to have a misconception of how the Commission is controlled, and about what the European Parliament can and cannot do and does and does not do. Hon. Members share a misconception about Pauline Green, leader of the socialist group. She has worked extraordinarily well, drawing together a programme for all the peoples of Europe, including the people of this country. I have heard Ministers praising her efforts, and rightly so.

We seem to be hung up on the question of sovereignty. What on earth do we mean by sovereignty? It means giving people power over their own lives. That in turn means enacting, at the right level, legislation that defends people, that acts positively in their interests and that encourages them.

My constituents ask what happened to sovereignty when it came to pit closures. It was not the bureaucrats of Brussels who got rid of the pits; it was Whitehall and Westminster that infringed my constituents' sovereignty and deliberately stopped them having work. The result is that one in three men in the area is out of work and actively seeking work.

My constituency is a good example of the need for a social chapter. We used to have what were disgracefully referred to as women's jobs, because they paid enough only to supplement a wage. People work 40 hours for £100 or £120, but these salaries are no longer an adjunct to other people's wages; they are now the wages for whole families. What sort of pay is that on which to keep a family together?

I applaud the idea of a minimum wage, which should apply across the European Union. The EU can ensure that we do not go in for competitive beggar-my-neighbour policies. Hugh Gaitskell's speech, which I saw on television that evening, contained a basic illogicality that depressed me enormously. He said that we could not wipe away a thousand years of history. That was an appalling statement, because it did not recognise the fluidity of history. It looked to the past, not to the future. It did not regard history as something to be built on and looked out from. The Government are falling into the same trap.

We have to face up to the problem of monetary union which, for the first time, the Prime Minister mentioned this afternoon. My hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), the Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation, mentioned what I am about to say as well. It is clear to me, having talked to representatives from Germany, France and the Benelux countries, that they are looking to monetary union: it will come. It may not come in 1997 or in 1998, but it will come as soon as possible after that. The House should be in no doubt about that, and it will impinge on our sovereignty. Once a bloc of countries has entered into monetary union, the leeway that we shall enjoy to manage our own economy will be restricted. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said that our policy was one of full employment and that we could not achieve that under the terms of the Maastricht treaty. But we cannot have full employment by regarding ourselves as an island, putting a fence all round so that no longer do we consider ourselves part not only of the European economy but of the world economy.

Instead of pretending that we can solve problems within these islands, we must perform the much harder task—it is harder, let us not kid ourselves about that—of persuading our partners within the European Union that by bringing our policies together we can tackle the problem of unemployment. There is no lack of willingness on the continent to adopt such policies. It is Her Majesty's Government who have opposed every single proposal that has been made by the Commission with the support of the majority of the Council and who have blocked the really substantial measures.

Monetary union can and should help in that respect. It is what we use monetary union for that counts. No one can tell me that monetary union takes away our independence as we now know it.

Mr. Shore: Of course it does.

Mr. Enright: My right hon. Friend says, "Of course it does." Yet this weekend we have had an example of a young bit of a lad on almost the other side of the globe who can bring down a bank, ruin the value of the pound and send shivers throughout the entire world community. If that is some sort of sovereignty, I do not know what we are coming to.

We must be realistic about sovereignty. We must pool our sovereignty to obtain more power over ourselves. To do that, we have to know in what direction we are going, and that, I am afraid, is what the Prime Minister did not tell us today.

7.21 pm

Mr. Tim Renton (Mid-Sussex): The aim of the Opposition's motion today is purely party political. It is an attempt to create an unholy alliance between Labour, Liberal Democrats, Scottish nationalists, Ulster Unionists and those of my hon. Friends who wander in that nether world between heaven and hell, the Whipless ones, in the hope of embarrassing the Government and defeating them tonight. I am sure that, as some of my right hon. and hon. Friends have already said, the Opposition will be defeated in that aim and I hope that all Conservative Members will vote firmly in the No Lobby.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made a wise and balanced speech. One aspect of it on which I wish to concentrate in the few minutes available to me is his remark that Europe does not have just one agenda, and here I pick up the remarks of the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright). Of course, that is true. Germany has a different agenda from us. Its agenda is to maintain the strength of its currency and its fantastically strong record on low inflation and low interest rates. France, too, has a different agenda, which is to bind Germany into the European Union while Germany is still interested in being so bound and before, as could happen after unification, Germany turns its eye eastward and is not that interested in membership of the European Union.

We have a great challenge in that respect. How do we, as a wholehearted member of the European Union

"help to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe"?

Those words cause shivers of apprehension in some hon. Members on both sides of the House, but they are not new words. They appear in the original treaty of 1951. That original grand purpose, always undefined, has been reaffirmed many times. For example, article 1 of the Single European Act signed by my noble Friend Baroness Thatcher in 1986 has as its objective

"making concrete progress towards European unity."

Ever since 1973, the Conservative party has been a willing signatory to treaties that contain those words.

The free trade area is nearly complete and, as we look ahead to new challenges, there are great problems, which I fully understand, in working out how that ever closer union is to be achieved. But hon. Members should not think that that concept will go away, especially as we move from a European Union now of 15 countries to one of 20 or more as east European countries apply for membership.

Organisational changes are already required in the European Union. The roles, portfolios and numbers of the Commissioners need to be redefined; the rules about qualified majority voting need to be reconsidered. I am not one of those who in any way thinks that the present structures and administration of the Union are perfect, but we cannot and must not expect that 250 million of our European neighbours will turn their back on the concept of ever closer union just because some in Britain have momentary doubts, agonies and hesitations about it.

I have no doubt that the progressive solution will lie in what Churchill foresaw in 1950 when he referred in his book "Europe Unite" to

"some sacrifice or merger of national sovereignty"

along with the

"gradual assumption of that larger sovereignty by all nations concerned which can alone protect their diverse and distinctive customs and characteristics and their national traditions".

What does that mean? It means that we all voluntarily give up some individual national sovereignty in order to play an effective part in a wider sovereign organisation of which we are part.

Up until now, we have pooled sovereignty over such matters as trade, agriculture, fisheries and the implementation of the single market programme in order to have more force in the world as a trading bloc, but we have kept it, for example, on tax harmonisation, foreign policy and defence.

[Mr. Tim Renton]

Those boundaries are bound to move as the European Union develops and I understand that over each move there will be fierce argument, but the moves will take place, and that is one reason why I regard it as essential for the issue of subsidiarity to be properly defined at the intergovernmental conference so that there is clarity between what does and does not lie within the competence of the European Union.

The main issue that lies immediately ahead, which has occupied the House much this afternoon, is that of a single currency. I fully agree with all of those, starting with the Prime Minister, who say that much rational discussion is obviously needed about how much control over monetary and fiscal policy should pass to centralised European authorities when a single currency is likely to happen. That discussion must take place before Parliament decides whether to join a single currency and whether at that time to recommend a referendum.

I disagree very much with the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) over his wish to force the Prime Minister to take that decision now. It is much wiser to stand back and not take the decision but to wait until the arguments are better known. That may not be an exciting posture, but it is a sensible one. It is much better to do that than to take the wrong decision now.

My own judgment is that in about the year 2010 there will be only four major trading currencies—the yen, for Japan and the Pacific basin; the dollar, for north and south America; the Chinese currency unit, which would embrace mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, and a European currency unit. Other minor currencies will continue in existence, such as the rouble, but they will be subject to the regular risk of devaluation.

Before then, Britain as a trading country and a financial centre will have joined the European currency unit with all that that implies of no risk of devaluation and therefore of low interest rates and low inflation and higher employment. We will join it because it will be self-evidently in our interests at that time. But it is not a decision for today.

I remind the House of two dates. First, it is the 21st anniversary of my election as a Member of Parliament. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I thank my hon. Friends for their support. I came to the House as a member of the Conservative party, which had just taken this country into the European Community, and ever since then, unlike the Labour party, we have been a lead player in the development of the European Economic Community, to the advantage of Britain. We have always believed in a powerful Britain at the heart of a powerful Europe. We believe in being a participant, not a spectator. I trust that that will remain a basic plank of the Conservative platform.

Secondly, we are only two months away from the 50th anniversary of VE day. I remember that day very well. I remember the mixed feelings of triumph and relief. We have now had 50 years of peace in western Europe—a longer period of peace than at any time in the past 120 years. I believe strongly that the development of the European Union—its steady progress from a Coal and Steel Community to a European Economic Community and to the Union—has played a key part in bringing western European nations closer together in peace. I look to the European Union and to our active, positive membership of it, to give us peace for the next 50 years.

7.31 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): I compliment the right hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton). I agreed with much of what he said. I found his speech all the more welcome because it was in such stark contrast to the normal diet of speeches that we hear from many of his colleagues, which so often consist of false claims about the secret, socialist, centralising European agenda of the Labour party, coupled with attacks on wild, federalist ambitions across the channel, which only the Conservative party is capable of seeing off; about wicked continentals, in league with my colleagues in the Labour party, who, apparently, spend every waking hour dreaming up new ways of suborning the British way of life—one Aunt Sally heaped on another, for the Government to knock down.

It is quite clear to me why the Conservatives have had to construct such a ludicrous spectre on the continent. After all, they have made so many enemies of each other within their own party that the only way in which they are capable of coming together is by creating even bigger ones outside. Of course, it is very tempting to allow them to stew, to delude themselves, fighting one another, edging themselves steadily but surely out of office. But, in my view, the process in which they are engaged carries far too many dangers for our country for us simply to sit back and enjoy the spectacle of the Conservative party tearing itself apart, however enjoyable that is at one political level.

As I think the Prime Minister's speech revealed this afternoon, the Conservatives are incapable of uniting on anything other than platitudes, short-term postures and a postponement of every important decision that our country faces in relation to Europe. What, after all, were the Prime Minister's most frequently used words in his speech this afternoon? "Don't know"; "not yet"; "perhaps"; "maybe"; "wait and see". Why was that the theme of his speech? Because, on any long-term vision of Europe, the Tories have a fundamental, gut, irreconcilable divide between those who merely want the loosest possible European free-trading area and those who see Britain's economy, our trade, our defence, and foreign policy, intimately linked to Europe, and rightly so. That is why Government policy, as confirmed during the Prime Minister's speech this afternoon, is seemingly permanently on the fence, alternately paralysed or in retreat—never going forward, because looking ahead means falling out among themselves.

The Prime Minister is well practised now at looking both ways. Nothing in his Jekyll and Hyde performance this afternoon alters the fundamental reality of the divide in his own party. In my view, he has only himself to blame for that impasse. From the very moment he prevailed over his Maastricht rebels—thank God he did—in the summer of 1993, then inexplicably, to many of us, decided to cave in to them with his appeasing article in *The Economist* of that autumn, they knew full well that they had him on the run. He has been running ever since.

These are intolerable conditions in which to conduct Britain's European policy. We are heading, as the Prime Minister said, towards another European intergovernmental conference of great magnitude.

Although it is likely to fall well short of being a Maastricht mark 2, for there seems to be no great appetite anywhere for any great integrationist leaps forward in Europe, the IGC is forming an extensive tidying-up and reforming agenda, which Britain must address seriously and play a full part in shaping, on the basis of a clear, coherent and, above all, consistent vision of where we want Europe to go and what we want our place in it to be. If we do not—if the IGC fails, from our point of view—it will harm Europe's ability to co-operate more effectively on matters that are of key national importance to Britain: our economy, foreign policy, defence, environmental protection and much else besides.

That is why the Tories' fight over Europe is so damaging to Britain. The Government are so hamstrung by their need to condemn everything that their own sceptics label "integrationist" that they cannot embrace the necessary moves towards greater co-operation which are in Britain's interests, and they cannot take proper and full advantage of what I believe is a more realistic and practical political mood throughout Europe. I do not believe that that is any way to serve Britain's interests. I say that not because the Labour party wants to put Europe first, as is often bayed by Conservative Members, but because Britain's interests can be put first only by fully co-operating in Europe.

Let me offer some examples of where I believe that greater European co-operation is signally in Britain's national interest. I believe that we need a strengthened single market and guaranteed British access to it, and that often requires a strong Commission to enforce the rules if that single market is to work properly. It also requires, from time to time, a speedy and effective European Court, to provide adjudications of disputes, to ensure that we and our British companies gain access to that market. It is in our interests for the European Union to pull its weight on trade, to liberalise in some areas and to combat dumping in others; yet, for some, that is just portrayed as the European Union throwing its weight around.

We would benefit from common action, on unemployment and competitiveness, yet all we hear from Conservative Members is constant talk of deregulation, Government doing less. At the moment, there is even resistance among some to closer working among the police and judicial authorities. We would have much to gain from the formation of a Europol, yet for some that is too much like supranationalism. We need the decisions and actions taken through the common foreign and security policy better prepared and executed, and that will mean closer and stronger, not weaker, co-operation. As for defence, we need not only a bigger role for the Western European Union but moves to create common procurement procedures and greater burden sharing in defence expenditure.

Enlargement towards the east is in the interests of our peace and security; but does any hon. Member seriously doubt that it has implications for Europe's workings, the size of the Commission, the operation of the Council of Ministers and the performance of the European Parliament? Of course not. All that must change. Are we really going to block any extension of qualified majority voting, with small new members being given the same veto rights in the Union as Britain, Germany and France on matters of crucial importance to us? Of course not. All those matters must be on Britain's agenda; they are certainly on the Labour party's.

There is, in fact, a big agenda for Britain to get right in time for the intergovernmental conference. We must identify the areas in which action is needed and the changes that we want, and frame proposals for the necessary reform. The Government must accept, however—this is important—that we shall get nowhere with those proposals unless we are in a strong negotiating position. We shall succeed only if we have already won friends and influence in Europe, and have created such an atmosphere and commitment that our partners are anxious to reach agreement with us. That is what is missing now, and that is the crux of this debate. It is why the Government—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Order.

7.41 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): About a fortnight ago, I feared that the single currency could be discussed only by consenting adults in private. I am pleased to note, however, that today hon. Members on both sides of the House have indulged in the practice. I was particularly interested by the way in which the Leader of the Opposition so clearly expressed himself to be in favour of a single currency.

I do not think that the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) had any idea of the extent of the disagreement that emanated from the Labour Benches behind him. The idea that the Labour party is united on the single currency is absurd. I do not believe that the Leader of the Opposition himself has any notion of what being tied to a single currency really means, particularly in view of all that we know of past Labour Governments. I shall say more about that later.

I welcomed the Prime Minister's approach. As he said, we must wait and see exactly what the conditions are—and they certainly will not apply before the turn of the century—before deciding whether to join the single currency. However, I am not one of those who believe that monetary union necessarily leads to political union: it seems to me that political union means losing control of defence policy, foreign affairs policy and the budget.

Although we are making sensible arrangements in the Western European Union, we manifestly have our own defence policy. The same applies to foreign affairs—although we clearly could not have secured the terms and conditions that we managed to secure in the negotiations on the general agreement on tariffs and trade without the offices of the European Union. As for the European budget, it is controlled by the Council of Ministers, but it must be passed by national Parliaments—in particular, by the House of Commons. I therefore do not see why monetary union should necessarily lead to political union.

Indeed, it would be dangerous were monetary union to do so. It is important for democracy never to depart too far from its grass roots. Whatever may be said about democracy in the European Parliament, it evidently does not enjoy the sustained support of people in this country; we need only look at the turnout in European elections to see the truth of that. While national Governments retain a majority of support, it is clear that that is where power should reside.

The single currency is, however, of constitutional importance, if only because the European central bank will have to manage a monetary policy. If we adopted a single currency, we would give up our right to devalue.

[Sir Peter Hordern]

That has been a precious right for past Labour Governments; it is absurd for Labour to lecture us about the benefits of a single currency, given their progress in that regard—rake's progress, I should say.

In 1974, the exchange rate was just over DM0.6 to the pound; only five years later, it was DM3.8 to the pound. The result of that slide in the value of sterling against all other currencies was that interest rates had to be significantly higher than they would otherwise have been. They were just below 15 per cent. in 1974, and finished at just below 15 per cent. in 1979, having risen to 18 per cent. at one stage. That is the price of a policy that allows the currency to devalue. Whatever we may think of the philosophical benefits of floating the pound, our experience is that it has always floated downwards.

That has consequences. In the case of medium or long-term loans, the market will insist that a higher rate of interest be applied to sterling securities because of the fear of devaluation. That is why our interest rate on loans for between 10 and 20 years is always at least 1.5 points higher than the deutschmark rate.

Arguments about whether we should join the single currency tend to be conducted in a vacuum. Now, in 1995, we are arguing about whether it is a good idea; but in 1999 at least three countries will qualify—Germany, France and the Netherlands. We currently have 40 per cent. of our visible trade with those countries, and the decision will therefore be extremely important. I believe that those countries will adopt a single currency. We shall not be able to avoid that; we shall not be able to opt out of it. The currency will be widely traded—probably more widely traded in the City than anywhere else in the European Union—and a great many businesses and people will want to deal in it.

There will be an obvious advantage in businesses doing so. The interest rate on the European currency will be significantly lower than that on sterling, making it extremely attractive to European businesses. It will not be a single currency at first, but it will be a very powerful common currency. We can no longer discuss the desirability of such a development in a vacuum; it is going to happen.

Whether the currency will spread more widely, and whether that is desirable, is another matter. We cannot possibly know until much nearer the time; but if, for example, the Greeks, Italians, Spaniards and Portuguese by some miracle qualified to join the European single currency on nominal terms, I would guess that the currency would be extremely unsafe, simply because the margins between employment levels in Spain are so different from those in Germany. I do not think that such a policy should commend itself to those countries, although of course it is entirely up to them. Whether we join a single currency must surely depend on the number of countries that join, and the terms and conditions operating at the time.

As a common currency will be formed in any event, I think it likely that we shall join in due course, because it will probably be in our long-term interest to do so—particularly as the interest rate will be substantially lower than the sterling rate. The outlook for sterling in such circumstances, however, cannot be so strong. The currency will be not only weaker but less widely held than it is today. Consequently, the shifts of fortune, which are bound to occur, and the fluctuations in the value of sterling are likely to be much sharper even than they are today.

It will eventually be in our interests to join a single currency as long as it is confined, which I think it would be, to the stronger countries of the Union. It is important to retain control of the budget as at present and carry out the reforms which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spelt out in his speech. We should also try to extend Europe's boundaries. All those features work in our national interest.

Clearly, joining any monetary union must exert considerable financial discipline on this country of a kind that we have not experienced for many years. For 300 years we used a currency convertible to gold and for 20 years after the war we abided by the Bretton Woods agreement and were tied to the US dollar. That suited us very well. When I first came to the House—I have been here a little longer than my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton)—interest rates for Government borrowing were 4 per cent. for 20 years ahead. Low interest rates have much to commend them, and I hope that we can return to those conditions. However, it is rather too early now to say whether we shall be able to do that and it is much better to reserve judgment.

7.50 pm

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I get the impression that many Conservative Members are positioning themselves for the battle to come in six months, a year or two years. Many speeches seem to be shifting slightly towards a more sceptical position. I refer in particular to the speech by the right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), who has become a Euro-sceptic. That is clearly a sign of the way that the wind is blowing for a party that faces defeat at the coming election.

I was with the right hon. Member for Guildford two weeks ago in Bonn with the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. We also went to Rome in the course of an inquiry into these matters. I was struck by the clear, unanimous view in Germany, which was emphasised by Chancellor Kohl in all his public statements and by the Social Democratic party and even extended to the Greens, that Germany believes in European integration and not in the European Union as some kind of glorified, Thatcherite free market. It believes that the political side of the process is as important as the economic and monetary sides. We must recognise that now because when the single currency is established—not if, but when—it will undoubtedly be based on the German economy. As is the case today, Germany, with a population of 80 million people, will be the motor of the overall, integrated west European economy.

The right hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) spoke about the relationship between Germany, France and the Netherlands. It is clear that they will be in the new arrangement. One of the few things said by the Prime Minister with which I agreed was his allusion to the fact that it would cost us if we stayed out of a single currency. We should consider the problems that we would face with speculation, and people wanting to trade internationally and using the European currency rather than ours. For those of us who represent London constituencies with large numbers of people who work in banking and insurance in central London, that rings an alarm bell. If

we are outside the system, there will be job consequences for my constituents and those of many other hon. Members.

The timetable for the intergovernmental conference has been mentioned. If I recollect correctly, the Prime Minister said that it would start 10 months from now. I was not aware that a firm date had been set for the start of the conference, so perhaps that is new information. I understood from the discussions that we had in Germany that the date was flexible. It might start in 1996 or it could be delayed until 1997 to make sure that the preparations are right. Perhaps in his winding-up speech the Foreign Secretary will clarify that.

Preparations for that conference are going ahead in other countries, on an agenda which is not the same as that of the British Government. Our Government's agenda is minimalist and it is one of stopping, restricting, pulling back and reducing. Other Governments recognise that they must take actions that will make the European Union successful. That includes going forward in some areas. Unfortunately, we heard little about that in the debate, but that is not surprising because we have a hamstrung, lame duck Government.

The German agenda will be to keep the Bonn-Paris link central to the relationship. It will also concentrate on economic questions and on enlargement. For Germany, that cannot be done without democratic changes to make the European Union less remote and more accountable. The clear call from the European Parliament and from all those to whom I spoke in the German Parliament is for the question of the democratic deficit to be addressed. By that they do not mean some mythical repatriation of sovereignty to a centralised Westminster Government. They mean democratic accountability, with more power to national Parliaments and the European Parliament. That would do far more than spurious talk about referendums.

While I am on the subject of referendums, perhaps it would be appropriate to hear the words, generally wise, of the then deputy Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, in his letter to Prime Minister Churchill on 24 May 1945. He said:

"I could not consent to the introduction into our national life of a device so alien to all our traditions as the referendum which has only too often been the instrument of Nazism and Fascism."

I accept that that is a strong statement, but Mr. Attlee had a point because Governments who write the question, control the expenditure and fix the terms of the debate can easily rig a referendum to get the result that they want. When the Conservative party calls for a referendum, which is probably inevitable, we should understand why it is doing so.

Sir Norman Fowler: You had one.

Mr. Gapes: I shall come to that in a minute.

We should understand that such a call is not for a democratic device, but for a device to maintain a Government who are in such desperate trouble that they can find no other way out. I tell the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) that I voted no in 1975. I stand by what I did at that time, but the world has moved on.

People of my generation, those who were born after the second world war, must recognise that we are talking about a European Union that consists not of six or of nine but of 15 and potentially 20 or 25 states. We must recognise that it is not a free trade area, but a political and economic union, which we must build in co-operation with the rest of the peoples of Europe to establish peace, prosperity and an outward-looking Europe for the future.

7.59 pm

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): I am grateful for the opportunity in the time available to express my concern about the vulnerability of Britain's frontier controls under European Union law.

At the outset, I should like to make three things clear. First, there has never been any difference between my right hon. Friends and myself about the need to maintain our immigration controls. There is a fundamental difference between us, however, about our ability to keep those controls in place under EU law, as it now stands. Secondly, there is a highly topical element to my concern. The legal action in the European Court taken by the European Parliament against the Commission; the decision of the Schengen countries to begin dismantling their internal frontiers, thus leaving the United Kingdom increasingly isolated; the response of Mr. Santer to the court action; the National Audit Office report underlining the far greater effectiveness of our port of entry controls over the European style in-country enforcement measures; and the Flynn case now before the High Court, have all lent a fresh urgency to the problem. The immediacy of the need to act positively at this juncture is dictated by the Government's own call for an open debate on the agenda to be decided this summer for next year's IGC.

Thirdly, my underlying concern is that of someone who is in favour of a Europe in which the United Kingdom can compete and trade without hindrance, but not a Europe in which our quality of life is jeopardised by a provision in the treaty that we failed to tackle.

The fundamental difference between the Government and myself has been about the legal status of the declaration negotiated at the time of the signing of the Single European Act in 1985. The Government have asserted time and again during the past decade that the 1985 declaration preserves the right of individual member states to retain their own frontier controls. I maintain that it does nothing of the kind; we need something in EU law that does.

The House will be aware that, in 1985, the Luxembourg IGC agreed the Single European Act, which inserted a new article 8a in the treaty of Rome, requiring an area without internal frontiers. At Luxembourg, the then Prime Minister was rightly concerned that that article would create a new Community objective of bringing an area without internal frontiers into effect with which the United Kingdom would, sooner or later, be forced to comply. Article 5 of the treaty—I believe that it has now been changed to article B—imposed a duty on member states to take measures to facilitate Community objectives, or otherwise face infraction proceedings by the Commission.

Advised by the Foreign Office, Margaret Thatcher, therefore, took two forms of evading action. First, she had added to article 8a the eight extra words:

"in accordance with the provisions of this Treaty"

[Mr. Charles Wardle]

in the hope that that would limit its effect to EU citizens. It rapidly became clear that that advice did not limit the primary objective of the article. Her second tactic was, therefore, to negotiate a general declaration, which began:

"Nothing in these provisions shall affect the right of Member States to take such measures as they consider necessary for the purpose of controlling immigration from third countries."

Indeed, the then Prime Minister told the House when we ratified the Single European Act that without that declaration, she would not have been prepared to sign the Act.

That view of the declaration as the British opt-out from article 8a was reasserted by two Home Secretaries—by my right hon. Friend, now the Foreign Secretary, at Madrid in 1989 and by my right hon. Friend, now Lord Waddington, in Naples in 1990. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has clearly accepted the same interpretation, because he has stuck consistently to the same line. In the House and elsewhere, he has continued to pray in aid the Luxembourg declaration. He did so again this afternoon. The declaration has therefore been accepted as a copper-bottomed opt-out, but the trouble is that it is nothing of the sort and it was never regarded as such by our European partners.

My right hon. and noble Friend, Baroness Thatcher, has said in her memoirs, in a chapter ironically entitled, "Jeux sans frontières", that neither the Commission, the Council nor the European Court would be prepared in the long run to uphold what she had agreed in the declaration. So at some critical point, she concluded that the advice she had been given had been duff. My right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) said in his recent autobiography that he was advised by Home Office officials, before Maastricht, that the declaration was worthless. He asked my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary to negotiate a proper opt-out. He has recently repeated that claim. Presumably he received the same advice that reportedly was given to my right hon. Friends before Maastricht, making it clear that the declaration did not constitute a derogation from article 8a.

As I have said, it is no secret among other member states that the declaration cannot deprive the now entitled article 7a of its practical effectiveness. That article establishes a clear and simple objective, which allows no margin of discretion, which is that passport controls exercised only on the occasion of crossing an internal frontier would be contrary to EU law. The Commission made that clear in its May 1992 paper addressed to the European Parliament.

It is also pointless to claim that our EU partners will consider that the declaration, which is not legally part of the treaty, will have any bearing on the objective clearly established by article 7a. Declarations are not part of the treaty texts; they are declarations of the conference representatives and are not, as the treaty texts are, the acts of the high contracting parties themselves. Declarations are not, as such, ratified in the same way as treaty texts.

There is no practical advantage either in reminding other member states of some sort of moral commitment to a declaration that has no legal force in a treaty. There can be no comfort either in Jacques Santer's hints that the Commission would somehow accommodate our concerns about our internal frontier controls, when he said in his speech the week before last that he had an unfailing commitment to enforce EU law. In any case, it is open not just to the Commission, but to any private individual to challenge the legality of our internal frontier controls through the British courts, which will then be advised to refer the case to the European Court of Justice under article 177.

As I said, the Flynn case has already reached the High Court this week. When, sooner or later, there is a European Court ruling against us, it will not be something that we can simply ignore, because non-EU passengers arriving at our internal frontier ports would be able to apply for judicial review if they faced an immigration check that the European Court had declared unlawful. A flow of similar cases would follow quickly, paralysing the judicial system and rendering our frontier controls useless. The administrative confusion and the cost to the taxpayer of many of those who then entered unchecked would cause massive public disenchantment. Uncontrolled immigration is not what British people, regardless of their ethnic origin, want. They have never been asked whether they want to leave Britain's back door open; if they were, their answer would be an emphatic no.

By and large we are a civil nation, welcoming millions of visitors here from around the world each year. That is quite different from letting in the world and his wife to settle here indefinitely. An influx of migrants, freely walking into this country without so much as a by your leave, would quickly heighten racial tension. The first to suffer from those tensions would be British ethnic minorities, born and bred here and peacefully and constructively contributing to British life.

For those reasons, I urge my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to put article 7a openly on the IGC agenda and to insist to our EU partners that the purpose intended by Margaret Thatcher for the 1985 declaration, but not achieved, must now be embodied in a substantive change to the treaty itself.

That is a pro-European argument. It is a Conservative solution, which has already left the Opposition hopelessly divided, as every recent debate on immigration has shown. It is an issue on which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister can lead the way and which, I can assure the House, will continue to command a great deal of public support.

8.7 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): We have had a lot of interesting contributions to the debate, which has at least given us the opportunity to consider some of the wider aspects of the European debate, in particular, the steps that we need to consider in the run-up to the intergovernmental conference in 1996 and the discussions leading to a single currency either in 1997 or 1999.

As well as looking at the single currency, I should like to consider the institutional changes that the Community must face as we consider the possible applications for membership from a number of central and eastern European countries. I should also like to consider the ways in which the Union needs to become more democratic and accountable. We must consider the means of carrying the population of Europe behind the momentous changes that we inevitably face.

Some argue—some have done so today—that the Union that we joined in 1972 is vastly different in 1995. In other words, the Community, as it was, is now a vastly different animal. We have to recognise that the principles enshrined in the treaty of Rome in 1957 have their inevitable consequences in what was decided at Maastricht. Although the decisions taken at Maastricht were clearly a compromise, and even a fudge, we must recognise that the seeds of Maastricht were sown in 1957.

I remind the House that the treaty stated that the original signatories were

"determined to lay the foundations of an ever closer union amongst the peoples of Europe."

That has to be the basis on which subsequent developments have to be judged. The imperative for action was clear. The continent of Europe had been devastated by two world wars in a generation but, while the instruments of co-operation in the early days were economic, the impetus was clearly political. In the immediate aftermath of the second world war, France and Germany decided that it was in their best interests to move towards economic integration.

The need for such action was recognised by Winston Churchill in his famous Zurich speech in 1946. He posed the most pregnant question of all: how should Europe respond to the devastation inflicted by war? He answered it thus:

"It is to re-create the European family, or as much of it as we can, and provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom. We must build a kind of United States of Europe."

We may agree or disagree with the prescription, but it is clear that in that speech Winston Churchill recognised the importance of political and economic integration.

Britain's refusal to join the original six was based on a profound misunderstanding of its position in the post-war world. The British economy, as we have heard from hon. Members of all parties tonight, could not hope to compete outside the Union, and its political influence was severely diminished. However, when that realisation dawned, it was too late to shape the kind of Community that many people in Britain wanted. The original six had pressed ahead, and the terms of the treaty of Rome, and subsequent developments, were fixed in 1957.

The debate in Britain on the single currency has echoes of the past. There is no doubt in my mind that every decision taken since 1957 has led to the setting up of a single currency as envisaged at Maastricht. It should not have come as a surprise to anyone. In fact, there is very little debate on the issue in other member states. They do not have an opt-out or the kind of sterile debate that we have in the United Kingdom.

I cannot understand the argument about the loss of sovereignty because that argument should have been faced in the debates leading to the Single European Act. It did have consequences for the sovereignty of member states because its purpose was to set up an internal market by bringing down trade barriers, removing customs controls and moving to harmonisation of indirect taxation. The move to harmonise indirect taxation impinges directly on sovereignty.

The Government agreed to the formula set out at Maastricht to achieve a single currency. It is now a treaty obligation. The convergence criteria apply here. We constantly have to ask ourselves what will happen with price stability, reducing Government deficits and borrowing and so on. What happens in 1997 or 1999 when the criteria have been achieved, if they are achieved? How can we agree to the convergence criteria and set our targets accordingly but, once the targets have been achieved, say that we wish to remain outside the single currency? It is inconceivable that, having got that far, any Government would want to say no.

Alongside the debate on economic and monetary union, we must consider the Union's lack of accountability and transparency in its decision-making process. It must also become demonstrably democratic. For example, the Council of Ministers should open its doors and allow its proceedings to be publicly scrutinised and, as has been said, the European Parliament should be given greater powers of co-decision and new powers to amend the Commission's proposals.

In the short term, my party would like the Committee of the Regions to develop in such a way that it can take responsibility for regional policy, including structural funds and Community initiatives and, in the medium term, become the second chamber in a European bicameral parliamentary system.

I also want a change in the way that portfolios are allocated when Commissioners are appointed. The initial choice should be in the hands of the President of the Commission, subject to the approval of Parliament. This year's proceedings were a total farce because the horse trading between member states meant that it had already been decided which Commissioners should have which portfolios.

The Commissioners appeared before Parliament but it was merely a facade to suggest that Parliament was involved in some form of scrutiny. I should like the President to be able to decide on the portfolios, subject to real scrutiny, and the European Parliament should be given the opportunity to reject particular portfolios being allocated to particular Commissioners in certain circumstances. That would make the Commission more accountable to the European Parliament. I can see no problems with that. One cannot say that the European Commission is unaccountable and unelected but then deny it the legitimacy that it should have through its responsibility to the European Parliament. They are some of the institutional changes that should be taken on board at the 1996 intergovernmental conference.

Plaid Cymru recognises that the Union has to take further steps to achieve political as well as economic union through institutional change and the development of a common approach to defence and foreign policy. In that development, it is right that institutional and constitutional change is not limited to the European stage. There should be accountability at all levels. That is why there has been a growth in autonomy and self-government throughout western Europe—in Germany, Spain and Belgium and the small member states of the European Union. The best way to make progress is to ensure that, while it is necessary for some decisions to be taken at the European level, others can be taken at a local, national or regional level.

In recent years, Wales has forged new and exciting links with the motor regions in Europe, but those other regions possess a degree of autonomy and self-government that is denied to Wales. If one takes the small—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

8.18 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I heard the Prime Minister's speech with some misgivings and sadness. I believed that we had a tremendous opportunity today to hear a speech that could have defined a new way forward for a new Europe, instead of which we heard, in effect, an endorsement of the position under the Maastricht treaty. Unless and until we renegotiate that treaty, I fear that we are locked into a legal framework from which there is no escape.

The Prime Minister spoke today about a number of matters, including the question of a single currency, without giving us any hope that we would find a way out of the trap that Maastricht has presented. I believe that we have now reached a point where it is becoming ever more evident that the people not only of this country but elsewhere in Europe have increasingly moved against the single currency.

Opinion polls in *Der Spiegel* in Germany recently indicated that people there do not want a single currency. In a Harris poll of 250 top executives in the City of London, 63 per cent. wanted a referendum. On Central Television on Sunday, I debated against one of my positive European colleagues and we had a phone-in after the debate on a single currency. The motion that I put forward to reject the single currency was carried by 71 per cent. of the people who phoned in, compared with 29 per cent. who favoured a single currency.

What concerns me is that we are not making the kind of progress, which seemed to be implicit in the language of the Prime Minister and for which I had been looking over the past few years. Certainly there has been a trend in the right direction. Unfortunately, the promise has not been matched by the performance. For example, in *The Economist* on 25 September 1993, my right hon. Friend said:

> "I hope my fellow heads of government will resist the temptation to recite the mantra of full economic and monetary union as if nothing had changed. If they do recite it, it will have all the quaintness of a rain dance and about the same potency."

I would have very much liked to have heard such language again in this debate.

In the speech that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave in Leiden on 7 September, almost exactly a year later in 1994, he said:

> "I see a real danger, in talk of a hard core, inner and outer circles, a two-tier Europe. I recoil from ideas for a Union in which some would be more equal than others. There is not, and should never be, an exclusive hard core either of countries or of policies."

The problem is that the Maastricht treaty has created that very situation. By failing to veto economic and monetary union and by allowing it to take effect irrevocably on 1 January 1999, as I indicated in my intervention during the Prime Minister's speech, the circumstances are being created; the trap has been fallen into. The result is that our Government are truly on the line. By that, I mean that it will be impossible for us to escape from the question that I put to the Prime Minister in the confidence motion over the Maastricht treaty. I asked him if he had not presented the British people with the unnecessary question of whether we would have to leave the European Community after 1996. There is a deadline.

Today I was looking for a commitment that we would not have a single currency at all in principle. When the Prime Minister said that we would not yield to any unbending centralisation, I made the point, with which people surely cannot argue, that a central bank goes with a single currency, so if we make a commitment to refute unbending centralisation, we must be absolutely clear that we will reject the single currency. It is a practical question as well as a matter of principle. It seems, therefore, that there is no contest on the argument. The question primarily is one of timing. I have to say to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that the logic of his position is that we would say, "Not yet; we will make the decision later." He is pretty well saying that we must be practical about it and we must view the circumstances at the time.

Let me turn the minds of hon. Members back to the circumstances of the exchange rate mechanism and apply a practical application of the same principle. When we went into the exchange rate mechanism, we were not bound into a legal framework from which there was no retreat. As we know, although we were ignominiously ejected from the ERM because the Government refused to listen to those of us who were saying that it was a disaster—we had to get out and the sooner the better—at least we had the option of being able to get out on our own terms, however expensive that may have been for the British economy and however disastrous the policy.

If one applies the same principle to economic and monetary union under the Maastricht treaty, who is to say what will happen by 2001 or 2002, bearing in mind, for example, what the Governor of the Bank of England has said about the dangers of monetary union—the practical application of the principles that I am advocating—to jobs?

As we know from a recent survey, Europe is suffering the worst unemployment for 30 years—despite the Cecchim report; despite all the promises that were made. Therefore, if we get ourselves into a position by not rejecting a single currency now and kick the ball into the long grass, which is basically what the Prime Minister is suggesting, we shall end up being told in the treaty negotiations that everything was decided in the Maastricht treaty.

When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister refers to the fact that there will be no constitutional implications with respect to the Maastricht arrangements, which I would not resist if they were to have a significant constitutional impact on the United Kingdom, which is what he said virtually the other day in the "Breakfast with Frost" programme, he is effectively saying that we have adopted a position already, through the Maastricht treaty, which is a matter of principle, but that if we go further down that route, it would be construed as a constitutional issue with very severe practical implications. In fact, it is already a constitutional issue. That is a problem. It is the lack of logic in my right hon. Friend's argument that I find so difficult.

If we get to the point, as we did with the exchange rate mechanism, that we do not want any more truck with economic and monetary union, yet we find that we have locked ourselves into it, there is no way out. As a matter of principle, we should be getting out of it now.

If we had the leadership and the determination to look to the landscape of the next few years and consider the fact that the French presidency may last for seven years—that will be decided in April or May this year—there would be a real possibility that we could change, by that

leadership, the nature of the debate in France. If we said that we were not going to have a single currency and said it soon enough—now—the people in France, let alone the leaders who are squabbling with one another, would realise that they faced being pretty well left in a Europe on their own with Germany, just as in the Maastricht referendum, which got through by only a whisker and would not now if it were put back to the French electorate. We would, therefore, present circumstances in which we would change the nature of the debate in France and, at the same time, ensure that we could renegotiate the Maastricht treaty on those practical considerations to which I have referred.

There are profoundly good economic reasons as well as political reasons for rejecting a single currency, but above all else, it is a question of principle. It is a question of the democracy of the United Kingdom and the question is, who governs Britain—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

8.28 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): We listened with great interest to the speech by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle). It is a notable illustration of the tensions and divisions which afflict the Conservative party over Europe that there is a long list of ministerial victims, who have been either pushed out or have fallen on their swords because of Europe. Indeed, it is a long and prestigious list of names: Lawson, Howe, Ridley, even Thatcher, to which I suppose that we must add the name of Wardle. As consolation for the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle, he can at least be sure that he will not be the last—others will go the same way.

The reason for the fundamental division within the Conservative party on the issue of Europe is that the Conservatives simply do not understand Europe. They certainly do not like it; they have no affection for it, but they do not understand it, either. They do not understand Europe because they do not really understand Britain. They do not understand what Britain is all about.

We have heard much this evening about Britain being a nation state. Of course that is true; Britain is a nation state in one sense—it is obviously a state—and we all feel a national attachment towards the notion of Britain. We all feel British in an important part of ourselves. But, at the same time, Britain is a multinational state. It is a union of four nations: Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland. We can have a multinational state, a multinational identity, and a strong British identity as well. We can be both Scottish and British. Truly to appreciate that should put to rest the exaggerated worries of some Euro-sceptics about the dangers to national identity of further integration within Europe.

I do not argue or recommend that the pooling of sovereignty within the European Union should lead to a multinational union such as the United Kingdom. The way in which the European Union will evolve will be completely unique—it will evolve in its own original way. It will not be like the United Kingdom, the United States of America or the federal constitution of Germany. Indeed, I would not want it to be like the United Kingdom, because, in the 20th century, in particular, the United Kingdom is a model of a multinational union which is much too centralised economically and politically.

The United Kingdom shows the absurdity of the fear that European integration will lead to a loss of national identity. British integration has not lead to a loss of Scottish identity. With European integration, we are not losing identity; we are gaining a new identity. In addition to our Scottish, English, Welsh and British identities, we will develop a European identity. Indeed, that is already happening throughout Europe and within the United Kingdom. That factor has been missing from the debate. In particular, it has been missing from Conservative Members' speeches. People are beginning to feel European. They feel wholly British, of course, but they are beginning to feel European as well. It has become more natural for young people in particular to think of themselves as Europeans.

If Conservative Members really understood and empathised with the new European identity, they could concentrate on the real agenda—the real issues—instead of the bogeymen that they constantly raise. I refer, for example, to the need for radical reform of the common agricultural policy. The Government claim to be in favour of reform, but their claim is completely false and spurious. The Government were one of the main parties to block the fundamental changes which Ray MacSharry wished when he was Agriculture Commissioner. The reason for that is that, although the United Kingdom is a net loser through the CAP, a small but politically powerful group of farmers gain greatly out of the CAP.

Twenty per cent. of farmers receive 80 per cent. of all CAP funds. The bulk of funds goes to a small minority of farmers. That is a fundamental iniquity that the Conservative Government would never even think of challenging, and that is why we need a Labour Government to push through fundamental reform of the CAP.

The same could be said of the common fisheries policy. Again, there is need for a fundamental reform to make its operation more regional and more sensitive to the new enforcement mechanisms. Again, the Conservatives simply do not have the will to pursue such radical reform, because they simply do not care about fishing communities.

The Government are now claiming some credit for trying to move along greater co-operation within Europe on defence. But the Government, year after year, resisted the notion of building a strong European pillar on defence. They constantly told us that that would accelerate the withdrawal of the United States from involvement in the affairs of Europe. Now they are beginning to turn. I welcome that, but I cannot believe that their hearts are really in that development, either. That is a fundamentally important development to pursue. Without a common defence policy as set out in Maastricht and without giving substance to it, there can be no credibility or substance to a common foreign and security policy.

I will not say much about the social chapter, because my colleagues have covered that matter comprehensively, but how can the Government talk about increasing the conditions for genuine convergence among the different European economies when they opt out of the social chapter? Surely social convergence has to exist along with economic convergence.

On the issue of the single currency, the reality is that it will come. It is not a question of whether it is a good thing for Europe or whether Europe should go ahead. Europe will go ahead. There will be core countries,

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

probably by 1999—France, Germany, Benelux, and probably Austria. The question for Britain is: when that European core goes ahead, should we be part of it or stay outside? We have only to ask that question to receive the answer. It is inconceivable that the United Kingdom should stay outside. We really would then be in the second division.

I give a final warning that, if Europe goes ahead and Britain tries to stay outside, we could not retain the status quo in Britain. If that happened it would set up tensions within the United Kingdom itself, particularly in Scotland, which could lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. The status quo is not a serious alternative. We have to be part of the process of European integration.

8.36 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): The whole House will have listened with great interest and attention to what the Prime Minister said this afternoon, but I refer to a speech that he made at the beginning of February to the Conservative Way Forward group, when he said:

"Europe's future matters to us . . . we should debate it. And we have an obligation to shape it and make it more congenial to us."

He then went on to say:

"Popular opinion across Europe cannot be ignored."

I agree with that, and I am sure that the whole House would agree with it, but the fact of the matter is that, especially in this country, every stage of the process towards European integration has been rammed through Parliament, to the virtual exclusion of what people outside this place are thinking. The treaty of accession was rammed through the House against the better judgment of several prominent and principled Conservative Members of Parliament. The Single European Act was rammed through Parliament after a guillotined debate. The Maastricht treaty itself involved a vote of confidence. More recently, of course, the European finance Bill involved a motion of confidence to which seven of my colleagues and I declined to respond.

Since then, I and my eight colleagues have been on the receiving end of thousands of letters, the majority of which have said three things: first, "We agree with you on the issue"; secondly, "Thank goodness someone is at last standing up for what we believe in"; and, thirdly, "Don't give in!" Very sadly, many of them sign off as "Disillusioned Tory", "Ex-party Worker", or "Former Tory Voter".

Those are signals which our Government simply cannot afford to ignore. With a general election two years away, those are messages which they must heed or face the consequences. It is no longer a question of appeasing foreign Governments, placating querulous Cabinet Ministers, or wooing the Whipless Back Benchers. The Government must listen to the people. Sooner or later, the political classes will have to obtain a mandate for their European policies from the very people who put us here. Sooner or later they will have to recognise that there are only two ways of doing that—either through a referendum or by offering a real choice at the next general election. To my colleagues I say simply that if by the next general election the Conservative party does not offer that real choice, make no bones about it, others most certainly will.

I make no secret of my own preference. It would be for the Tory party to be seen as the party offering a clear and unambiguous alternative to the sell-out promised by the socialist Opposition parties. I should like to hear my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who has been kind enough to write the foreword to a pamphlet entitled "A Europe of Nations", say that he stands four-square behind the 49 conclusions that my 11 colleagues and I published in that pamphlet.

Those conclusions are supported by 28 centre-right parties in 20 other European countries. They are not the findings of an isolated minority but the considered opinions of respected mainstream politicians in this country and on the continent—indeed, across the whole of Europe.

The conclusions are in no way demands. They represent a series of serious and thoughtful suggestions that in our opinion would strengthen the Government's hand at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference and significantly improve the Tory party's prospects at the next general election. Whether the Government adopt those suggestions is of course a matter for the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to decide. But that is a judgment that they must now make—and by their judgment they will themselves be judged.

I shall make one final point. There is at the moment a depth of disillusion with politicians, and a contempt for the arrogance and deceit of the political classes that will not be dispelled by empty rhetoric. To use a modern idiom, the voters want to see the beef.

It has been a long time coming, but the moment has finally arrived when we must start unbundling the European Union so that different groups of members can co-operate flexibly in different areas of policy, all within the constant nexus of the single market. Areas of policy that are of purely domestic concern should be ring-fenced or reserved exclusively for national Governments. That arrangement should be enshrined in national constitutions, which in the United Kingdom would entail an Act of Parliament guaranteeing national sovereignty in specified internal areas.

The institutions of the European Union must be overhauled to reverse the current one-way drift to federalism. The Commission should be reduced to the role of a civil service, and the European Court must stop making law on the hoof. The European Parliament should be prevented from competing with national Parliaments for power. Last but not least, all articles that provide for monetary union should be removed from the treaties so that a single currency could come about only by evolution and with the full consent of all participating countries.

I believe that the whole nation would rejoice to hear the Government endorse a message of national sovereignty, of national self-confidence and the reassertion of the Conservative party as the only truly national party in British politics.

8.43 pm

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): We have heard three speeches tonight—one for Europe from the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), one for the nation from the Leader of the Opposition, and one for and to his party from the Prime Minister. If I put myself in the position of any other member of the

European Union, or of its newspapers or of its politicians, and went through the Prime Minister's speech looking for some guidance or direction, I should find none.

On a Euro-currency the Prime Minister said, "Yes, maybe, not sure, wait and see." On a referendum he said, "Possibly, could be." He said something strong about defence, but I am not sure whether our friends and partners in NATO would be quite as keen as the Prime Minister seems to be to regard Britain as the Gurkhas or the Spartans of Europe in exchange for being left alone to pursue our own course in so many other areas.

A key part of the debate has been about a single European currency, although more properly under the treaty we should be talking about economic and monetary union. We have not heard much this evening about the aspects of economic union that go far beyond the simple, single market, free trade area that is the lowest common denominator uniting members of the Conservative party.

The debate has been extremely interesting, and listening to it has made me realise that the Conservative party, or some of its members, oppose economic and monetary union because it requires a pooling of sovereignty. They believe in the mythical concept of a currency of which this country must under no circumstances lose control.

If the British currency were so powerful and of such great value, and if in the past 15 years it had maintained a common value against any other currency for more than 18 or 20 months, there might be some sense in that argument. But the plain fact is that since 1979 our pound has been the sick man on the roller coaster of other world currencies. Some Labour Members demand the right to devalue, saying that the weapon of devaluation should always be in the armoury of a national Government. I tell them, and some Conservative Members, too, that devaluation was, is and always will be the soft option.

The hard option—the socialist option, or at least the social democratic option—is to remake our labour market and our economy on the basis of partnership, of industry and of fairly distributed growth to ensure, as in Germany and in the dynamic Asian economies, that we become a world beater rather than a country whose companies are taken over one by one and whose banks collapse when some wide boy from Watford goes on a spree in Singapore.

In a nutshell, I am a hard currency and cheap money man; I favour a hard currency outside and low interest rates inside. I am glad to say that, after many deviations, that is a policy for which I hope the Labour party now stands.

However, we must go beyond the currency question, because the historic duty of 300 years of British statespersonship has been to ensure that there does not develop on the continent a military, an ideological or a religious bloc so powerful and predominant that it reduces our capacity for independent and sovereign manoeuvre.

I tell both my colleagues and Conservative Members that with the formation of a Franco-German deutschmark bloc—surely that will come—there will exist exactly such an economic hegemonic unit that will control so much of the European economy that from the people who will then be running Europe the message will come to Britain, as an offshore island with an offshore currency, that the line has been determined and that Britain can play no part in determining what that line should be.

A point that has not be raised much today concerns the present fundamental democratic deficit in Europe. Yes, the people of this country and of the other European nations are unsure of the direction in which they are being taken. The answer to that problem is not to opt out again and again but to make the procedures of Europe more transparent and to make the Commission, whether it is a civil service or consists of former Ministers, far more accountable and to put it under democratic control.

That will mean accepting that we must tackle the problem of the free movement of people, which is a fundamental part of the more integrated European model that we are trying to create. The free movement of people, which has been wickedly confused with the question of immigration from outside the European Union, is very precious to Europe. We cannot have the free movement of goods and capital without the free movement of peoples, and anybody who pretends otherwise and puts up border patrols and road blocks at every port, road and tunnel into the UK will find that if that is how we treat our partners' people, they may start treating our goods in a similar way.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): The hon. Gentleman is talking about the citizens of the European Union moving about freely within the Union, and that is one thing. There are 5.5 million people inside the European Union from other countries. Is he suggesting that they should be able to move about freely within the Union and come to the UK without restriction?

Mr. MacShane: If Europe recreates the controls over all roads and methods of transport which it had immediately after the war, it will be a disaster. If Britain alone recreates or overemphasises those controls, the rest of Europe will not necessarily be happy when dealing with other areas such as the movement of goods, services and capital.

The point has been put that the IGC is simply a minor tidying-up affair and the Prime Minister said that, in due course, the Government will put the proposals to the House. He may be indulging in some wishful thinking, because the IGC will have to look at the substantial question of how European nations—those now in the EU and those seeking to join—relate to each other. Every enlargement of the European Union has led not to a loosening of relations, but to a tightening of them. If we want the free movement of goods, capital and people, we need regulations.

There is an idea that 27 countries could exercise a veto over all the issues. We know which issues are important to us, but other issues are important to other countries. What if Poland, for example, said that it would veto any changes or reforms to the common agricultural policy? Placing the veto on a pedestal outside the specific area of military or defence co-operation is extremely dangerous. That will not bring the Europe which the majority of Members want. It would create a conglomeration of principalities, like Germany in the 17th century.

The only way forward is through dialogue and partnership with our partner countries, between all sectors of our society and—above all—with the workers and employees who have so far been excluded by the Government from the European debate. That dialogue and partnership is not available from the Conservative party, and only a change in Government can deliver it.

[Mr. MacShane]

8.52 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): I cannot remember when I last spoke on European matters in the House. In recent years, I have been closer than some to the trials of the Government, who have often wrestled with a party and a Parliament rightly sensitive to the increasing impact of the European Union on British interests in crucial spheres of our domestic policies. Animal exports and immigration and border controls are merely two examples currently in the news.

The European Union also has elements which are ambitious to gather to themselves defence and foreign policy matters. Among those who describe themselves as positive about the European Union, there is bewilderment that people do not share their enthusiasm about the benefits of our membership. They blame the Government for not being positive enough, when heaven knows, the case has been put by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and by many other Ministers for many years.

What obscures the advantages of our membership is that there is a pervading sense of being carried along at a forced pace towards European political union without any hope—which in the event proves to be real—of having significant allies in the European Union on crucial occasions to arrest the process.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his speech that there are many in Europe—there are some in the House—who do not want to arrest that process at all. They speak of the destiny of a united Europe, in the sense of one people, one state. They are disdainful and dismissive of concerns about sovereignty, nationhood and the major constitutional changes that are required. It is like a faith to them. There have been such visionaries before. Theirs is an old concept in modern form.

Whether we like it or not, the question of a single currency in the context of the Maastricht treaty is plainly set to dominate the European agenda in a way which will dwarf the "will we-won't we" debates which preceded our entry into the ERM. The Prime Minister was right in accepting that a single currency is more than an economic or business matter, but that it has serious constitutional and political consequences. It would be, of course, an enormous step towards political union, just as the single market has taken us inevitably further down the centralist road.

The opt-out has been negotiated, but that begs the question—which will not go away, as 1999 grows nearer—whether the Government will exercise that opt-out or recommend that we participate fully in the single currency in 1999, less than four years away.

Why should the Cabinet have to pretend to be united on this great subject? We know that some Cabinet members have no objection in principle to signing up, and we know that some do object in principle. Throughout the ages, all Cabinets have found difficulty on such matters. All Cabinets and Governments are composed of the principled, the more flexible; the bright, the pedestrian; the cautious, the impetuous; and are as subject to folly and wisdom, sound judgment and profound misjudgment as any body of people thrown together by caprice, merit, fortune, sycophancy or necessity.

There is no way that any Government—whatever the Leader of the Opposition may naively believe—in this Parliament or the next can be united on the question of a single currency, when the question whether to opt in or out will have to be decided before 1999.

I wish that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would announce now that he is still of the view that he expressed to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee when Chancellor of the Exchequer in July 1990—that a single currency would involve a

"transfer of sovereignty from the UK Parliament of a sort neither Government nor Parliament would find themselves able to accept".

I recognise that we as a party are as split as Labour is—and most certainly would be in government—on such a question.

Although I heard what my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and others have said, I would say that—as with Balfour, who was faced with the equally explosive tariff reform question before the 1910 general election—the best way forward for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister lies in promising a referendum. I am convinced that my right hon. Friend believes that, but has not yet found the moment to say so.

The mechanism that I would prefer would begin with a vote in Parliament. Then, if Parliament voted to join a single currency—only if it so voted—a referendum would ensue.

Finally, despite the Government's self-inflicted minority voting position in the House, I hope that they will achieve a majority tonight with the help of the Whipless. [HON. MEMBERS: "The witless?"] I said the Whipless.

If I were the "Chief Whipless"—that position is unenviable, and is a sort of parliamentary Moloch—I would recommend that course upon my colleagues. That is not only because I want to see the Whip restored to all of them without preconditions as soon as possible—a quiet letter from the Chief Whip would suffice—but because my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has moved as far as reasonably can be expected at present. The rebels, or the Whipless, have had a real and lasting effect on that. In addition, the experience has proved salutary for the Government. Since removal of the Whip from so many, they have found control of the agenda even more difficult than usual.

All Conservative Members who see disunity as the main threat to our fortunes and as doing the work of opposition—work that official Opposition Members are incapable of doing, as we witnessed in all its glory today with either their people or their policies—must hope that harmony will be restored in the Government's victory tonight.

9 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Earlier today we heard the Prime Minister, who was going to make a statement to the nation and make it clear to the rebels why they should back the Government tonight. Our motion is that

"this House does not support Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the European Union and does not believe it promotes the interests of the British people."

The past 15 years have shown that the Conservative Government are totally incapable of managing the country. They have sent the wrong signals to the rest of the world and especially to the people in Europe. They have an absolute xenophobia—something that the Opposition and the rest of the nation must reject. I have always believed that British people are not anti-foreigners. We welcome all cultural divisions.

When I hear the Conservative rebels and look at the divisions on that side of the House I find it unbelievable. Who would believe that the Prime Minister is coming here tonight to plead with his nine rebels? He called one of them "barmy" in November 1993. Not long after that, in early 1995, he said that they were very "conservative", and I quite agree. Then one of those barmy rebels said:

"I would be extremely surprised about the manhood of any of them who didn't refuse to retake the Whip. I think most of my male colleagues are men who can be trusted and we are staunch patriotic Conservatives. We are one group of people that have been foolishly treated by the very immature people who are running the country."

The rebels were talking about their own Government. They have put in place this Government and the Cabinet to run the country and they are calling them an immature Government. I fully agree with the statement by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman)—this is an immature Government.

We have seen a divided nation—the rich get richer, while the poor get poorer—a divided Government and one unbelievably divided party. The Government cannot see any direction in which to go. They have no hope for Britain and are trying to make some arrangements, but we must remember that we joined the market. In those days, I was an anti-marketeer. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Hon. Members may say, "Ah!" but when I was a young kid and used to be wild and run across the road, my mother told me, "Listen son, if you keep doing that you'll get knocked down." I have changed my mind and I do not run across the road now. So, some of us do make decisions and I am telling the Government that it is time for them to change their minds. There is nothing wrong with changing your mind. Many of us do in immaturity things that we do not do with experience.

The Conservative Government have had 15 years, but they are so inexperienced and immature that they are running Britain down in the eyes of Europe and our competitors because they are no longer making Britain great. They are making us fools in the eyes of the world.

I believe that we should go for a single currency and I believe in monetary union. That is the way forward for the people whom I represent and look after. I am sure that if we went among the business folk in my constituency and asked the ordinary men and women, they would agree. We are in Europe. We have paid for membership of the club. Let us get the best deal possible. Let us sit at the management table and not go with the cop-out and the opt-out that the Government back.

Today, the Prime Minister faced in every direction and he sat on the fence. You know what happens if you sit on a fence too long—you get the sorest backside ever. The way that they are carrying on, this Government are going to get one big kick up the backside at the next general election.

We have also heard about the fast track, the slow track and every track. I will tell the Minister this—if you walk in the middle of the road, you end up getting knocked down. The Government have to make decisions for our people. One decision that they could have reached, which would have got the backing of the nation, was to support the social chapter. I see Conservative Members smiling, but in my constituency the unemployed people are not smiling.

I remember when the referendum took place and the Tories were marching up and down the country telling the workers to vote to join the Common Market. I remember the promises that they made—everything was going to be rosy, there would be new jobs, pensions and holidays and our health scene would improve because we would have a big market. I remember the days when the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) and the others were travelling the world and telling us how good it would be. When they got an opportunity to sign the social chapter, however, they knocked it back and let working-class men and women in this country down because they were not prepared to put their money where their mouth is and back the ordinary men and women who make this country and who produce. Those men and women want to be in the market, and they want to get a benefit from it.

Clearly, the Government's role is to iron out the difficulties and to manage the country's affairs with those other countries. Let them come to good sense and arrange them. When we join a club we all participate and take part in its functions, but if the club has something the matter with it, yes, we argue and debate and try to get a consensus arrangement. This Government have abandoned that. They do not want to sit at the table, they want to sh—I was going to use another phrase—[*Laughter.*] Let me put it this way, they want to spill a drink on the table. They do not want to contribute in the way that we expect a Government to do.

I am delighted that the Prime Minister has considered a referendum. I have always supported referendums and have never seen them to be a weakening of anyone's position. Occasionally, we have to go to the country and give the people the right to vote and to make decisions. It is appalling that in this House we think that ordinary men and women cannot make up their minds, that they are all thick and dummies. We are the biggest dummies and this Government is one of the worst in the past 15 years. Why do they not listen to the wishes of the people, have a general election now and let in a Labour Government, who will meaningfully discuss and debate and take Britain on to better things with our European partners?

9.7 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): At the start of the debate, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) lamented the fact that the Government never said anything positive about membership of the European Union. Had he stayed to hear the rest of the debate, he would have heard excellent speeches explaining positive reasons why Britain must remain in the European Union from my hon. Friends the Members for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright), for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) and for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane). I confess that none of those speeches quite managed the vigour and clarity of language of the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham). The whole House is grateful that he accepted his mother's advice and stopped running across the road.

[Mr. Robin Cook]

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) made a telling point about the nature of the open debate that we have heard in the House this evening when he pointed out that it had shown up Conservative Members' shift in favour of Euro-scepticism. The right hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell), whose position on the Foreign Affairs Select Committee makes his view especially significant, made it plain that he was against a single currency in principle. The right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton), whose constituency I know quite well, came out clearly and said that he was in favour of wholesale repatriation of policies generally; then, with a flying change of leg in his logic, he appealed to all Euro-sceptics to vote in support of the Government's European policies.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) also made it plain where he stood in relation to Europe and why he believed that the rest of the party should join him rather than him rejoining the rest of the party. He referred to letters that he received signed by disillusioned Conservatives. Labour Members also receive that kind of letter and the hon. Gentleman deludes himself if he thinks that, by playing a nationalist card at the next election, all those disillusioned Conservatives will forgive the Government for having wrecked their families' domestic budgets over the past three years.

However, the debate has revealed a delusion that appears to be more widely held on the Conservative Benches, which is that the Labour party supports a political super-state in Europe and a federal Europe—an argument sometimes put forward by the same people who say that we have no policies on Europe. That version of Labour's policies bears as much relation to reality as their giant, inflatable versions of our spending plans. Let me remove that apparent confusion so that Conservative Members do not, through genuine misunderstanding, mislead their constituents again.

Labour does not support a federal Europe. On the contrary, we recognise that the nations of Britain have a powerful and healthy sense of their identity. Indeed, that sense of a shared identity is one of the important sources of social cohesion and commitment to social justice within the nation. That is why we shall take no lectures on the importance of national identity from a Conservative party that has taken every possible step over the past 15 years to undermine the social cohesion of our nations and has left a Britain more divided by inequality than at any time this century. Nor will we take lectures from the Government on the importance of subsidiarity in Brussels when they refuse to practise subsidiarity in Britain.

In the past six months, I have frequently travelled on the continent and I have met a number of politicians there who are perplexed at finding that they are lectured on the dangers of a centralised Europe by a Government who have built the most centralised state in Europe, abolished whole local authorities and packed quangos from Land's End to John O'Groats with appointments from Whitehall.

Only last Friday, the Prime Minister came to Scotland—indeed, he came to my constituency—to tell us that subsidiarity was not for the Scots. The Prime Minister cannot preach the importance of national identity in Leiden and deny it in Livingston.

I assure Conservative Members that we do not intend to support a Europe that is as centralised as the Britain that they have created. Our vision is of a Community of free member states, associating on the basis not of surrendering national identity but of sharing national interests. Having listened to Conservative Members, it is not clear that they all recognise that we have a common interest to share with the rest of Europe. Over the past months, news bulletins have been studded with gems from Conservative Members suggesting that they are not prepared to share a taxi ride with our partners in Europe, never mind our economic future.

The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont), who graced us with his presence earlier this evening, called on Britain to get off the escalator and, if the rest of Europe insists on continuing to go up on it, to wave it good luck and goodbye. I am bound to say that it provides an insight into why the economic management of the past 15 years has been marked by such extraordinary incompetence that the last Chancellor thinks that Britain has an economic future by going it alone outside Europe.

That brings me to the other context for this debate. Alongside the strong sense of national identity in Britain, we must also recognise the powerful move to a global economy in which industrial production is now not the property of any one nation state but is internationalised, in which world-wide sourcing by companies has meant that trade has expanded twice as fast as output. Throughout the world—in Latin America, in the Asian Pacific area and in north America—the fastest-growing industrialised countries are coming together to form immense trading blocs.

Against the background of that dramatic growth in the global economy, I marvel that Conservative Members appear to think that the best way to prepare Britain for the challenge of that world is by being as difficult as possible to our nearest neighbours. Britain needs Europe because it provides our largest market, because it provides the largest reason for inward investment to this country and because it gives us the clout of a large trading bloc in negotiating with the rest of the world. The reason why we support Britain's membership of the European Union is that it is vital to exports from the country, to investment in the country and to the jobs of the working people of the country.

That is why we believe that Britain's role is that of an independent member nation state of Europe, co-operating to make a success of Europe. It is what Lord Howe described last month as "Labour's balanced approach" on Europe—I assume that he meant that as a compliment. Lord Howe has been much less complimentary about the European policy of the Conservative party to which he belongs, which he described as

"dragged into a ghetto of sentimentality and self-delusion".

When the Prime Minister came to office, he made a very different speech from the one that he made today. In that speech in 1991, he said that he wanted to put Britain at the heart of Europe. Today, he told us that he was prepared to be isolated in Europe. It is just as well that he is prepared to be isolated in Europe, because he heads a Government stuffed with Ministers who delight in being isolated in Europe.

When the Employment Secretary was asked at Davos about the Government's agenda for the intergovernmental conference, he replied that their agenda was to veto everyone else's agenda—no to any change in the

European constitution, no to any change in the European Parliament, no to ending Britain's right to say no. That was not only a negative approach but a triple negative approach.

I have to suggest to the Foreign Secretary—as a negotiator, he probably understands—that the problem with always saying no is that one ends up being left out of the game. There can be no more dramatic illustration of the price that one pays for a strategy of isolation than the fact that, in the recent argument about the access of Spain to our fishing waters, Britain could not persuade a single ally to vote with us to block such a damaging change to our national interest. Isolation could not prevent Spain gaining access to our fishing waters. Isolation ensured that Britain could not prevent Spain doing so.

Being isolated will not secure the fundamental changes that are needed in the common agricultural policy, the costs of which have doubled under the present Government, and which is the source of most of the fraud in Europe. Every year, that fraud costs European taxpayers losses of the same amount that led to the collapse of Barings bank.

We shall obtain those fundamental reforms only if we build alliances, if we form partnerships. We cannot do it from a position of isolation. To be sure, when the Prime Minister vetoed the appointment of Mr. Dehaene, he reduced Britain to a position of splendid isolation.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): The hon. Gentleman speaks about isolation, yet in his earlier remarks he spoke about the importance of inward investment to the European Union and the fact that there was a great deal coming to this country. Does he believe that we are isolated from Europe in terms of the social chapter? Surely it is for the reason that we have not signed up to the social chapter that so much investment comes to this country, rather than going to the continent of Europe.

Mr. Cook: I can absolutely confirm to the hon. Gentleman that we are isolated over the social chapter. Indeed, the only party in Europe that agrees with the Conservative party's opposition to the social chapter is the National Front of France. That is the degree to which the Conservative Government have formed alliances over the social chapter. I shall discuss later what we believe should be done in relation to the social chapter.

I was about to ask the Foreign Secretary what possible national interest was served by isolating us over the appointment of Mr. Dehaene. He merely swapped Mr. Dehaene for Mr. Santer, who immediately said that he came from the same party and shared the same idea of Europe. The truth is that the veto was used on that occasion not to promote any national interest but solely so that the Prime Minister could prove that he was tough on Europe—because the only way he can unite the Conservative party is by being divisive inside Europe.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): In the interests of the clarity about which the hon. Gentleman's party leader spoke earlier, will the hon. Gentleman now come clean and admit what the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) would not admit—that the European socialists' manifesto commitment to make qualified majority voting the rule means weakening our national veto?

Mr. Cook: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not stay through the debate. Had he done so, he would have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) quoting our manifesto on the veto; but, for the avoidance of doubt, I am happy to correct the hon. Gentleman again so that he does not again mislead his constituents. We said:

"we have always insisted . . . on maintaining the principle of unanimity for decision-making in areas such as fiscal and budgetary policy, foreign and security issues, changes to the Treaty of Rome and other areas of key national interest."

I hope that we can bury once and for all the canard that Labour is in favour of dropping the veto.

I am happy to say that the whole Labour party is united on that. The Prime Minister's problem is that he cannot put Britain at the heart of Europe because he heads a party that is split from top to bottom about whether it wants to be at any part of the anatomy of Europe.

Of all the quotations from Cabinet Ministers in the trenches of the dispute over Europe in the past three months, the one that I most relish came from the Chancellor, who said:

"We've run out of ways of making it clear there aren't any divisions."

Cabinet Ministers have had plenty of opportunities to make it clear. Never have so many studios been open to so many Cabinet Ministers on the same topic. Tory Ministers used to air their differences in code—after they appeared, television commentators had to be wheeled in to interpret what they had been saying. Now, the divisions come neatly packaged as soundbites and headlines. Whole photocopiers have expired in the basement of Labour party headquarters trying to keep up with the recycling of conflicting quotations from the Cabinet.

The Prime Minister addressed the House for a whole hour, half of it on the single currency. At the end of it all, we still do not know whether he agrees with the Chancellor that those who reject monetary union because it leads to political union are being too simplistic or whether he agrees with the Chancellor's No. 2, the Chief Secretary, who is apparently one of those simplistic people. As I understood the Prime Minister's speech, we are meant to conclude that he agrees with both of them—or, at any rate, he wants to keep his options open to agree with both of them, depending on the nature and style of their speeches.

The Prime Minister made a passionate speech for the don't knows. When my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) intervened to ask whether, if the economic conditions were right, the constitutional arguments would keep the Prime Minister out of the single currency, the Prime Minister replied that he did not know where my hon. Friend had been for the previous 10 minutes. The truth is that he had been listening to the Prime Minister.

The really interesting feature of the Prime Minister's speech was that three or four times he was given the opportunity to back the statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that a single currency would not be a threat to the nation state. Not once did he take that opportunity. It seems a simple enough question: does the right hon. Gentleman agree with his Chancellor, given that he has assured us that the Cabinet is united? If it is so united, why cannot the Prime Minister, in the spirit of unity, say that he agrees with his Chancellor? I understand why not: he cannot say that he backs the Chancellor, because to do so would be to offend his own Euro-rebels. After expelling all nine of them only four months ago because

[Mr. Cook]

they did not agree with his policy, he is now reduced to avoid announcing a policy in order to reduce the area that they have for disagreement with him.

I am bound to say that, compared with the Prime Minister's speech, the Euro-rebels' manifesto is a model of decisiveness, conviction and clarity. At least we know where they stand. They stand for a substantial repatriation of decision making. They stand for abolishing the elected European Parliament. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It is not just policy of the Euro-rebels. Apparently, a large chunk of the Conservative party agrees with this. Those people stand for reducing the powers of the European Court. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Well, there we are. They want to see the foreign and security policy removed from the competence of the Union. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I have to tell the Foreign Secretary that at Labour party conferences this is the moment when we call for a card vote.

If all those hon Members who are agreeing with the Euro-rebel manifesto intend tonight to vote with the Government, would they help us by pointing out which of the commitments are now shared by the Government with which they are voting tonight? If the Foreign Secretary wants them to vote tonight, perhaps he could tell the House which of those commitments will be in his negotiating brief for next year's intergovernmental conference. The rest of us are entitled to know. When he goes to the IGC, he goes to act for Britain, not just for the Tory party. That is why the agenda should be determined in the interests of the 60 million people of Britain, not the prejudices of a handful of Tory Members of Parliament.

I move to one clear example where the people of Britain are at present discriminated against because of those prejudices. We are, as has been helpfully pointed out, the only country in Europe where working people are denied the advantage of the social chapter—another area where the Prime Minister is prepared to be isolated in Europe, isolated by offering worse working conditions to the people whom he represents than can be obtained on the continent.

I heard the Prime Minister say in his speech that Europe was increasingly accepting our agenda of deregulation. That is a curious delusion since we are the only country that has opted out of the social regulations. It appears to be based on a view that he is in step and everyone else in the European continent is out of step. I should warn the Prime Minister and his Cabinet that not only are they out of step in Europe; increasingly they are out of step with their own backers in big business.

In the Queen's Speech debate, I pointed out to the House that United Biscuits, one of the all-time great donors to the Tory party, thought so little of the opt-out on the social chapter that it had been the first to form a works council in Britain. On cue for today's debate, yesterday Coats Viyella announced that it had also achieved an agreement to set up a works council—a company which has given £27,000 over four years to the Tory party, a company which was apparently prepared to be a donor to the Tory party but is not prepared at any price to buy its policy on the social chapter. Its chief executive said that that was a

"sensible agreement which will be of competitive advantage to Coats Viyella."

The truth is that business knows that it will never compete on the basis of lower wages and worse working conditions. It will compete only on the basis of higher skills and higher technology. The bosses at the top of the industries that the Government have privatised have no intention of seeking competitiveness through lowering their wages, and they will not raise the commitment, the motivation, the skills of their work forces by telling them that they must achieve competitiveness through lower wages.

Labour will sign up for the social chapter. We will sign up for the social chapter because we believe that it is offensive that people employed by British companies in Britain should settle for fewer rights at work than people employed by those same British companies on the continent.

Mr. Hartley Booth (Finchley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I shall give way on this occasion, but it must be the last.

Mr. Booth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. *[Interruption.]* Regardless of the friend bit, which comes from being a barrister—we call everyone friend as a member of the Bar—why did the hon. Gentleman decide that he wishes to create large-scale unemployment through our accession to the social chapter in Europe?

Mr. Cook: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman explained why I was thought to be his hon. Friend. I was aware that the arguments that we are deploying here are compelling, but I had not anticipated that I had had quite that degree of success.

As to the increase in employment, the hon. Gentleman had better go back and discuss it with the chief executive of Coats Viyella, who pays the Conservative party and has come to the conclusion—he is right, of course—that if we want to be competitive, we achieve that competitiveness not by lowering wages, not by lowering working conditions, not by producing a casualised, demotivated work force, which would be a low-skill work force, but by building a work force who are committed, who are involved in their company and who have high skills.

Mr. Oliver Heald (Hertfordshire, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No. Not even the promise that the hon. Gentleman might make to call me an hon. Friend will persuade me to give way on this occasion. I anticipate that his right hon. Friend will wish to make a speech.

The Labour party will sign up for the social chapter. We will sign up because it is in the interests of working people in Britain. We will sign up also because it will provide a clear demonstration that we will break with the opt-out mentality of the Government. It will show that we are prepared to play a full part as a full member of the European Union. It will establish that Britain once again can be taken seriously in Europe, because we will take Europe seriously. It will provide a flat contrast with the Government, who are incapable of covering up their divisions over Europe, of agreeing a strategy for Europe, and who are therefore incapable of negotiating for Britain in Europe.

Today's debate provided the Prime Minister with an opportunity to tell the country where the Government stood on the central question facing Europe. His speech proved that he did not even dare tell his own party where it stood. Such a Government do not deserve to remain in office. Such leadership does not deserve the support of the House.

9.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): What the House has taken part in today is a new production of a fairly well-worn classic play. There have been some familiar figures in the cast, and some new ones too. There has been a remarkable dominance of Scottish voices during the debate. Perhaps that is because the producer is the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who, whatever his failings as an actor-manager, gave an entertaining, though insubstantial, contribution as an actor.

As often happens when people plan what they think is a clever debate long in advance, it does not usually work out quite that way. Of course there is a discussion about Europe, which runs through all political parties in this House and in this country—and not only this country—but the Labour party is singularly ill-equipped to mount this debate and this dramatic production today.

As has been pointed out—though I think rather too gently—by my right hon. and hon. Friends, over the past 35 years the Labour party has changed its policy on Europe six times. I am not talking about the elegant nuances of difference, with which Conservative Members are familiar; I am talking about six changes, each of 180 degrees. It happens that during that time there have been six Labour leaders, but I must tell those who like a simple plot to their play that, disappointingly, there is no parallel between the two facts. There have been six leaders and six turns of 180 degrees, but some leaders have had more than one policy.

Lord Wilson set the pace. He had three policies during his time as leader of the Labour party: out, in, out. That is clearly the model that the current Leader of the Opposition is emulating. I am not sure of the number of months for which he has led the party, but he has already moved from his original view that we must come out to the view that we must do whatever is proposed in Brussels. We listened to his speech carefully; but if he listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Livingston, or studied what the hon. Gentleman has been saying on television and radio, he would find that the hon. Gentleman is now looking desperately for another fence on which to sit.

Anyone who studies the six fundamental changes to which I have referred will find that only one thread runs through them: the thread of inconsistency. Why? Because the only consistent thought is of scurrying around for the sake of tactical advantage. Having lived through a good many years of this, I am driven to the conclusion that the Labour party—with one or two notable exceptions—does not actually know or care about Europe or European policy. Labour Members see Europe simply as a board on which they can play little parliamentary games.

As I have said, I have lived through this for some years. Over and over again, I have seen the overriding Labour party desire for some form of words on the Order Paper enabling Labour to gather into the Division Lobby people of all shades of opinion. All that they need share is some criticism of the Government's policy. Labour is at it again tonight: it wants to lure the leader of the Liberal party—enthusiastic for a single currency—into the same Lobby as some of my hon. Friends, and Opposition Members. It does not matter what people believe in; they are all welcome in the Labour Lobby, provided that somewhere among their views is a criticism of the Government.

We lived through all this during the debates on Maastricht. I became familiar with the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) when he was the actor-manager, and I must say that I developed a certain admiration for his skill and subtlety, damnable and opportunistic though it was on all occasions. Now the hon. Gentleman has been packed off to shadow the Secretary of State for Scotland and to answer the West Lothian question, and we have a different actor-manager. This, I must say, is much less subtle. Here we have a trap with "TRAP" marked clearly on it, plonked in the middle of the motorway; and we are invited to walk into it.

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Livingston obtained part of his education in the kirk. Had he done so, he would be familiar with the book of Proverbs, which states:

"Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird."

That is what the hon. Gentleman has tried to do, but he has done it in the presence of a good many fairly wise and wily birds on both sides of the House.

Speaking of wise and crafty birds brings me naturally to the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux). He intervened in the Prime Minister's speech, and I feel that the question that he put—now that we have reflected on it—requires a fuller answer. I believe he referred to horizontal transfer of sovereignty between member states. He knows, or I hope that he knows, that there is no proposal for joint authority—for horizontal transfer of sovereignty—in the framework document. He also knows, and I am happy to confirm, our view—which has long been clear—that there can be no change in the sovereignty of Northern Ireland except at the wish of the greater number of the people who live there. If that is the assurance that he wanted—and I think that it is—I gladly give it.

There have been some notable contributions to the debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) chided Ministers for not setting out the advantages of membership. I thought that that was a little hard because my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did exactly that in his speech. When I come to enlargement, I shall deal with what my right hon. Friend said on that subject.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) urged us—we need no urging—to put forward positive ideas at the intergovernmental conference next year on how the structures and procedures of the Union's institutions can work better. He listed the Council, the Commission, the courts and the Parliament. All those existing institutions are clearly necessary, but we believe that they could work better. We certainly think that the Commission should do less, and do it better.

My right hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton), for Woking (Sir C. Onslow) and for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) made thoughtful speeches which need to be taken into account in any analysis from

[Mr. Douglas Hurd]

upstairs on where the Conservative parliamentary party now stands. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) made a rumbustious and welcome speech in which he made the case for a referendum on a single currency. He was supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin). I think that everybody understands the force of those arguments, which are deeply constitutional. Both my hon. Friends will have heard what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said about keeping that choice before us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) spoke along lines that we could have anticipated, but which were nevertheless clear. He acknowledged what is certainly true: that there is no difference in objectives or policy between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the rest of us and himself. The question is one of timing and tactics. My hon. Friend quoted article 7a and agreed that it was accompanied by a general declaration which made it clear that nothing in the Single European Act would prevent member states from taking necessary action against illegal immigration.

The legal position is not quite as straightforward as my hon. Friend suggested. I refer him to the opinion of, say, Lord Oliver of Aylmerton, a Law Lord, in a Select Committee of the House of Lords. In any case there is a clear commitment by the Heads of Government of the time—1985—which included the present Federal Chancellor and the current President of the European Commission on the point.

We have sustained for 10 years without challenge or difficulty immigration controls at our ports and airports. The Prime Minister said today, as he has said before and as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said, that we shall take whatever steps are necessary to protect our frontier controls. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle suggested a specific tactic: that 10 months before the opening of the intergovernmental conference, we should put that on the agenda. There are disadvantages and risks in that tactic, and we do not need to decide on it now. However, the undertaking given again today by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stands.

Several hon. Members referred to two themes that have run through the debate. The first of them is flexibility. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon) spoke of that as if my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had invented the idea in a fit of pique or of determination to be isolated. That is absolute nonsense. We have flexibility; there is flexibility in defence. I have just visited Austria, Sweden and Denmark, which are not full members of the Western European Union, whereas we are. In the debate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made specific proposals about defence and stated and showed that Britain was in the lead in that subject. Others are not, and others may not wish to be included. It is a perfect example of the flexibility about which the Prime Minister spoke, and so it is with frontiers. Britain and Ireland are island countries and we naturally have different ideas about frontier controls from those in countries with land frontiers. Why is that wrong? Why is that an aberration? It is part of the essential flexibility of Europe. Those who deny that flexibility are denying something that is not passing, not an aberration, but is an essential part of Europe. It is a natural feature of what we are trying to do. The United States of America is not the good model for the future of Europe.

The Leader of the Opposition seems quite astray on qualified majority voting. He seemed to suppose that there was not any and that we were blocking its introduction. Of course there is. Those who say that the common agricultural policy could not be reformed without QMV seem to ignore that QMV applies to the common agricultural policy. What the Prime Minister talked about is further extension of QMV, which we oppose.

The hon. Member for Livingston, with a jutting beard gesture of which we are getting rather fond, became extremely indignant because the Prime Minister suggested, modestly and quietly, that when the European socialist manifesto, co-authored by the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), said that QMV should be the rule, that must mean an undermining of the veto. The hon. Member for Livingston became very indignant and said,"No, no." He read again the domestic Labour party manifesto on the subject. All he proved by that indignation is that the Labour party speaks with two voices, both official. Labour is bound, as I understand it, by the European socialist manifesto, which is the nature of European socialism. The right hon. Member for Copeland was shadow Foreign Secretary when he put his signature on it. Those two completely contradictory voices entirely justify the criticism that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made.

The main point that I should like to dwell on is what I believe to be the heart of the matter.

Mr. Lamont: Will my right hon. Friend address the question that I put to the Prime Minister earlier, to which I do not believe he gave a clear answer? I asked whether the Government believe that monetary union will lead to political union or whether they believe, as Lord Lawson said the other day, that one cannot have one without the other? I believe that this is the issue of principle. It is two years since we began negotiations on the Maastricht treaty and that is an issue of principle, not of timing.

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friend is one of the greatest experts on the subject because, with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, he negotiated the opt-out. I have always admired the skill with which they both did that. I was sitting in admiration in another room at the time.

I think my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister answered clearly the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) has just made. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that he was absolutely clear that it was right to preserve for this country the freedom, that he and my right hon. Friend had together obtained for us, with some difficulty, at Maastricht. He went on to answer the specific question put by my right hon. Friend. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I simply repeat what the Prime Minister said. He answered the question clearly in his speech.

Mr. Robin Cook: If the Foreign Secretary will not answer that question, will he, in the remaining 10 minutes of the debate, answer the question that has now been asked five times in the past five hours? Does he agree

with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that a single currency would not threaten the nation state and, if so, can he explain why his Prime Minister cannot say so?

Mr. Hurd: The Prime Minister answered that question and I agreed with the answer given. The Prime Minister went on to make a point, which I think is overwhelming common sense: this choice of a single currency or not is not before the House. It will not be before the House for four or five years at least. Other countries are committed to accept, regardless of the circumstances at the time, but we are not because we have the freedom of the opt-out negotiated at Maastricht. If and when that choice comes to us, the Government will take that choice and recommend it to Parliament in the light of not just one set of facts but of all the facts which are valid at that time—the facts at the time, not the hunch at present.

Of course, there is a constitutional question; of course, there are economic questions, and the Prime Minister went into these in some detail. The only sensible course is not to pontificate about this now but to weigh up the choice when and if we need to take it as a nation.

Mr. Cook *rose—*

Mr. Hurd: No, I am not going to give way to the hon. Gentleman again.

It seems to me an entirely sensible course to which the great majority of people in this country would adhere.

I now come to what I believe is the basic flaw in the critique of the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the Liberal party. The Leader of the Opposition spoke as if there was only one model for Europe and the question was whether we moved forward in some direction which he regarded as inexorable or whether we retreated and turned our back on Europe. I entirely reject that choice; that is not what it is about. There is not just one model. There is a choice of directions, and we are among the people who make the choice. It is the essence of our policy that we should work with others to make the choice which has not already been engineered but which is a choice with which we can feel at ease.

This is a debate that we have had, with variations, several times before. I think that there is an opportunity now—the Labour party has given us that opportunity—to draw a line under divisions and discontents, which have been very real. There are rancours belonging to the past and they are certainly very real. They belong to the debate on Maastricht, but there is a danger in constantly fighting and refighting old battles. Obviously, there is a political danger here—there is no doubt about that—but there is another point which is perhaps not so familiar.

As I said, I have just returned from visiting Denmark, Sweden, Austria and Germany. I agree with the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton). In all the countries that I visited—and this was not true before Maastricht—there is debate on the issues that have come forward in this country. Before Maastricht, we had the sensation—it was well founded—that ours was the only country in which there was a debate. Now there is a debate in all the countries that I visit and, in some of them, there is a lively interest in the ideas that we propose.

However, I must tell my right hon. and hon. Friends and the House that interest in these ideas is weakened and is not going to be effective if it appears that they come out of domestic division here at home. This I find infinitely frustrating because I am quite sure that the ideas that we are working out and putting forward are the right ideas for Europe and I do not want to see that frustrated because they appear to arise from domestic controversy at home. [HON. MEMBERS: "Tell us one."] That is precisely what I am about to do, and I have seven minutes in which to do [illegible]

[illegible] will be happening next year? Three things will be happening more or less at the same time. No doubt there will be a continuing discussion about a single currency. There will be preparations for the enlargement of the European Union. I disagree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup on this point. I do not think that we should be grudging about enlargement. The countries of central and eastern Europe have to be able to comply with the treaty and meet the conditions about competition, about the single market. They will not, of course, find that easy and they will not be able to do it at once, but they are political democracies—they have free elections. Their problems arise from the free market. We should give them time, but we should encourage them and we should not say to them that they are not really European countries, that they are not really entitled to join the European Union because we are too busy sorting our own ideas. We should encourage them to join. That process will go ahead next year and the year after.

Alongside that process, as the Prime Minister said and as we said at Question Time today, must go changes—drastic changes—in the common agricultural policy and in the structural funds. One cannot possibly imagine extending, enlarging the European Union and maintaining in its present form a common agricultural policy covering the farmers of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. That will be the second thing going on next year.

Thirdly, there will be the intergovernmental conference which will consider the structures that were established at Maastricht. As the Prime Minister said, I am absolutely clear that there will be no attempt from anybody to overturn, to destroy those three pillars and say that we must start again. That is not the mood of the Union at all.

We have the Community itself—the first pillar—the single market, from which this country benefits, the single commercial policy and the gradual dying away of state aids and protectionist devices. Of course there are fierce rearguard actions from the protectionists, and we read of the battles. We do not read, so much, when the battles end in success. We read of the efforts by the French to keep out our lamb, of the Germans to keep out our beef, of the French to keep our aircraft out of Orly airport. We do not always read that, actually, we won all those arguments because there was a single market, because there were rules and because in the end, however grudgingly, those rules had to be obeyed. That is one pillar.

Alongside that pillar is the co-operation in foreign and security policy and in home and justice matters. I shall send my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup the speech that I made in Berlin yesterday, which he had some difficulty in getting. I am in favour of co-operation in foreign policy, but I am not in favour of seeking to make that effective by majority vote. I contested that fiercely in the Maastricht negotiations—successfully—and would do so again. I do not believe

[Mr. Hurd]

that we would achieve a more effective European foreign policy if we introduced majority voting and started trying to vote people down.

We have two highly successful institutions in Europe—NATO and the European Union. We have a queue of countries wanting to join both. It is in the fundamental interests of this country that the success of those institutions should not unravel. There are two ways, it seems to me, in which the European Union could unravel. One is that we could go back into a dangerous muddle of old rivalries, rumours of war, commerce and investment constantly interrupted by rows over tariffs and conflicting trade arrangements. If we went back downhill in that direction, just when the North American Free Trade Agreement is forming, just when Asia and the Pacific are coming together as an entity, just when Latin America is coming together, we would be moving right against the grain of the world. One way in which Europe could unravel is through cynicism and neglect. It could unravel if we were tolerant of fraud. It could unravel if we were unable to practise subsidiarity successfully.

Another way in which Europe could unravel is that it could try to go forward in a purely theoretical and philosophical way. There could be some great centralising movement, some talk of a great leap forward, but, in fact, it could be a leap forward into a bog. That is why I believe that Prime Minister Balladur is right to say that there is no point in reviving the anachronistic debate on federalism. A Europe of nations is working together as never before, working with the grain of history, with popular feeling. It is not a question of advancing or retreating on a road which is already engineered by others. It is a question of choosing the right road, forgetting our defeatism on that road, and putting our energy and commitment into the matter that way. After a year or two at this task, I am quite sure that that can be done and that our ideas of a Europe of nations can succeed. It is possible, it is right, and I ask the House, by rejecting the motion, to help us to succeed.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 314, Noes 319.

Division No. 92] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Shef'ld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Maginnis, Ken

Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oiner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. Gordon McMaster.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & Cl'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth, N)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'rd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'sh'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry

Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'er V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. Sydney Chapman.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 326, Noes 313.

Division No. 93] **[10.18 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(East Surrey)*
Aitken, Rt Hon Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael *(Selby)*
Allason, Rupert *(Torbay)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas *(Hazel Grv)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Mole V)*
Baker, Nicholas *(North Dorset)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Matthew *(Southport)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bates, Michael
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Booth, Hartley
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Eltham)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Sir Rhodes
Brandreth, Gyles
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Sir Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, M *(Brigg & C'thorpes)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Peter
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John *(Luton North)*
Carlisle, Sir Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Churchill, Mr
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Ru'cliff)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coe, Sebastian
Colvin, Michael
Congdon, David
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre For'st)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina *(S D'by'shr)*
Curry, David *(Skipton & Ripon)*
Davies, Quentin *(Stamford)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duncan, Alan
Duncan-Smith, Iain
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Rt Hon Tim
Elletson, Harold
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Evans, Jonathan *(Brecon)*
Evans, Nigel *(Ribble Valley)*
Evans, Roger *(Monmouth)*
Evennett, David
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Rt Hon Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam *(Woodspring)*
Fox, Sir Marcus *(Shipley)*
Freeman, Rt Hon Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Sir Peter
Gale, Roger
Gallie, Phil
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, Sir John
Grant, Sir A *(SW Cambs)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth North)*
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn

Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archibald
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Rt Hon Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Andrew
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Nick
Hawksley, Warren
Hayes, Jerry
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hendry, Charles
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Robert
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, James *(Southampton Test)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas *(G'tham)*
Horam, John
Hordern, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'frd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Sir Ralph *(N Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(W Hertfdshr)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, Sir James
King, Rt Hon Tom
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Mrs Angela *(Erewash)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Bir'm E'st'n)*
Knox, Sir David
Kynoch, George *(Kincardine)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Sir Ivan
Legg, Barry
Leigh, Edward
Lennox-Boyd, Sir Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maitland, Lady Olga
Major, Rt Hon John
Malone, Gerald
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Merchant, Piers
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David *(NW Hants)*
Moate, Sir Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Rt Hon Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Sir Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Sir Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pickles, Eric
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Richards, Rod
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Robathan, Andrew
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Robertson, Raymond *(Ab'd'n S)*
Robinson, Mark *(Somerton)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Mid Kent)*
Rumbold, Rt Hon Dame Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Scott, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Nicholas
Speed, Sir Keith
Spencer, Sir Derek
Spicer, Sir James *(W Dorset)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Spink, Dr Robert
Spring, Richard
Sproat, Iain
Squire, Robin *(Hornchurch)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Michael
Stern, Michael
Stewart, Allan
Streeter, Gary
Sumberg, David
Sweeney, Walter
Sykes, John
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomason, Roy
Thompson, Sir Donald *(C'ter V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Sir Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(N Tayside)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Waterson, Nigel
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Rt Hon Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Sir Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macc'fld)*
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Carlile, Alexander *(Montgomery)*
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge H'l)*
Denham, John
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret

Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(S Antrim)*
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Henderson, Doug
Hendron, Dr Joe
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Norman *(Cumbernauld)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheffld, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Mon)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Brdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Alice
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester, S)*
Martin, Michael J *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, The Reverend Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Raynsford, Nick
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robertson, George *(Hamilton)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Londonderry)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Simpson, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, The Reverend Martin
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strgfd)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Warsing, Robert N
Watson, Mike
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. Gordon McMaster.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MADAM SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House rejects the policy of Her Majesty's Opposition towards Europe, which would destroy United Kingdom jobs, erode the United Kingdom's competitiveness in world markets, place new bureaucratic burdens on business and industry, destroy the veto and diminish the role of Europe's nation states and their national parliaments.

PETITIONS

Cot Deaths

10.31 pm

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): I wish to present a petition, the prime signatories to which are Julie Oakley, of my constituency, Karen James, of the Plymouth, Sutton constituency, and many people from your constituency of Plymouth, Drake, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The petition comes from a total of 17 parents who have lost their children in sudden infant cot deaths. They believe that their children died due to fire retardants in the cot mattresses and they call on the Government to undertake further research and to demand a further recall of mattresses containing antimony, phosphorus and arsenic.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The Humble petition of Members of the Plymouth Cot Death Action Group,

sheweth, That evidence has shown that cot mattresses containing fire retardants have caused antimony poisoning in some babies which may have been a factor in their sudden deaths.

Wherefore your Humble Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will commission further research into sudden infant death syndrome, and will ban the use of fire retardants in cot mattresses, and recall all cot mattresses containing fire retardant chemicals, such as antimony, phosphorus and arsenic.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Disabled People (Civil Rights)

10.33 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): I rise to present a petition signed by 1,015 of my constituents, who were deeply angered last year when the Disabled Persons (Civil Rights) Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) was talked out in the House. They are concerned this year to find that the Government may not make time available for the same Bill, this time introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

The petition reads as follows:

To the House of Commons. The petition of the constituents of York declares that disabled people are unfairly deprived of their basic civil rights in the United Kingdom. The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons pass legislation to ensure civil rights for disabled people. And the petitioners remain, etc.

The petition is signed by John Keeper, the secretary of the National League of the Blind and Disabled in York and, as I say, by 1,014 other of my constituents.

To lie upon the Table.

Children's Homes

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

10.34 pm

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): In this debate I could probably say anything I liked about the physical standards, the care and staffing in unregistrable children's homes, the number of them in the country and the number of placements of children hundreds of miles away from home. I could say that the children being placed are the most disturbed and the most difficult. The Minister could not contradict me because the collation of data is extremely inadequate in every respect.

As the Minister is aware, I have pursued the subject of the debate through numerous parliamentary questions. Recently I have been trying to establish when the social services inspectorate study will be completed. The answer that I received was, "In due course." I hope that when it is completed, it will be published, if for no other reason than to prove me wrong in my belief that it will be as scathing about some of the standards of care as the one in the north-west was.

Following the report by the SSI in the north-west, the Department of Health issued a circular, LAC(93)(16), in August 1993, entitled "Practice guidance on the application of the Arrangements for the Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991 in relation to small unregistrable children's homes". That guidance shows up the illogicality of the current situation in which children's homes of fewer than four children are not required to register, something to which I shall return in a moment.

What has come to be of great interest to me is the difference between an unregistrable children's home and care provided in a family setting as offered in some of the brochures of private agencies. The water in that area is becoming muddied.

On that point, the guidance says that where investigations reveal that the home offers care equivalent to close parental care provided on a 24-hour basis by one or two adults, consideration should be given to making the placement in accordance with Foster Placement (Children) Regulations 1991. Note the word "should". But why on earth should anyone bother? It is much easier to treat it as an unregistrable children's home rather than the expensive, protracted approval process for fostering.

If such homes with fewer than four children had to be registered, they would have to be treated either as children's homes or foster homes, and certainly could not be foster homes posing as children's homes, which is certainly happening at the moment.

On foster homes, let me quickly raise an issue with the Minister, which I think is related to unregistrable children's homes. Clearly, some voluntary agencies—I include independent fostering agencies that register as voluntary agencies—are interpreting the current regulations as allowing them to approve a pool of foster carers, whereas the regulations clearly state that that can be delegated only in relation to a particular child. Even that is not a function that can be delegated to a profit-making organisation, which they are as the profit is essentially the fee paid to families. The Minister might like to consider some of those issues and whether the way forward is for voluntary agencies to be registered as

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suitable to approve their own foster parents. They could be registered either by the local authority or by the Department of Health.

The guidance circular states that premises should be inspected before placement to satisfy the authority that they are suitable in relation to the standards set out and then once a year thereafter by an officer from the placing authority. The standards referred to in the guidance are physical standards, and they are important. But my eye was struck by the fact that one of the things that the social worker has to inspect is whether there are any obvious fire risks. I can assure the Minister that when I was a social worker, I doubt whether I would have seen a fire risk if I had fallen over one. The investigation of fire risks should be left to the proper fire authority.

The guidance instructs that police checks should be carried out, but not that a personal reference should be taken up, when looking at the staff who will be caring for the children. Those staff should be interviewed to see that they understand the care that is necessary for the children. The guidance does not specifically say that that should include the proprietor of the home, who may not have the day-to-day care of the children. But the standards that he sets are important for the staff. Nor does it indicate whether a social worker interviewing the staff is entitled to have access to the application form to the agency that employs the carer. Proprietors are to be advised that matters of control and discipline should conform to those that relate to registered children's homes. There is no requirement, however, to keep a record of that.

As for the inspection that must take place before each placement, the guidance does not say by whom it should be done. I presume that it could be done by the placing social worker. If I was placing a child, I could go to the home in the morning, interview some of the staff—the police checks having been carried out—come back in the afternoon and place the child. Also, of course, the local authority that carries out the inspection does not receive one penny. If the homes were required to register, the local authority in the area in which the homes were resident would receive an income. Apart from anything else, requiring inspection before each placement of a child is not a cost-effective way of using resources.

As to the duties of the local authority in which the home resides, authorities placing children in homes in a different area must inform the geographical authority about the placement. The guidance says that the authority should inform itself about the welfare of those children. Does that mean that it has to visit? What responsibilities does it have? Who pays for the time that is required when visiting? Can it charge a fee? In the event of a tragedy, who bears the responsibilities? For example, for a fire, would it be the local authority officer who inspects, the placing social worker who visits or the geographical authority, which, apparently, should inform itself about the welfare of the children?

That will not do. The whole situation is ridiculous, full of anomalies and quite unjustifiable. We are talking about the most difficult children, who are often a danger to themselves and to others. In one children's home in Manchester, a mentally handicapped boy was tortured over time by two younger boys. I am saying that to illustrate some of the difficulties of behaviour that those children present. How can placing authorities fulfil their responsibility 100 miles away from home? Let the Minister be in no doubt that children are being placed a considerable distance away.

Private agencies might indeed have found a market niche in offering placements for children who are difficult to place, but surely we should ensure that the care that they provide is of the same standard as that found in registrable children's homes.

Why are homes asked to register anyway? Presumably, it is to set out and maintain minimum standards for the physical environment in which the child is cared for, to ensure that the proprietor is a responsible person and to ensure that the people who inspect have an expertise in that and are not just the placing social worker.

I totally agree with standards being set, but why is it not good enough for small children's homes? There is no logic in it. In terms of the overriding principle of the welfare of the child, which underwrites the Children Act 1989, it is unjustifiable to have two-tier standards in private children's homes. Why should anyone go to the trouble of managing a registered children's home when the system allows an easy way out? I think that the Minister—I do not want him to take this personally—is being obstinate, because in the atmosphere of deregulation, he does not want to be seen to regulate. That is the only explanation that I can come up with for his refusal to make small homes register. That is not good enough for the welfare of children.

10.43 pm

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ms Coffey) for her kind invitation to take part in the debate. She and I fought shoulder to shoulder in the long campaign for the registration of small private children's homes, and I wish to endorse the powerful argument that she made, but especially the new case that she made on the threat to conventional fostering arrangements.

It is now just over 12 months since my own Adjournment debate on the subject of children's homes in Streatham. In that debate, I highlighted the difficulties faced by the local community, and expressed concerns about the quality of care experienced by the young residents of those homes. I also sought to highlight the anxieties of the local community about the proliferation of small private children's homes in the area. Unfortunately, I have to tell the Minister that the problem has not gone away.

Let me cite a case that arrived on my desk within the past few days. Although I am entirely confident about the facts, I do not propose to name names—partly because the case is so recent and some of the relevant organisations have not had time to furnish me with their account, and partly because I understand that criminal charges are pending. Suffice it to say that the private home concerned is a small unit in the vicinity of Streatham common, and that life for local residents has been a great deal harsher since its establishment in the past 12 months.

This local example raises yet again all the question marks about the arrangements for small private children's homes to which my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport and I have referred so frequently on the Floor of the House, and which—as we now know—have been exposed in two reports from the social services inspectorate. In this

case, the placing authorities were not local; that is fairly common, too. I am pleased to say that the London borough of Lambeth has adopted a policy of making no new placements in such homes.

There is a question mark, in this case, over the mechanism by which placing authorities are supposed to notify the geographical authority when young people are placed in such homes. The requirement is not obligatory, and the social services inspectorate has drawn attention to the inefficiency of the system and the frequent inaccuracy of registers in such homes.

There is also a question mark over the suitability for semi-independent living of very young people who may have criminal records, and the reliability with which the register of attendance of young people in such homes is maintained. That in itself reflects major questions about the quality of supervision—questions that my hon. Friend has raised—and the extent to which supervisors are continuously present on the premises, as they certainly ought to be.

It is totally unsatisfactory that youthful residents can be away from the premises at all hours of the day—and, in particular, the night—without the application of any disciplinary measures. It is even more unsatisfactory that grossly anti-social incidents may occur on the premises when supervisors are notionally present.

All that is known to the Government. All the problems were set out in the social services inspectorate's report of its study of small unregistered children's homes in the north-west, published in January last year. If recent press accounts are anything to go by, the current report following nationwide study by the inspectorate is even more damning. It reveals that the number of such homes is mushrooming; it also identifies new examples of sharp practice—claims for therapeutic services that are not provided on the premises, and the charging of enormous fees for special treatments that are also not provided. It raises big question marks about the background of those who run small private children's homes. It makes an overwhelming case for change, and for the proper registration and inspection of such homes.

We know that the report is in the Minister's hands, but it must be said that the last social services inspectorate report languished in the Department of Health for two years. I hope that this evening the Minister will be able to assure us of the report's rapid publication, and of equally rapid Government action, which is now long overdue.

10.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I am delighted to have the opportunity to do another pas de deux with the hon. Members for Stockport (Ms Coffey) and for Streatham (Mr. Hill)—or, rather, a pas de trois. We have had the pleasure of discussing this important topic before, and I have no doubt that we will again.

Let me begin with the hon. Member for Stockport, who had the good fortune to be successful in the ballot.

As the hon. Lady knows, we met to discuss this issue on various occasions and following one of those meetings in September 1993, when I met her and Mr. Bob Lewis, the director of social services for Stockport, I confirmed in a letter dated 30 September that Mr. Lewis had agreed to try to establish through his contacts in the Association of Directors of Social Services whether the problems that the hon. Lady had described were more widespread. I have to date not received any response from him on that point. The hon. Lady may like to raise that with him.

I also met the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Streatham in February last year. The hon. Member for Streatham also raised in an Adjournment debate in January last year, the topic of homes which are not subject to registration under the Children Act 1989.

The provisions of the Children Act and the regulations linked to them demonstrate our commitment to the protection of vulnerable children, and that does and must mean their protection in a disciplined and safe environment. We are aware of the difficulties faced by local authorities in caring for, and controlling, some of the young people whom it is their responsibility to look after, including children accommodated in small children's homes. I use the word "controlling". This is an important element in caring. My Department has issued guidance to local authorities on permissible forms of control in children's homes, including small homes. I know that problems of control have been perceived in the homes referred to by the hon. Member for Streatham.

All too often we hear of people responsible for homes who misunderstand their responsibilities and powers in this regard. For example, we hear of the reluctance in some cases to lock the doors at night, which to most of us seems a commonsense measure to ensure that children do not go out to places where they would be at risk and to ensure that intruders do not get in to harm the children.

As hon. Members know, following its study of children's homes in north-west England last year, I asked the social services inspectorate to look further at the provision of small unregistered homes. I do not have a report in my hands nor am I sitting on one. The hon. Member for Streatham has obviously seen a document that has not yet been submitted to me. I expect the inspectorate to report to me in the spring. I cannot comment on speculation about the inspectorate's findings in what was probably a recent issue of *Community Care* magazine, since they have not yet been reported to me.

Let me put all this in context by setting out the current requirements of the legislation relating to the arrangements for the care of children accommodated in small homes. Monitoring the standards of care in unregistered, small, private children's homes is the responsibility of the local authorities that place children in these establishments.

Local authorities have a duty under the Children Act to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children for whom they provide accommodation and maintenance. Local authorities must, as far as is reasonably practicable, ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child and his or her parents, and must give due consideration to those wishes. The local authority is required to ensure, as far as possible, that the accommodation provided is near the child's home, to endeavour to promote contact between the child and his or her parents, and to keep the parents informed. When communication between a child and his or her parent is infrequent or non-existent, the local authority is required to appoint an independent visitor for the child.

Under the Arrangements for the Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991, the local authority responsible for looking after any child is required to record in writing the arrangements made for the

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placement and for promoting the welfare of the child. The care plan and the plan for the placement of the child must cover the arrangements for contact with the family, the arrangements to be made for the time when the child is no longer accommodated by the local authority and whether plans need to be made to find a permanent substitute family for the child.

The local authority must arrange a medical examination and assessment for each child. The care plan must record the child's health history and the arrangements for medical and dental care and surveillance and any possible need for vaccination, immunisation and vision and hearing tests. The child's educational history must be recorded, as must any educational need and the action required to meet that need.

The record of all those arrangements must then be sent to the district health authority, the local education authority, the general practitioner, the local authority social services department, if a placement is not in the placing authority's area, and the parents. Records must be kept by the local authority for each child until he or she is 75.

The "local" local authority social services department must keep a register of every child in the establishment, with particulars as recorded in the care plan.

Under the Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991 the "placing" authority is required to review the case of each child within four weeks of when the child begins to be accommodated by the local authority; then after another three months and then at least every six months after this date.

Each review must examine the care plan already described, and include meetings with the local authority, the child, and others, including, of course, the parents. The child must be told, at each review, of the local authority's complaints procedure.

In addition to that considerable body of legislation, which came into force in 1991 and the accompanying volumes of guidance issued to local authorities at that time, in 1993, my Department issued an important circular, to which the hon. Lady referred, reminding authorities of the requirements of the regulations in relation to the placement of children in small homes and providing practice guidance.

The level of regulation of the care of the children accommodated in small unregistered private children's homes is already very rigorous, but I should like to refer to the actions taken by my Department to monitor the local authorities' care monitoring of the children looked after by them and accommodated in homes not subject to registration procedures.

The performance of local authorities in the exercise of their responsibilities under the Children Act 1989 is monitored primarily through the on-going inspection of social services by the social services inspectorate.

In addition, as I said earlier, in 1993, the inspectorate undertook a study, to which hon. Members referred, of small unregistered children's homes in the north-west of England. That report was published in February 1994. It highlighted many of the positive aspects of those small homes, particularly the opportunities they can provide for care to be tailored specifically to meet the needs of young people in more innovative and flexible ways than is often possible in larger units. It also emphasised, however, the need for authorities to apply the Arrangements for the Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991 and the Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991 in a robust and rigorous manner. The report pointed out that where the home offers care which is equivalent to close parental care provided by one or two adults on a 24-hour basis, the Foster Placement (Children) Regulations 1991 might be more appropriately applied. I shall certainly consider carefully the hon. Lady's points about group fostering. She might like to write to me and provide fuller details about that.

The inspectorate has widened its study to cover all local authorities in England and, as I have already said, I await its report.

We have emphasised the need for authorities to apply the arrangements and regulations as robustly as possible. The hon. Lady may recall that a new requirement on small homes for adults to register with local authorities was introduced in 1993. On the face of it, one might wonder why the Government have seen fit to introduce such a measure in respect of adults but not children. The answer is, of course, that the very rigorous arrangements for placement and review regulations which I have described have no parallel in the legislation governing homes for adults, governed by the Registered Homes Act 1984. The regulation of the small homes for adults is a "lighter-touch" form of regulation, including annual returns of particulars to local authorities. There is no requirement on the local authority to inspect.

As I previously announced, my Department is collecting particulars to enable a gazetteer of children's homes, including small unregistered homes, to be produced. The information collection is nearly complete and returns have been provided by more than three quarters of local authorities. Perhaps I might mention in passing that that three quarters does not include Stockport. The hon. Lady might care to raise that issue with her director of social services. However, statistics will be available in the next few months.

I hope that the hon. Lady and the hon. Gentleman will agree that, while they are absolutely right to raise this issue and while it is vital that we keep the welfare of children in care under constant review wherever they are housed, the legislative arrangements already in place governing the care of children in small homes are, if used properly and in full, adequate to protect the welfare of the children, in so far as legislation can achieve this. I shall, of course, keep the matter under review and have said as much in the past. I shall keep an open mind about any further need to act and shall consider carefully any new evidence presented to me.

Ms Coffey: Will the Minister publish the report that is being completed, just as he allowed the social services study of homes in the north-west to be published and made publicly available?

Mr. Bowis: That is something that we always consider when we receive advice and guidance from our relevant experts. As of now, I do not know what form the reporting will take but we shall certainly consider the matter carefully and seek to ascertain, among other things, whether it is suitable for publication. The statistics from the gazetteer will, of course, be made known.

Ms Coffey: The Minister will understand that, if the report is not published, the view might be taken that the reason is that the information contained in it is highly embarrassing to the Government. There is such public interest in small children's homes, and surely the Minister can think of no reason that such a report should not be published.

Mr. Bowis: At this time of night, one should not encourage the hon. Lady to speculate about anything, and I shall certainly not speculate on a report that I have not yet seen or on what we shall do to bring the information to a wider audience.

I undertake to consider any new evidence presented to me, including any evidence from the social services inspectorate and any that my colleagues in this pas de trois care to bring to me now or in the future. I urge the hon. Member for Streatham to present me with chapter and verse in respect of the examples that he cited as it is much easier to proceed on that basis than on the basis of anecdotes. I am sure that we all understand that we have to base our policy on facts.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 2 March 1995

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 9 March.

QUEEN MARY AND WESTFIELD COLLEGE BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 9 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

Income Tax

1. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Government have to extend the 20 per cent. income tax band.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The Government are committed to low tax rates, and will continue to move towards a 20 per cent. basic rate of income tax when it is prudent to do so.

Mr. Hendry: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for that answer. Will he confirm that 5 million people now pay tax at the lower 20 per cent. rate? Does he agree that an extension of the 20 per cent. rate is a clear example of the way in which Conservative tax cuts help those on lower incomes, especially pensioners, as well as all other groups in society?

Mr. Clarke: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. As he says, the 20 per cent. band has been widened every year since it was introduced, and nearly 5.5 million taxpayers now pay tax of only 20 per cent.

Mr. Gordon Brown: On the taxation of income of executive share options and the abuses in the privatised utilities, on Tuesday the Prime Minister threatened legislation, and on Wednesday the Secretary of State for Employment, the President of the Board of Trade and, indeed, the Chancellor rebuffed it. Will the Chancellor admit that he was wrong in ruling out legislation in the past? Give that 150 directors of privatised utilities have £100 million in shares—

Madam Speaker: Order. I have had occasion earlier this week to call attention to the fact that a supplementary question was not related to the substantive question on the Order Paper, which today concerns the 20 per cent. income tax band and its extension. Would the hon. Gentleman care to relate his question directly to the substantive question on the Order Paper?

Mr. Brown: On the loss of income tax revenues because of what happens in the case of executive share options, will the Chancellor tell us that in the Budget Finance Bill he will introduce new measures to curb executive share options and tax them as income?

Mr. Clarke: I have just told the House that 5.5 million people now pay tax at only 20 per cent. The hon. Gentleman has so little to say on behalf of the Opposition about reducing the burden of tax on those on lower incomes that he keeps dragging out his complaints about a handful of people whom we are all agreed have taken too much out of the industries for which they work.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and I spoke yesterday. I did not see what my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade said, but I assume we all said what the Prime Minister said on Tuesday. I certainly did, and so did the Secretary of State for Employment. The Greenbury committee has been set up and has promised to report to us with recommendations on how best practice can be improved and on any measures that need to be taken. We all agree that the Government will certainly take whatever action is necessary when we have the Greenbury report.

The hon. Gentleman is using his protracted concern about the share options of a handful of people to disguise the fact that he has nothing whatever to say about the total burden of taxation on ordinary men and women.

Direct Taxation

2. **Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the relationship between reductions in direct taxation and the performance of the economy; and if he will make a statement.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Jonathan Aitken): It has long been our assessment that high direct taxes damage the performance of the economy. That is why substantial reductions in direct taxation have been made since 1979 and why we hope to make further reductions when it is prudent to do so.

Mr. Jenkin: Is it not evident that countries whose Governments take a higher proportion of the national wealth in taxation than our Government tend to have slower growth rates? Have we not achieved a major structural shift in competitiveness, to the advantage of the United Kingdom, by holding down the share of wealth that is taken by the Government, unlike many of our European competitors whose Government expenditure now exceeds 60 per cent. of gross domestic product?

Mr. Aitken: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for stressing the importance of the connection between tight control of Government expenditure and good economic growth and competitiveness. He was right to make the point that the share of output spent by our Government is lower than that of any of our major European competitors. I should also note that, as we are a world trading nation, we must keep up the pressure to maintain tight control of Government expenditure because the ratio of Government expenditure to gross domestic product in other competitive nations, in areas such as the Asian Pacific region, and even in mature economies such as the United

States of America and Japan, is still lower than it is here. We are, however, winning the prize in relation to our European competitors.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Why is only one of the Chancellor's five wise men forecasting that he will achieve his inflation targets by the end of this Parliament? Does the Chief Secretary think that that may be because they anticipate irresponsible and premature tax cuts that prejudice the national economy for short-term political advantage?

Mr. Aitken: I shall not second-guess any wise men, whose forecasting record has not been any more impeccable than anyone else's sometimes, but I reject the notion that some irresponsible activity is going on in the Treasury and that it will lead to higher inflation. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor has shown his determination by a series of moves to keep inflation tightly under control and we will continue to do that.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we welcome progress so far, but it is precisely those developed countries such as Japan, Switzerland and the United States of America that have the lowest proportion of taxation as a proportion of gross net product—it is below 30 per cent.—and the best unemployment figures? In the past 15 years, fresh progress has been made in the United Kingdom to reduce the tax burden on a direct basis. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to get the total tax burden below 30 per cent. of GNP to match the achievement of those other countries?

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend makes a good point. As I said in my first answer, Britain is doing well in relation to some of our European competitors, but if one looks around the world one finds that we have some way to go, both in terms of taxation reductions and of Government expenditure reductions, to maintain our momentum of competitiveness. We are doing well. The trend of Government expenditure and taxes is aiming to come down, but we must keep that pressure up.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Following the publication on Tuesday of the report and study by Oxford and Warwick universities showing that no connection exists between the performance of companies and of the economy and the tax breaks given on executive share options, will the Chief Secretary give a commitment to tax those options as income? Does he not understand that the public are sick and tired of being taken for a ride by the excesses of some people in privatised boardrooms, and that it is not enough for him, the Prime Minister and his right hon. Friends to call this distasteful? The public want action and they want it now.

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Gentleman's continual attempts at bogus indignation on this point are synthetic. If a company is successful and the executives of that company are performing well, there is no reason why they should not receive good rewards. Like everyone else, however, the Government are opposed to and critical of corporate greed, wherever it materialises. We reject the continued attack on share options that, in many companies, are well earned and well deserved, as are the rewards. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman that all share options should be regarded in a hostile and negative light just because there are a few abuses. That is not the correct stance.

Insurance Tax

3. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received on the new insurance tax.

The Paymaster General (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I have received a number of representations.

Mr. Ainger: Does the Paymaster General accept that since 1979 burglaries and car thefts have more than doubled and that since 1987 there has been an increase of more than 20 per cent. in the price of insurance premiums? Why then, given that information, have the Government decided at this stage to penalise the victims of crime even further and, in many cases, to impose an additional tax on people who have no source of defence other than their insurance? Why has the Paymaster General carried on with this, bearing in mind the representations that he has received?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The incidence of crime is certainly one factor in the level of insurance premiums, which is why it is good news that the latest figures show that, over the past 12 months, recorded crime has dropped by 5.5 per cent. and burglary and theft by rather more.

In answer to the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I believe that a 2.5 per cent. tax on insurance premiums does not deter people from taking out prudent insurance, bearing in mind the fact that this sector is historically undertaxed to the extent that insurance premiums do not bear value added tax.

Taxation, Scotland

4. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect on the Scottish economy of an increase in taxation equivalent of between 3p and 19p in the pound; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: Such an increase would be unnecessary and would make the Scottish economy less competitive.

Mr. Arnold: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the vast sums of money currently being paid to Scotland should perhaps be considered the English subscription to the United Kingdom? Is it not perhaps more important to consider that payment as a transfer payment thought necessary because both England and Scotland are part of a single currency—the pound?

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the factual position which is that Scotland today receives 21 per cent. more public expenditure than England—worth approximately £13 per head—but that is because of decisions taken by the elected and accountable Government of the United Kingdom. Whether future proposals for a single currency with fiscal harmonisation would or would not lead to higher levels of public expenditure in various parts of the European Union is one

of the many difficult matters that we should have to assess when we considered whether a single currency might at some stage in the future be in Britain's national interest.

Mr. Salmond: The Chief Secretary is making it very clear why he was laughed at by the business men at the Scottish Council Forum last week. When will he educate his hon. Friends about the huge hidden subsidies that pour into the south-east of England and, more directly, about the fact that, over the past 16 years, the Government have been bankrolled by Scottish resources to the tune of £100,000 million of oil revenues, or £20,000 per head for every man, woman and child in Scotland? When will he start educating Conservative Back Benchers about the true fiscal position?

Mr. Aitken: The sort of rubbish that the hon. Gentleman has just uttered shows why, by contrast, I was warmly applauded when I spoke in Scotland. The fundamental point that I made, with which the business community agreed, is that a tax-raising Scottish Parliament would be an expensive self-indulgence which would scare away inward investors, cost a single man as much as £6.35 a week in tax and cost Scotland jobs, employment and competitiveness. Only the hon. Gentleman would wish to pursue such a path of folly.

Sir Donald Thompson: Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents do not care how much goes to various parts of the United Kingdom and that my people in Yorkshire think that a strong Scotland is a strong England and, therefore, a strong Yorkshire and object to this spurious devolution nonsense?

Mr. Aitken: My hon. Friend articulates the view that all our colleagues share—that a strong Union is good for Scotland, good for Britain and good for all parts of the United Kingdom, including Yorkshire.

Brewing Industry

5. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has had from the brewing industry regarding levels of excise duty.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I received several representations from the brewing industry prior to the last Budget. Since then, various members of the brewing industry have written or made representations to me and other Treasury Ministers.

Mr. Sheerman: The Opposition are never sure which of the Treasury Ministers are good Europeans but, given that many of them indulge in a drink, may I ask the Paymaster General whether he is concerned about the fact that the brewing industry is being harmed by the duty differential and the high level of illegal importation, or smuggling? Is it not about time that he and his colleagues did something to protect an industry that is a job creator and a wealth creator and deserves his attention and help?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Brewing is indeed an important industry, and we wanted to keep excise duties stable in the Budget. It was when the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends voted down the second stage of the imposition of value added tax on domestic fuel that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor sought to recover the revenue by increasing excise duties on tobacco, alcohol and road fuels, which was very much a second-best option. The brewing industry may well want to know why the hon. Gentleman forced that option on the Government, against our original intentions.

Mrs. Lait: When does my hon. Friend expect the European Commission to publish its paper on excise duties on tobacco and alcohol? Does he expect our continental neighbours to engage in constructive discussions on the subject?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I cannot say when the discussions will be properly under way, but my hon. Friend knows, I hope, that we believe that other member states should increase the minimum rates of duty to help to close the gap between our higher duty rates and theirs. That gap is the cause of much of the cross-border shopping, and some of the smuggling, that is currently taking place.

Tax Evasion

6. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to gather information on the sums of money lost to the Exchequer through tax evasion.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Sir George Young): There is no reliable way of measuring the extent of tax evasion. What is important is for the Inland Revenue to investigate suspected evasion across all areas of taxation—which it does—and to collect tax that is payable.

Ms Lynne: Is the Minister aware that £4 billion is lost each year in uncollected tax? Meanwhile, the number of Inland Revenue support staff is being cut by a further 25 per cent. Is it not madness to cut staff numbers when the uncollected tax bill is soaring?

Sir George Young: The reduction in the number of Inland Revenue staff is being paid for, or secured, by a move to self-assessment and the introduction of information technology. The important point, however, is that counter-evasion work is not being cut. On the contrary, over the next five years the Revenue will put more resources into such work from routine processing.

Mr. John Townend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the lower the levels of taxation, the less will be the incentive either to evade or to avoid tax? The loss of revenue will also be much lower.

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend makes a crucial point. When tax rates were approaching 100 per cent., the incentive to avoid or evade tax was relatively high; now that we have reduced tax, with the highest rate at 40 per cent., the incentive to engage in the creative accounting referred to by my hon. Friend has, of course, been sharply reduced.

Mr. Maginnis: Does the Minister agree that there is every incentive for people to avoid paying tax, given the profligate way in which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland spends taxpayers' money? He has embarked on a door-to-door drop, delivering to every house in Northern Ireland the Government disinformation that is contained in the framework document.

Sir George Young: I am not sure that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury is the best person to respond to

that question, but I am sure that there was value for money in every action taken by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Ms Primarolo: In the context of tax evasion and loss of money to the Exchequer, is the Financial Secretary aware of last week's National Audit Office report, which showed that £800 million of VAT had had to be written off because his Department had not collected it? People will be shocked to hear that, at a time when the Government are imposing VAT on fuel and proposing to cut the number of VAT offices collecting the money. What steps will the Government now take to ensure that money is collected from businesses and individuals alike when it is owed, rather than extending the scope of VAT on fuel?

Sir George Young: Both Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue have a very good record of collecting tax that is due and payable to them, but if there is no money to be collected because, for example, the business is insolvent, clearly the money cannot be collected. The bulk of write-offs to which the hon. Lady referred were because, in fact, the cash was not there to pay the bill.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Pursuant to my right hon. Friend's answer, if it follows that when the top rate of tax was reduced from 98 per cent. to 40 per cent. the tax take went up, it also follows that the amount of evasion went down. Does it not therefore follow that if the Labour party were to put up tax rates, the amount of evasion would increase?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in his last point and, crucially, in his first point, too. Although we have reduced the top rate of tax, higher earners are now contributing a bigger percentage of the total tax bill than they were in 1979.

House Prices

7. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on house prices.

The Minister of State, Treasury (Mr. Anthony Nelson): The Department of the Environment house price index shows that house prices increased by 2 per cent. in the year to the fourth quarter of 1994.

Dr. Jones: How does the Minister reconcile the need for price stability in the housing market with his Government's policies on assistance to house buyers, especially the million trapped by negative equity?

Mr. Nelson: The hon. Lady should draw some encouragement from the fact that the number of people with negative equity has fallen by nearly a half and, indeed, the value of that negative equity has fallen by nearly two thirds. I immediately acknowledge, however, that there is a real problem and a concern, particularly for those who want to move and suffer from negative equity. In the Government's view, the best prospects for a gradual revival in house prices will be served by continued economic growth and increased prosperity, rather than a short-term inflationary boom.

Single European Currency

8. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has with EU leaders about the introduction of a single currency and its link with political union.

12. **Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received advocating a single European currency; and if he will make a statement.

14. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has held with the Economic and Finance Council about a single European currency.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I hold regular discussions with my European colleagues about a wide range of issues, including those relating to a single currency.

Mr. Prentice: What are the constitutional impediments, if any, of Britain joining a single currency? Is the issue really a matter of practice rather than principle, as asserted by the Prime Minister yesterday?

Mr. Clarke: The Prime Minister, other members of the Government and I set out yesterday the way in which the country should exercise the judgment that we have allowed it to make by the negotiations at Maastricht. We discussed this comprehensively yesterday and the Prime Minister came to the sensible conclusion—indeed, the obvious, commonsense conclusion—that we should take advantage of that option by taking a hard-headed judgment of British interest when the time comes, if it ever comes, for us to make up our mind.

Mr. Welsh: Did the Prime Minister agree to or in any way alter the words of the Chancellor's speech on 9 February, in which he said that monetary union would not necessarily be a huge step on the road to federal union in Europe? If the Prime Minister agreed with him then, why will he not back the Chancellor's words now? Is there a massive policy gulf between them or, indeed, between them and the previous Chancellor, who disagrees with them both?

Mr. Clarke: The Prime Minister answered that question yesterday in a way with which I totally agree. The Prime Minister said:

> "With one important qualification: I believe that it is possible to move forward to monetary union without necessarily moving forward to political union . . . the qualification depends on the nature and style of monetary union".—[*Official Report*, 1 March 1995; Vol. 255, c. 1067.]

He went on to deal with that. It is absurd nit-picking textual analysis to try to separate members of the Government from that. That position leads, as I have just said, to the plain and obvious commonsense conclusion that we will make our minds up on the best judgment of British interests in 1999, or thereafter, whenever this proposition comes before us. To most people in the country, that, I think, is the sensible way in which to approach this important issue, compared with the rather lightweight way, with uncertain support behind, which the Opposition parties have demonstrated.

Mr. Heppell: Is the Chancellor aware that yesterday the Prime Minister significantly decided not to endorse the Chancellor's view on a European currency that it

would not be a serious constitutional issue? In view of the Prime Minister's lack of support, does the Chancellor feel that his position is unassailable?

Mr. Clarke: I can only assume that the hon. Gentleman was not here yesterday. If he had been, he would have enjoyed an extremely interesting debate which, in my opinion, was won hands down by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I can also assume that the hon. Gentleman did not listen to my first two answers to questions on this subject. It is quite obvious from his misquotation that he has not read the speech that I gave a few days ago. I suggest that he studies what is coming from those on the Government Benches explaining the difficult choice that the country may face and how we propose to tackle it. He will then be better informed on all aspects of the subject.

Dr. Hampson: Did my right hon. and learned Friend notice a piece in *The Observer* a few months ago which argued that commitment to a single currency and the associated restrictions on public spending and inability to devalue were inherently in conflict with the Labour party's commitments on economic policies? The author of that piece was the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who claimed that 67 other Opposition Members supported him. Is it surprising that the title of the piece was "Labour all at sea over Europe"?

Mr. Clarke: I failed to see that article, but I am familiar with the views of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who is in his place again today. The right hon. Gentleman was a member of Labour Governments who seemed to their opponents to use devaluation as an instrument of policy from time to time which, as a deliberate instrument of policy, I do not think that we should.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) is quite right. At least 60 Opposition Members do not agree with a word of the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition yesterday. The Leader of the Opposition yesterday put forward an incredible position in comparison to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who made it quite clear that he was going to concentrate on the national interest if and when the decision had to be made.

Dame Jill Knight: Is it not the case that there is now clear evidence that other members of the European family, notably Germany and Ireland, have stated that they recognise the dangers, not only of rushing prematurely into the EMU, but of saying at this stage in the proceedings that they intend to go into the EMU or indeed stay out of it?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is right. Although the debate may be lively in this country, it is becoming more intelligent and more informed and it is somewhat in advance of that taking place in some other countries on the continent. I have heard the German State Secretary and the Irish Finance Minister say that they see no prospect of economic and monetary union before 1999. I have seen reports of the Portuguese Finance Minister saying that he would expect the Portuguese to exercise an option, despite the fact that they failed to negotiate such an option for themselves in the Maastricht treaty.

The Prime Minister, the Governor of the Bank of England and I have begun to set out the argument at greater length in this country. All of us, including myself, have set out clear circumstances in which we would be opposed to going into economic and monetary union because there are circumstances in which it might not be to our advantage. We in Britain are in one of the best positions in Europe. We have sensibly reserved for ourselves the opportunity to make a contribution to designing the thing and then to make our own decision in due course about where our national interest lies.

Mr. Forman: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that all Conservative Members, except possibly one right hon. Member, felt that we were completely convinced by the clarification provided by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on this question yesterday? Is it not a fact that, since the Maastricht treaty, the European Union has become much more of a hybrid organisation with more intergovernmental characteristics? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that we should not fall for the argument from some of our continental partners that we are going to be the victims of institutional determinism?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend and I do not think that we are going to be the victims of institutional determinism. I also agree with him that neither of us, nor the Conservative party, wishes that. My hon. Friend is quite right. Ever since Maastricht, with the second and third pillars moving forward on an intergovernmental basis, there have been changes from the old blueprint days inside the European Union. Yesterday, the Prime Minister clarified the position not by giving silly simple answers to very glib questions, but by setting out the serious economic and political considerations on which we have to concentrate and then reserving to the Government of this country the right to make up their mind in due course on a hard-headed judgment of the national interest.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Although the search to find Mr. Leeson is now over, the search is clearly still on to discover the Government's European policy. On the single currency and the referendum, yesterday the Prime Minister said that a referendum may be necessary and desirable. Does the Chancellor now regret saying, as he did, that a referendum was totally a non-issue and that those who thought that constituents desired it were slightly up the creek? Does the Chancellor agree with the Prime Minister that a referendum may be necessary and may be desirable?

Mr. Clarke: Well, there were better jokes yesterday from the Leader of the Opposition and from the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). The search is now on for some Labour party policy on the subject which might hold together people as disparate as the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) with the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney, and the hon. Member for Workington with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), pointing out some rather serious divisions behind the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown).

Our position is clear: that when the time comes to make a decision, the Prime Minister left open the question of a referendum. If and when we do reach the stage at which a single currency is on the agenda and ready for national decision, that is obviously again something that we have

left open for the British Parliament at the time to consider when it decides how to address the question of the national interest.

Mr. Haselhurst: Does my right hon. and learned Friend think that the increased usage of the ecu as a common currency would help to clarify some of the practicalities and dispel some of the myths attaching to a possible future single currency?

Mr. Clarke: I do, but I think that it is going to be rather difficult to move there from the Maastricht position. The British Government, with hindsight, were proved right in pursuing those ideas, as indeed we did in the run-up to Maastricht. If it came back as a real possibility, I agree with my hon. Friend that it might well be a very sensible way to proceed, but all these matters now might or might not emerge in the debate over the next four, five or however many years in which we are going to play an active and constructive role.

Teachers' Pay

9. **Mr. Betts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will agree to fund fully local authorities and schools for the cost of the teachers' pay settlement in 1995-96.

Mr. Aitken: No.

Mr. Betts: Does the Chief Secretary accept that the only help that the Chancellor has so far offered to schools and councils facing education budget cuts is that they can enter into sale and lease-back deals with their own assets? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that sale and lease-back deals under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 have to be offset completely against the credit approvals of local authorities and therefore cannot add one penny to their revenue budgets?

If that is true, is not the advice so far offered to schools and local authorities unhelpful and misleading? What will the Chief Secretary do to help schools, governors and parents facing massive increases in class sizes, or will he, like the Chancellor, stand on one side while education standards in our schools decline because he and his colleagues will not fund the pay settlement for which they are totally responsible?

Mr. Aitken: I am certainly prepared to tell the hon. Gentleman what I would do to help schools in Sheffield. I would encourage Sheffield county council to stop being extravagant and profligate with taxpayers' money. I would stop it wasting money, by keeping open 12,000 surplus school places. I would be very critical of a council that, when it was under the hon. Gentleman's leadership, wasted tens of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money on the world student games for Sheffield. Instead of coming up with bright wheezes for spending taxpayers' money, it is about time that Sheffield and a few other councils got their act together and kept taxpayers' money under good tight control.

Mr. Devlin: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Cleveland, one of the most left-wing authorities in the north of England, has announced that it will fully fund the teachers' pay increase from its own reserves? If a well-known left-wing authority such as Cleveland can do that—like Sheffield, it has built up enormous debts—why cannot other authorities do that?

Mr. Aitken: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his praise, which comes from an unexpected quarter, for a council that is doing the right thing. All over Britain there are schools with current cash balances of more than £700 million, and local authorities are awash with cash of about £2 billion. Against that background, it is ludicrous for some councils to claim far too easily that they cannot possibly afford to fund what is admittedly a tight local government settlement to help schools.

Mr. Clapham: Is the Minister really aware of the pressure on local authorities? For example, in Barnsley over the past five years we have had to absorb a 57 per cent. increase in the number of children on free school meals, a 54 per cent. increase in the number of children who receive grants for clothes and a 200 per cent. increase in the number of children needing special education. Clearly, the local authorities need help—

Mr. Fabricant: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The microphone is not working and we cannot hear.

Madam Speaker: I am sorry, but I can hear the hon. Gentleman quite clearly, although it seems that no one else can. Will the sound effects people please increase the sound for Mr. Clapham?

Mr. Clapham: Given those facts, is the Minister prepared to review his decision?

Madam Speaker: Did the Minister hear the question?

Mr. Aitken: I heard the question, more or less. The answer to it is that the hon. Gentleman has provided only half of the true picture. Of course the local government settlement is tight, but in Barnsley, for example, there are unspent school balances of about £3 million, there has been a standard spending assessment increase of 30.4 per cent. over the past five years, and expenditure per pupil is at the rather satisfactory figure of £1,570. Even allowing for inflation, that is roughly three times the amount spent when the Labour Government were in office. The schoolchildren of Barnsley have not had a bad deal from the Government.

Mr. John Greenway: Cleveland county council, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), is not alone in the north-east in having had the foresight to plan for the teachers' pay award. North Yorkshire county council provided in its budget for a 2.5 per cent. increase in pay, and although finding the extra £300,000 will not be easy, it will not mean the kind of cuts in the classrooms that we have heard about from the media. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that local authorities that have done the right thing this year will not be starved of cash next year, and that their patience with the Government's policy will be rewarded with a better settlement in future?

Mr. Aitken: I congratulate my hon. Friend and his North Yorkshire local education authority on having done the right and responsible thing and cut their cloth according to what was necessary to deliver good standards of education. On my hon. Friend's second point, of course we acknowledge that this year's local government settlement has been tight. I hear what he says about

ensuring that neither in North Yorkshire nor anywhere else are schoolchildren subjected to unreasonable pressures—but we do not believe that we have put unreasonable pressure on this year. The local government settlement is tight but fair.

Incomes

10. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what inquiries his Department is conducting into the distribution of income and wealth in the United Kingdom.

Sir George Young: We keep a range of information under review, including that in the Department of Social Security's households below average income analysis and the Central Statistical Office's analysis of income distribution and the effects of taxes and benefits.

Mr. Barnes: Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that we should know the facts before we make decisions. Should we not know the full facts about income and wealth distribution, and about the range of poverty? Between 1974 and 1979, the Labour Government had a standing Royal Commission on income and wealth distribution, but the first act of the new Conservative Government was to disband it. Should we not have an investigation covering more subjects than those that the Minister mentioned?

Sir George Young: Of course it is important to have the facts, but if we examine the expenditure of the poorest 10 per cent. in this country—the poorest three quarters of a million people—we find that roughly half of them spend more than the average. I ask the hon. Gentleman to look at the facts with care before he comes to any conclusion.

Mr. Yeo: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the country would be better served if his Department spent its time considering the creation of income and wealth rather than its distribution?

Sir George Young: My hon. Friend is right. He will know that we have adopted many supply-side measures precisely to increase the capacity of this country to promote wealth. There are also measures in the current Finance Bill that take those policies further.

Ms Armstrong: Is the Minister not a little complacent, given that the deputy chairman of the Conservatives has reminded the party that the British people are fed up with the rich getting richer on the backs of the poor? Is it not time that the Government took action on the matter? They have an opportunity in the Finance Bill to agree to taxing excess share options. Why do they not take it?

Sir George Young: The Opposition will have absolutely no credibility on the subject of poverty until they come up with clear and costed proposals to deal with the problem and have identified exactly how they will pay for them.

Taxation

13. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of taxation on different groups since 1979.

Sir George Young: Average net income rose by 36 per cent., in real terms, between 1979 and 1991-92. There were increases for all economic groups and all family types.

Mr. Skinner: Why does the Minister not tell us the whole story? Is not the truth that, since 1979, the richest 10 per cent. in Britain have had £50 billion cumulatively in tax cuts? Instead of attacking the nurses and teachers with paltry wage increases, and attacking pensioners, why do not the Government redistribute that money to ensure that pensioners, the national health service, the social services and local government have the right finances to offset the cuts?

Sir George Young: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to ask his right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench why the Labour party tabled an amendment to the Finance Bill to give—for the first time—tax relief to exactly the sort of people about whom he is complaining, on the bills which they pay for tax planning.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Maclennan: As the Prime Minister failed last night to persuade his campaign manager—the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time of Maastricht—on Europe, how can he hope to persuade anyone else? Will the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont) be joining those without a Whip, or will they join him within the ranks of the anti-Europeans in the Conservative party?

The Prime Minister: What has piqued the hon. Gentleman is that I managed to persuade a sufficient number of people into my Lobby to win the vote.

Mr. Devlin: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the Lloyds bank survey of the north of England which shows that one third of all businesses in the region expect to take on additional staff in the next three months? Is he also aware that there has been a 13 per cent. drop in unemployment in the neighbouring constituency of Sedgefield? Why do we never hear any of that from the Member who represents that constituency?

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to hear about the drop in unemployment in Sedgefield, although I thought that it had fallen by 16 per cent. I am delighted to see unemployment dropping throughout the United Kingdom, and we intend to pursue policies which ensure that it will continue to drop.

Mr. Blair: In the light of yet another report today on an excessive pay package in a privatised monopoly and of his own threat on Tuesday to legislate, will the right hon. Gentleman back an amendment to the Gas Bill a week on Monday that would give the regulator the power

to cut prices where pay deals are excessive? Would that not send the clearest possible signal to the utilities that the game is up?

The Prime Minister: I set out the position clearly to the right hon. Gentleman on Tuesday, and he should know that the role of the regulator is to protect the interests of the consumer. I do not propose to extend that role. The regulators are introducing competition and bearing down on prices. As to the underlying premise of the right hon. Gentleman's question, I set out that we shall wait and see the report from Sir Richard Greenbury and his colleagues. We shall then take action upon that, including legislative back-up if that is required.

Mr. Blair: Does the Prime Minister not know that the Greenbury committee has said that it will not propose any legislation and its report will not be out for months? Furthermore, its main recommendations will not affect the abuses in the privatised monopolies. The anger is now, the abuses are now: why will he not act now to put an end to the abuses?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman's assertions are, frankly, wrong. I made clear the other day the subjects that I believe need addressing—the need for complete and open disclosure over remuneration and the need to ensure that bonuses and share options are firmly based on company performance. Those subjects need consideration. When we have recommendations that cover those, we shall consider them, and I have made it clear that, if necessary, we shall provide legislative back-up. Unlike the right hon. Gentleman, I believe that it is both necessary and desirable to wait until we have that report and that information so that we can consider what action is necessary.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: May I refer my right hon. Friend to the debate on Europe and the single currency yesterday? In columns 1053 and 1056 of *Hansard*, the leader of a political party dealt with interventions by one of my right hon. Friends, first, by saying that he would give way, but not doing so, and, secondly, by accusing him of inconsistency? Is there not a lesson in that on how to get people to vote on our side by treating them with less courtesy than the Labour party? *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: We had an excitable day yesterday and perhaps we can have a little more calm today, Madam Speaker. The debate yesterday was very revealing in a number of respects. It was revealing because of what the leader of the Liberal party had to say, and it was also very revealing because a number of Labour Members flatly contradicted assertions in the speech by the leader of the Labour party. He was open enough to admit that his party was split and his party was generous enough to show precisely that in the speeches that Labour Members subsequently made.

Secretary of State for Wales

Q2. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will remove the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) from his post of Secretary of State for Wales.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Wigley: Surprise, surprise. Is the Prime Minister aware that, when the post of Secretary of State for Wales was first created, the idea was to have one member of the Cabinet from Wales, to speak up from personal experience of the needs and the aspirations of the people of Wales? The present incumbent is clearly incapable of doing that. Given the opinion poll this week, which has shown yet again that there is a 2:1 majority in favour of the powers of the Welsh Office being answerable to a Parliament in Wales rather than to a Governor General, will the Prime Minister stop having such an intransigent attitude to the question and allow the people of Wales to have at least some semblance of national democracy?

The Prime Minister: I do not regard my position as the hon. Gentleman described it and would describe it quite differently. He is aware of my views of the possible difficulties with a Welsh Assembly. I do not believe that it is in the interests of Wales. To be frank, generally if the answer to the question is more politicians, then it is the wrong question. As to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, during his period in office, Wales has benefited from a steady stream of inward investment from the United States and the Pacific rim, and there has been a considerable improvement in the quality of life and the standard of living throughout Wales. Those are the policies that are necessary for the future. An extra tier of government, which would suck a great deal of authority from local councils in Wales, is not the way forward.

Ministerial Visits

Q3. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Prime Minister when he next plans to visit Blaby.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Robathan: Is my right hon. Friend aware of a recent visit to Enderby in my constituency by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), at which he discussed devolution with the Blaby constituency Labour party—all 25 of them? When my right hon. Friend visits Blaby, which I hope that he will do very soon, will he also discuss devolution, for he will discover that the overwhelming majority of my constituents, many of whom were born in Scotland or Wales, value the integrity of the United Kingdom, oppose devolution and have no interest in a ridiculous regional assembly based in Birmingham or elsewhere?

The Prime Minister: Where there is a proper system of local government, I believe that devolution to an extra tier of government is an unwise way to proceed. There is one form of devolution that I strongly favour, which is devolution straight down to individuals: to let families make their own choice; and to let people have more control over schools, hospitals and local decisions. That is the form of devolution that we favour, not devolution to an extra tier of bureaucrats and politicians.

Engagements

Q4. **Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Etherington: Will the Prime Minister attend the House tomorrow to vote in favour of the admirable Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill, presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall)? More

importantly, will he give an undertaking to the House that he will endeavour to ensure that parliamentary time is made available so that the will of the vast majority of people, who want the barbarism of blood sports abolished, can be brought to fruition?

The Prime Minister: That has traditionally been the responsibility of individual Members and their consciences. I shall not be here to support the hon. Gentleman.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Lancashire county council put £7 million of council tax money into a special contingency reserve to pay a 2.2 per cent. rise in teachers' salaries? Unfortunately, it has not handed over that money to the schools to pay those salaries. Does he sympathise with those in the schools, who feel very angry about that and therefore want to go grant-maintained?

The Prime Minister: A large number of schools have gone grant-maintained because they believe that they can better look after their own interests than if they are retained in the control of the local education authority. I hope and believe that many more will do so in the future, not least for the reasons that my hon. Friend set out. I do not think that anyone can be unaware of the campaign that is being waged at the moment by some education authorities. I noticed the press release produced by the Opposition this morning. If they had looked at the facts of what is to happen to the standard spending assessments of the education authorities that they quote, they might have produced a more straightforward and honest press release.

Q5. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Timms: The Prime Minister will recall that, in 1991, the then Secretary of State for Transport announced that the channel tunnel rail link would be routed through east London to promote urban regeneration specifically within east London. Will the Prime Minister confirm that the Government remain committed to that objective for the rail link?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly confirm the importance of the rail link and I shall ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to let the hon. Gentleman have as much information as is currently available.

Q6. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Evennett: Now that the distraction of yesterday's debate is behind us, does my right hon. Friend agree that he should turn his attention to the economic development that has been so successful in recent years, with falling unemployment, low inflation and record exports? Does he agree that the Government's policies are dealing with the real issues that affect the lives of our citizens and that the Opposition have no policies whatever on the economy?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to commend the economic recovery, which is very strong and widespread, and shows signs of being the best economic recovery that we have seen in this country for very many years. I intend to continue to give my full attention to that economic recovery. I wish to ensure that we continue to have growth and falling unemployment, and that we continue to see the levels of investment and growth, particularly in the manufacturing industry, that we have seen of late. Only a continuation of those policies will, over a long period, improve the living standards of the British nation, which is what I wish.

Q7. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Fatchett: May I refer back to the issue of top people's pay increases, which was discussed earlier? The Prime Minister has argued that he will leave all of that to the Greenbury committee and its report. Is it right that a Government should delegate that responsibility to an employers' organisation that has a vested interest in top people's pay? Is it not about time that the Prime Minister, who claims that he feels strongly about that issue, gave a lead to the country and introduced his own proposals—or shall we simply be left with government that is all delegation and no leadership?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends are thirsting to go down the route of pay policies that the Labour party has gone down for generations. The concern that people feel about that issue is the concern that I spelt out with great clarity to the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) on Tuesday. We are examining that, we are waiting for recommendations on that, and, when necessary, when the facts are available, we shall decide what action needs to be taken, if necessary, including legislation. However, I have no intention of operating in the envious spirit that activates the hon. Gentleman.

Local Government Reorganisation (England)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. John Gummer): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the progress of the review of local government structure in England.

My aim is a local government structure that can deliver effective services to its citizens and help build vigorous and self-sustaining communities. I believe that in many places that will involve the creation of unitary local authorities. Equally, I have long recognised that local government needs to reflect local identities, history and tradition. There is room in our system for diversity; different solutions in different areas, to meet different local circumstances. Local government does not need to be neat—it needs to be effective.

I also want to achieve stability so that local government can plan ahead with confidence; developing the concept of the enabling council, which has done so much to create a new culture in local government.

Against that background, I am pleased to be able to announce decisions on 20 of the counties where decisions are outstanding. First, I shall announce decisions on three counties where the commission has recommended change: Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Durham.

For Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, the commission has recommended that the county councils should be abolished, and replaced by a structure of unitary authorities—three in Bedfordshire, four in Buckinghamshire.

I am sure that it is right that Luton in Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes in Buckinghamshire should become unitary authorities. I am, however, not convinced by the argument for unitary local government in the rest of those counties. I have decided, therefore, to retain the existing structure of county and district councils in Bedfordshire outside Luton, and in Buckinghamshire outside Milton Keynes.

In Durham, the commission has recommended that Darlington should become an unitary authority, with the rest of the county remaining two-tier. I propose to accept that recommendation.

I have given a full explanation of the background and reasons for those decisions today, in an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington). There are copies in the Library and the Vote Office.

I now turn to the other 17 counties, for which the commission has recommended no change in the present structure. Those are Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Cornwall, Cumbria, Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Lancashire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Northumberland, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Suffolk, Surrey, Warwickshire and West Sussex.

I have decided that, with two provisos, I should accept those recommendations. First, the commission has recommended the status quo for a small number of district councils which are among the largest non-metropolitan towns and cities in England. Many of those councils used to be county boroughs and so have a tradition of unitary local government. They are also often areas where there is a significant need for economic and social regeneration. The business community, deliverers of personal social services and the voluntary sector often believe that that need can best be met by bringing all of the responsibilities of local government under one roof. There are some other councils where the commission has appeared to accept that logic. I believe that we must at least test the case for consistency in this matter.

Therefore, I intend to ask the commission to carry out fresh reviews of a short list of selected districts—I emphasise that they are districts, and not counties. The rest of the county in each case will not be subject to any further review. I also emphasise that they are fresh reviews for which we shall issue new guidance to the commission. Before we issue that new guidance, we will consult local government and other interested parties about it. I expect the new reviews to get under way in the summer.

I believe that those new reviews must be carried out by a reconstituted commission which can look at the cases afresh. I am most grateful to Sir John Banham for having offered his resignation as chairman of the commission. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Sir John for the significant contribution that he has made as chairman, particularly in the establishment of the commission, in responding to the acceleration of the review process and in delivering the structure recommendations for all areas by January this year.

I shall be consulting the Opposition parties about a successor, and I hope to announce a name shortly. I will be considering with the new chairman what other changes should be made to the commission, most of whose members' terms of office expire in June.

The areas I have in mind to be covered by the new reviews are: Blackburn, Blackpool, the Medway towns—that is, Rochester upon Medway and Gillingham—Northampton, Peterborough and Warrington. I also have it in mind to include Thurrock and Basildon in Essex, without prejudice to whatever I may decide on the commission's recommendations for the rest of the county.

A strong prima facie case has been made for a number of other districts to be considered for unitary status. Five districts almost fully covered by the Thames gateway area do not have unitary status at present. I have already said that I propose to refer three of those—Thurrock and the Medway towns—to the commission. Therefore, there is clearly a case for referring the other two—Gravesham and Dartford—as well.

Exeter and Gloucester are two long-standing county boroughs, in both of which there has been strong pressure for unitary status. The commission has recommended unitary status for the ancient counties of Hereford and Rutland. If those recommendations are accepted, it would seem right to ask the commission to consider the case of Huntingdonshire.

The commission has recommended unitary status for the city of Nottingham. There are significant built-up areas outside that city's boundaries, and that leads to the conclusion that the commission ought to look at the advisability of giving unitary status to Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe, given that there is clearly no local demand for a Greater Nottingham council. Finally, if Warrington is referred, the similarly densely populated district of Halton, which has been part of Cheshire only since 1974, may be a suitable candidate for reconsideration.

[Interruption.] Many of the places concerned are interested in their future, even if Opposition Members are not.

I propose to hold further discussions with those towns and cities and their counties, and if those discussions confirm my present understandings, I shall also refer them to the commission for consideration.

It is, of course, open to me to consider further requests for unitary status, but given the need for stability, I should make it clear that it is very unlikely that I shall want to add significantly to the number of referrals to the commission.

I said that accepting the status quo recommendations was subject to two provisos. The second is this: in their response to the commission and their representations to me, many county and district councils admitted that the two-tier system can and must be improved.

Many have made explicit promises about improved co-operation and—where it is appropriate—delegation of functions. Many, indeed, have written such promises in the literature they have sent out in their areas. We are compiling a list of those for each county council. I shall be reminding each of them of the promises that they have made, and I shall be asking them to report to me on the implementation of what are, after all, their own commitments.

I am still considering the recommendations which the commission has made for change in the remaining 12 county areas. I am aware that everyone involved is anxious for the position to be clarified quickly, and I shall be making further announcements shortly.

With the decisions I have announced today, we have covered 27 of the 39 counties. In those counties, with the exception of the small number of districts I have mentioned, people now know how their governance will be carried out. Where the two-tier system is to remain, the authorities will be able to move on to the issues that the review has brought to the forefront: closer co-operation between the tiers and greater delegation of responsibility wherever that is possible. Whether the structures are two-tier or unitary, the end result should be improved services and more effective local government.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): On behalf of the Labour party, I welcome much of the statement, and thank the Secretary of State for the discussions which preceded it. The overall effect of what he has announced should deliver much of what we have been calling for.

The proposals made by the Local Government Commission were inconsistent, and displayed neither rhyme nor reason. Rutland, with 33,000 people, was to get independence, while Northampton and Blackburn, both with more than 180,000 people, were not. We were seeking consistency. We were also calling for the House to be given an overall view of the likely proposals for the whole country.

Today's announcement recognises that the present shambles could not be continued. It creates a reasonable prospect of some consistency across the country, and gives a reasonable indication of the likely outcome of the review in every part of England. As that is what we were asking for, I very much welcome the Government's positive response to the points that we have been making, in public and in private.

If we take together the decision so far announced by the Secretary of State, the further recommendations for change made by the commission and the list of authorities which the Local Government Commission is to be asked to re-examine, we see that most of the former large county boroughs are likely to regain their former status, and some additional major urban councils are likely to join them.

Taken together with the list put forward by the Secretary of State, unitary status seems likely to be achieved by Blackburn, Blackpool, Bournemouth, Brighton, Basildon and Thurrock, Darlington and Derby, Exeter, Gravesham and Dartford, Gloucester, Halton, Leicester, Luton, the Medway towns, Nottingham, Northampton, Milton Keynes, Peterborough, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Reading, Slough, Southampton, Stoke-on-Trent, Thamesdown and Warrington.

However, a limited number of other councils clearly qualify for unitary status under the Secretary of State's new criteria. Therefore, I suggest to the Secretary of State that he at least consider the case for Cambridge, Ipswich, Norwich, Oxford and The Wrekin, which seem to meet his overall criteria. I hope that, in deference to other hon. Members, he will agree to consider other borderline candidates for the list of councils to be referred back to the commission.

The Secretary of State has recognised that, for this proposal to work, changes had to be made at the top of the Local Government Commission. When Sir John Banham was appointed to chair the commission, the right hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Portillo) said that he was very happy to appoint Sir John, and described him as "a distinguished public servant" with "a tremendous knowledge" of local authorities. The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), the previous Secretary of State for the Environment, said that he was "delighted to announce" that Sir John Banham had agreed to take up the job. I bet he was not half as delighted as the present Secretary of State is to announce Sir John's departure. His conduct of the affairs of the commission has been quite deplorable. It should have been beyond reproach, but at times it has been beyond belief. Sir John's departure was required if today's proposals were to command any support or credibility across the country.

I welcome the opportunity that the Secretary of State has offered us to contribute in due course to setting out the new guidance to the commission. To advise it to use a bit of common sense would make a good start. The Secretary of State will understand that we would expect any new county boroughs to have reasonable and acceptable boundaries, and also we would expect the commission to make sure that the number of elected councillors truly matches the ward electorates in all the new authorities.

I hope that the Secretary of State will accept that the new situation creates a further period of uncertainty for council staff who are affected. Therefore, I hope that he will agree to meet the appropriate national officers of the main local government trade unions in an attempt to work out severance and compensation terms that are acceptable to all concerned.

The statement, welcome though it is, acknowledges that the local government review has sunk into a morass of contradiction, inconsistency, expense and litigation, which could have been avoided if the Government had laid down clearer guidelines in the first place and appointed someone better to do the job. The present Secretary of

[Mr. Frank Dobson]

State has to accept some responsibility for the mess, but the bulk of the blame must lie with his predecessors and their principal appointee.

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his general and generous support for what we have proposed. We should look forwards rather than backwards. No doubt all of us could think of different ways of doing many things. Let us accept that the commission has certainly produced its proposals faster than we had expected. It has given us a real opportunity to take these steps, and we should proceed from there.

I shall certainly look carefully at the other districts that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. Of course, I looked at those in trying to draw the line, but that is difficult, as the hon. Gentleman kindly recognised. There are particular examples in terms of size, and we must also bear in mind the effect on the remaining parts of counties if we take the steps that the hon. Gentleman proposes. I shall have to look carefully at the districts and I promise to look at them afresh.

The next step relates to boundaries. I do not envisage any wholesale change in boundaries as a result of what is proposed. It is important for there to be some continuity and security, especially for staff. I should have thought that matters of council wards and the like are traditionally and properly the responsibility of the commission.

Naturally, we are concerned to ensure parity of representation, and it would be proper to draw to the new commission's attention the hon. Gentleman's points. I am certainly happy to meet the representatives of staff organisations, and I recognise that this is a difficult time for all of them.

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): Is it not anomalous to grant Luton unitary status and at the same time to deny that status to the county town of Bedford? Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in the county outside Luton, the number of people has been reduced to 360,000, with four local authorities? Is that not over-government locally?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right to put forward a case that I know he has espoused for a long time, but perhaps my answer lies within his question. A perfectly reasonable county is left if one takes the one large town out, but if one then takes another area out, one does not have a sensible remaining county.

Although a fine and ancient town, Bedford is a district with considerable rural areas that have much in common with their neighbours. It would find the two-tier system more to its liking. I have tried to make a proper judgment. It is consistent with general policy for Luton to have its own unitary authority and for Bedford to be a proud county town in what is a fine county.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): The Secretary of State has told us that he intends to refer only districts to the new commission, which he will get to do his bidding as the last one did not. Does he not accept that removing the major town or city from each of the 17 counties that had expected to remain within the status quo will simply prolong for the next year or two the appalling disruption to local authorities that this shambles of a Local Government Commission has caused for the past two years?

Mr. Gummer: The House is beginning to find it extremely difficult to know what the hon. Gentleman really wants. Of all parties in the House, the Liberal party has shown itself interested only in electoral advantage in any discussion on this matter. I am finding it increasingly difficult to find any rhyme or reason in what the Liberal party wants. When we talk about inconsistency, incongruity and the lack of reasonable principles behind anything, the Liberal party sets an example unfollowed by others.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): With reference to the county of Cheshire, I naturally warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's decision to request the new commission to consider Warrington, which deserves unitary status—that has my full support. Will he accept, however, that the borough of Macclesfield, in which immense support exists for unitary status not only among individuals, but among charities, voluntary organisations and business, and which produced the best result in the whole of Cheshire in the public consultation on unitary status, should also receive further consideration from the new commission?

Mr. Gummer: Of course I shall look again at Macclesfield, but it is a town of 49,000 people. The district of Macclesfield is a mixture of town and country. It is not dissimilar to many other districts. It is a fine town, and its name is often well presented in the House. It does not, however, stand in quite the same role as, say, Warrington or Northampton, in terms either of size or of historic governance. I shall reconsider the matter, but I think that that town should fall outside the group of councils that I have decided to refer to the new commission.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is the Minister aware that, in his further proposals for Nottinghamshire, he has announced that district councils in suburban areas such as Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe will be considered for unitary status, but that areas such as Bassetlaw, Mansfield, Newark and Ashfield will not? The only thing wrong is that the areas that he has proposed for unitary status are Conservative, and that the areas that he has said will not be considered further are Labour. I do not want to accuse him of being politically biased—no hon. Member would want to do that—but could he not add a further request that the fresh review should consider all the district councils of Nottinghamshire? All eight of them want to be unitary authorities. That is the best way to sort the matter out; it is better than just basing proposals around the city.

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. A very large proportion of the councils on the list that I read out are Labour councils, but one cannot make the division between Labour and Conservative councils in that way. The councils that I have suggested are part, or an extension, of the conurbation of Nottingham itself, which is at one end—the southern end—of the county. The particular districts that he mentioned would have to be considered to some extent because of the residuary council.

I know that the hon. Gentleman lives in a county council which is not greatly loved by anyone. There is no doubt that Nottinghamshire county council has been unsuccessful, and has done a number of things which have upset everyone. I shall, of course, examine the matter

again, but I think that, if the hon. Gentleman reads my statement, he will find that the councils to which he referred are quite different in terms of make-up. Were I to include them, I should open the way for a wide range of differences and not achieve the coherence that I seek. However, I shall re-examine the issues, because we should try to reach a consensus if possible.

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): I thank my right hon. Friend. Is he aware that the people who live in the rural areas of my constituency were not overwhelmed by the idea of unitary authority status? However, I am in fairness bound to say that the Medway towns, which I think comprise the largest conurbation in Kent and which deserve the review that he is going to grant, think that they can form a good unitary authority. I support them in that.

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend. This is a review, not a decision, and it is for the commission to look at this again. The Thames gateway councils will be involved in seeking money for exciting new projects, arguing among themselves about where those projects should be located and searching for money from the European Union and elsewhere. That means that there is a case to be made for those who are going to affected to have the opportunity of at least equal representation. To exclude them would be wrong.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I understand that the statement lends itself to a great deal of local flavour but many hon. Members wish to ask a question and I can call them only if they and the Minister are brisk. There is another statement and further business to come.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does the Secretary of State recognise that many people in Lancashire will be less inclined to remain in a Lancashire county council that no longer contains Blackburn and Blackpool? Does he accept that Burnley was an extremely successful county borough, and exactly the same size as Darlington, to which he proposes to give unitary status?

Mr. Gummer: It is curious how enthusiasm for Lancashire county council is busy waning as I offer an alternative. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will find that the balance that has been struck reflects the fact that, in their discussions with the commission, Blackpool and Blackburn showed considerable support for unitary status, which outweighed other parts of the county of Lancashire. It therefore seems right to try to reflect that fact, and I think that the general outcome was probably right.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments about Nottingham. Once the decision has been made to give unitary status to the city of Nottingham, is it not important to balance that power with the review for Broxtowe, Gedling and Rushcliffe? I wish my right hon. Friend well in his attempts to get a consensus on the future of Nottingham.

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend.

Mr. Alan Milburn (Darlington): May I thank the Secretary of State and his ministerial team for their support for a single-tier Darlington council? He will be aware of the overwhelming popular support in the town for a return to the principles of self-government that were undermined 21 years ago in the previous local government review. When does he intend to bring an order to the House to bring into being the new Darlington council, so that we can make progress as soon as possible?

Mr. Gummer: I shall produce such an order as soon as possible, although it cannot come into being immediately.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I thank my right hon. Friend for taking the trouble to visit Dartford a few days ago. When he makes his recommendation to the new chairman of the commission, will he recommend that, if north-west Kent is given unitary status, that status should be given within the existing boundaries of what is now the borough of Dartford? We have no wish to be part of a Thames gateway authority stretching from Crayford to beyond Gillingham.

Mr. Gummer: I much enjoyed my visit to Dartford. I have no intention of suggesting the establishment of such a large authority, stretching from Crayford to Hempstead and Bredhurst; I would not dream of it.

I shall suggest to the commission, in the first place, that it review the possibility of a new authority relating to Rochester upon Medway and Gillingham. I shall also suggest, if further discussions take place with the councils concerned, and the county council, that they review the possibility of a new authority covering Gravesham and Dartford—or, if they think it right, a separate authority for Gravesham. That, however, will be for them to propose. I am not making the proposition; I am offering them the opportunity to consider the matter. I doubt, however, that they would want an authority the size of the one that my hon. Friend fears, which would be out of line with anything else that we are proposing.

Mr. Mike Hall (Warrington, South): I thank the Secretary of State for his announcement about the county of Cheshire, and welcome the reference to Warrington. May I stress that I feel that Halton borough council should also have unitary status? It fulfils all the criteria outlined by the Secretary of State in relation to popular support, a good identity and social and economic regeneration to support business and the voluntary sector.

May I echo the points made by the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)? Macclesfield also fulfils all the criteria. I urge the Secretary of State to look again at Chester as well: it too has a complete identity. You will gather, Madam Speaker, that I believe that a unitary solution for the whole of Cheshire would be appropriate.

Mr. Gummer: I understand that there are those who would prefer the whole cake to half of it. I am trying to ensure that the widely differing views of local government are taken into account, and that we provide reasonable answers that will satisfy most people.

I accept the hon. Gentleman's views about Halton; that is why I put Halton in the second list. I shall discuss the matter more widely, and if it turns out that the hon. Gentleman's proposal seems to be more generally accepted, I shall act accordingly.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, I visited the area recently—in fact, I have been there several times—and I am much impressed by the partnership between local authorities and the private sector, and by the use to which elements of the single regeneration budget have been put.

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I was pleased to note the changes that have taken place, and I hope that any new form of local government will enhance and increase opportunities.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his statement, and for tidying up what was a rather mucky exercise.

The county council campaign in Leicestershire has caused some anxiety and concern about whether the county of Rutland can afford county status. Will my right hon. Friend therefore allow some extra time, so that—basing its assessment on the proper costs rather than on county council propaganda—that small county can establish whether it can afford such status, and the division that has been caused can be replaced by unity?

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend. I am sorry about some of the extreme propaganda that has been put out by some councils; I do not think that it has helped the discussion. In my statement, I tried very hard to provide an opportunity for people to secure a more sensible and permanent answer.

I shall certainly consider the possibility of extra time. I have always felt that we ought to be able to obtain the advantages of unitary authorities with more sharing. When it seems best for services to spread across two unitary authorities, I do not see why we cannot find ways in which to allow that. We shall consider ways in which we can help.

I do not want people who have long sought independence and control over their affairs, for all sorts of historic reasons, to feel that they can choose that independence and control only at huge expense—particularly if the expense has been calculated by those who do not want them to have it.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Will the Secretary of State explain why he has taken so little notice of the fact that the majority of citizens in Lancashire, according to the consultations, prefer the status quo; and why he has not taken account of the fact that his present solution will increase the costs of local government for all people in Lancashire? We will be paying for Blackpool achieving unitary status.

Mr. Gummer: I am proposing Blackburn as well as Blackpool, if the hon. Lady wishes to be—

Mrs. Wise: I will add Blackburn as well.

Mr. Gummer: I am glad that the hon. Lady is even-handed about this. The majority of people in Lancashire will have the status quo. I am suggesting only that the commission looks again at these two authorities, where there is evidence of very considerable support and where, in both cases, there is a large population, closely knit, which would have unitary status in other parts of the country. I merely think that it is good idea that that should be looked at carefully. I understand that I have the support of very many members of the Labour party, who live in both those areas, for this reference.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner), I welcome the decision to call for the new or revised commission to review the Medway towns. My right hon. Friend will know from his personal knowledge that the redevelopment of the Medway towns is absolutely critical to their future prosperity and that for planning, transportation and urban redevelopment, the Medway towns are seen as a whole.

The call will be welcomed by all the political parties, with the exception of the Gillingham Liberals, who got up to some extraordinary stunts during the consultation. Will my right hon. Friend tell me a little about the time scale that he foresees for the review, and when he thinks that there will be elections to a new county borough of the Medway towns?

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend. I hope that we will have the guidance ready in June, when the old commission will cease and the new commission will be appointed. I hope that it will then get on with the job as quickly as possible, but it is up to its members, of course, to decide how.

I very much agree with my hon. Friend: the great and ancient towns of Chatham and Rochester joined to make a single authority—with rural areas about them, but centrally those two authorities—because they knew that it was necessary for the future of their community. In many of the regeneration areas of the Medway towns, it is difficult to draw the line between Gillingham and Rochester upon Medway.

Indeed, only those who have long lived there—it is probably why the Liberals do not understand this—know where the boundary is. Those who care about Rochester upon Medway and Gillingham are very concerned about the regeneration possibilities and the great hope that comes to that area of the country. I think that they will want at least the advantages—as well as the disadvantages, for there may be some—of unitary status to be considered.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): I join my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) in welcoming a number of the points which were made by the Secretary of State. May I have clarification on the question asked by my hon. Friend about The Wrekin, which the Secretary of State knows is one of the largest district councils which has not so far been give unitary status?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that his answer suggested that The Wrekin will be reconsidered, and will he bear in mind the fact that, with a population of 145,000, it is larger than many authorities which have already been granted unitary status? Will he give some indication of when, after the review process starts in June, he expects it to be completed?

Mr. Gummer: I have recently been to The Wrekin. I understand the hon. Gentleman's comments, and thank him for his support. It is, I think that he will agree, a rather different area from most in the country. That is in the nature of that new town, with its ancient heart and the connections which have been very successfully built. I shall certainly, as I have said, look at it again and consider whether it ought, like the others, to be referred to the commission.

I cannot say when the commission will finish its work, but I hope to press it to finish its work as rapidly as is consistent with sensible and consistent decisions.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Blackpool, South): I thank my right hon. Friend on behalf of the people of Blackpool

who voted in such substantial numbers for the unitary status option. May I also thank my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration for taking such care in listening to the representations made to him by members of all political parties when he visited Blackpool shortly before Christmas?

In particular, while recognising that Blackpool, as an historic county borough, has now to make its case to the reconstituted commission, will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Councillor Maxine Callow, the Conservative leader, for her hard work on Blackpool council? Will he also confirm that one reason why there was such a substantial vote in Blackpool for unitary status was because of the appalling way in which the socialist-controlled Lancashire county council misused council tax payers' money in an appalling propaganda campaign—and even then it lost in Blackpool and Blackburn?

Mr. Gummer: In my unaccustomed role of extreme reticence on party political matters, I will miss out that last but obviously heartfelt comment. I hope very much that Blackpool will have the opportunity to present its case, and the commission will no doubt then consider it very carefully. I noted the very successful campaign which showed that Blackpool felt strongly about recovering its ancient status. We shall have to see what the commission thinks about that.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that 21 years ago today I was elected for the then parliamentary constituency of Newton which included an enormous part of the borough of Warrington? Is he aware that the mid-Mersey belt of north-west England is dominated by the three great towns of St. Helens, Wigan and Warrington, and that a Warrington borough, as a unitary authority working in conjunction with the metropolitan districts of St. Helens and Wigan, would have an enormous impact on improving the quality of life and the regeneration of the north-west?

Mr. Gummer: Although I do not know the area anything like as well as the hon. Gentleman, I know it well enough to see that there is a seeming inconsistency with the kind of structure that has been recommended by the boundary commission. That is why I think it would be a good idea if we considered the matter in the way the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May I thank my right hon. Friend for recognising the significance of the Thames gateway, the rail link and the Ebbsfleet station announcement, all three of which will bring about massive change in north-west Kent? It is quite clear that, by making that a coherent planning whole, it would be very much better carried out by one council than by three.

Mr. Gummer: I was much impressed by the problems that Gravesham would have if it did not have pretty direct control over the way in which planning operates in that part of north Kent. I am also very impressed by the argument that, with the coherence of neighbouring unitary authorities, both Gravesham and Dartford would find themselves less able to deal with the issues that beset them. After I have discussed the matter with the councils and the county council, the commission may well want to recommend something different.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The Secretary of State will agree that it is important that the proposals gather the most widespread bipartisan support. Against that background, and while I welcome the statement regarding Warrington and Halton—incidentally, half of Halton has been part of Cheshire all its life—will the Secretary of State ensure that the whole of Cheshire is reconsidered in the light of his comments about Halton and Warrington, so that that important bipartisan element is maintained?

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point, and I respect the way in which he put it. The difficulty with the bipartisan element is that it is not one which has to be maintained simply in his area. It must be maintained very much more widely.

Therefore, in seeking the right answer, I have tried to take into account the views that I have received from all parts of the House. Sometimes, that is difficult, because one has heard contrary views from neighbouring areas, not just across the boundaries, but within parties. I have tried very hard to get the balance right. I think that I have it right in this respect, but no doubt the hon. Gentleman will write to me to ensure that I do not miss another opportunity to consider the matter.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Bearing in mind what my right hon. Friend has said about Norfolk, does he recall that, throughout Norfolk, there was a clear majority for the status quo, in response to the commission, both in local polls and in MORI polls? That was also true in Norwich. Therefore, if my right hon. Friend, at a later stage, looks again at the city of Norwich, will he make sure that there really is a clear majority of people within that city who are in favour of any variation?

Mr. Gummer: If I considered Norwich—I have promised my hon. Friend that I will look at the list he gave me—and if I presented it to the commission, I have no doubt that the commission would want to make sure that there was local support, and that local government would be improved by anything that it proposed. I should certainly draw to its attention all the relevant details I have, and that would obviously include any reference that my hon. Friend would like to give me.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Does the Secretary of State accept that the Local Government Commission was a creature of his own Department's making, and that today's announcement will create further uncertainty? Will he try to remedy matters by ensuring that there is a quick timetable to resolve issues? Staff will be concerned about the matter; they have had a rough deal. Will the right hon. Gentleman increase redundancy terms for affected staff?

Mr. Gummer: I have done my best throughout the discussions to show that I wanted as speedy an answer as possible. I speeded up the matter, and I now propose that we should act as quickly as possible. The hon. Gentleman speaks less than fairly about what is a complicated matter to try to find the next stage on in local government, which is a continuing, evolving system, and I want to get the best answer. The hon. Gentleman speaks with a certain

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sourness, because the county council of which he was a member is without doubt one of the least popular county councils in Britain.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, although it is true that Aylesbury Vale district council put up a not unreasonable case for unitary status, we needed the disruption involved in the demolition of Buckinghamshire county council like a hole in the head? Is he aware also that many of us are greatly relieved to be released from between the nutcracker of the county council and the district council?

Mr. Gummer: I hope that I have done the best for Buckinghamshire—I have tried hard to do that. It is a fine and ancient county, and I hope that we will now have stability there and that all hon. Members from Buckinghamshire will find it possible to support what is inevitably not entirely to everyone's liking.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Has the two-year journey been wasted? Does the Secretary of State agree that, when all transitional costs are taken into account, it will cost more than £1 billion? It is no use blaming the commission, Banham and all the rest. The truth is that the Secretary of State and his mates have changed the rules and told the commission to review and to review again.

How many people will get the sack as a result of the new venture? How many workers will be made redundant? Would it not have been better to use that £1 billion in local government in order to reduce class sizes, instead of spending it on administration?

Why has the right hon. Gentleman not mentioned Derbyshire? Is it because he will get involved in another political carve-up there? Before he tells me about Derbyshire county council, let me tell him that the councillors have been elected with big majorities ever since 1981. The people liked them and voted for them.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman has a characteristic of consistency, which is rare in such local government discussions. He is always opposed to anything that I say or any Conservative Member says, whether he has thought about it or not. The hon. Gentleman is wrong about his figures, wrong about his assessment, and wrong about the views that I have put forward. Local government is too important to be based upon the conservatism of the Member of Parliament for Bolsover.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Will my right hon. Friend please add Spelthorne to the list that he will review again? It meets all the requirements that he has listed this afternoon. For reasons of brevity today, I will write to my right hon. Friend, setting out all the justifications, and I hope that he will respond favourably.

Mr. Gummer: I look forward very much to my hon. Friend's letter.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (Lancashire, West): After two years of turmoil in Lancashire, and, it has to be said, much demoralisation among all councils in Lancashire, is not the referral back of Blackburn and Blackpool for further consideration simply a recipe for extending that turmoil and demoralisation?

Furthermore, is it not an invitation to boroughs such as Burnley and Preston, which have a logical case in view of what the right hon. Gentleman has decided today, to press him to extend what he is saying to them? Even worse from the right hon. Gentleman's point of view, he might get demands from Lancaster as well.

Mr. Gummer: I have not noticed any demoralisation in the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and I did not notice any demoralisation in my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Mr. Hawkins), who has already spoken. I have not noticed, either, that the proposal could be demoralising to the people who specifically sought their own unitary authorities in those two places.

However sympathetic we may be to those who work in local government—and I am very sympathetic to them—in the end they work there because of the citizens they serve. If those citizens feel strongly that they would be better served by unitary authorities, at least that idea should be considered. It would be odd to demand that it should not be considered.

I know that the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Pickthall) is one of the rare strong supporters of Lancashire county council, so it is odd that he asks, "What about unitaries elsewhere?" I think that I have got the balance about right, and I hope that we shall be able to go forward together on that basis.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), is my right hon. Friend aware that most people in Norfolk were in favour of the status quo, and will be pleased? But will he also congratulate the borough of King's Lynn in west Norfolk on its excellent campaign for unitary status, which received considerable support in the town? The people there were pleased to meet the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration the other day.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend the Minister of State made a point of telling me that King's Lynn council's presentation seeking unitary status was one of the most excellent that we saw. It was extremely well put forward, and my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) is fortunate in his local council. I hope that, now that the future is clear, Norfolk county council will carry out its stated desire to give much more local preference to the other local authorities in Norfolk.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): My right hon. Friend has not mentioned Devon as such, but he has mentioned Plymouth, which is in Devon. Will he bear in mind the fact that the commission's original recommendation for Devon, with the exception of Exeter, to remain the same appeared to have obtained general approval? The second recommendation, which means that my right hon. Friend is now considering Exeter, may not really abide by the general view of the people of Devon, and we should like a reply about Devon as soon as possible.

Mr. Gummer: I promise my right hon. Friend as quick a reply as possible on Devon. In the light of what the recommendations of the commission were, it is not proper for me to refer in this statement to an area wider than

Exeter, but I shall continue to consider the proposals for Devon carefully, and I shall make a statement as soon as I can.

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his acceptance of Sir John Banham's recommendation that, after 100 years of service to the people of Lancashire, Lancashire county council should continue in existence.

I accept what he says about the historic status of Blackpool as a county borough, but there will be considerable concern that my right hon. Friend appears to have ignored many of the points that Sir John made in his report about additional transitional costs and about the effect on the ability to deliver services both to the people of Blackpool and throughout Lancashire. I hope that, when the fresh review is constituted, my right hon. Friend will urge Sir John's successor to consider those factors carefully. Can he tell us how long he expects the present period of uncertainty to continue?

Mr. Gummer: There is no uncertainty for the rest of Lancashire, but we shall get this period over as rapidly as possible. I have made no statement about the validity of the Banham remarks about Blackpool. All I have said is that I am offering the opportunity for a newly constituted commission to reconsider Blackpool. No doubt it will take into account all that my hon. Friend has said. It would be wrong to deny to the many people in Blackpool who have sought unitary status the opportunity to have their case considered in the present context rather than in another.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Is my right hon. Friend aware that what he said about Warwickshire will be widely welcomed within the shire county? The status quo was desired, and I am grateful to him for agreeing with that. However, he will understand that funding is critical for local authorities. To use his own phrase, the "delegation of responsibility" applies especially to local authorities. Can he therefore say when the cap might be lifted, so that true accountability might be restored to local government?

Mr. Gummer: I fear that this is neither the occasion nor the opportunity so to do.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) said that the majority of people in Lancashire preferred the status quo, but only 5 per cent. voted in favour of that. Since the county council employs no fewer than 47,000 persons, that disposes of most of that 5 per cent.

May I congratulate Blackburn and Blackpool on their good fortune, as they will in all probability escape from the profligacy and inefficiency of Lancashire county council? I much regret that, up to now, liberalisation has not come to Lancaster, which is a historic city, an academic and business centre, a thoroughly composite place and the gateway to the lake district. May I ask my right hon. Friend to reconsider that most lamentable decision?

Mr. Gummer: There are many cities in this country which could well do with the earnest advocacy which my hon. Friend gives to Lancaster. I do not think that anyone in Lancaster could possibly not know that she speaks for the city whenever the opportunity occurs.

My hon. Friend knows the terms under which I sought to produce the list, and she must understand that—following my careful study of the terms—the great city of Lancaster has neither the size nor the nature which would lead it to be in the same sector as the others to which she referred. [HON. MEMBERS: "Just say no."] I will not—as Opposition Members would like—dismiss what my hon. Friend has put forward, and I will look again at the terms. I ought not to give her a huge hope, as hers is a rather different case from others.

Mr. Alan Howarth (Stratford-on-Avon): While welcoming my right hon. Friend's decision to accept the commission's recommendation in respect of Warwickshire, may I ask whether he agrees that, after 20 years of Treasury rule, local government is not in all respects flourishing as he would wish?

In the reference in his statement to the desirability of self-sustaining communities, was my right hon. Friend in effect saying that, in future, the democratic principle would be better expressed through subsidiarity and local accountability? Does he agree that sauce for the goose must be sauce for gander, and that, just as we insist on subsidiarity between the European Union and the national Government, so we should pursue subsidiarity between the national Government and local authorities—and, moreover, between local authorities and their own communities?

Mr. Gummer: I have always believed in subsidiarity, and it is important that it is applied not just as far as the United Kingdom in the European Union is concerned, but to local authorities. I wish that those authorities which most demand subsidiarity would remember their need to give subsidiarity to schools and all other organisations which are perfectly capable of running themselves, instead of being bossed about by town halls.

Sir David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be great relief in my constituency that it has finally been confirmed that Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and the villages will not be pushed into a Greater Luton, and that mid-Bedfordshire will not be pushed into a Greater Bedford? Can he confirm that elections for the reconstituted Bedfordshire county council—which we hope will be successful—will be in May 1997?

Mr. Gummer: The elections will be held as planned in May 1997.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (Surrey, East): May I particularly welcome what my right hon. Friend has said about keeping those local authorities such as Surrey, which made commitments in the heat of consultation about devolving and sharing power, up to the mark?

My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, who kindly visited my constituency only yesterday, will know that parish councils command wide popular support. Will my right hon. Friend consider putting back into his recommendations what the commission unaccountably left out—a recommendation for new parish councils in Tandridge district?

Mr. Gummer: I agree with my hon. Friend that Tandridge district is a good example of a well-run local authority. Local authorities are all looking carefully at

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what the county councils have promised them. I must say that a number of county councils which hitherto had shown precious little regard for subsidiarity, co-operation or delegation became extremely keen on it when there was any possibility of them being abolished. I have a list of all those clear statements, and I intend to ensure that, as those county councils made the statements, they shall carry them out.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): While I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement about the chairmanship and future membership of the commission, may I express my concern at the time that he is taking to decide on the future of Derbyshire? Some Conservative Members find it difficult to understand how a Local Government Commission can recommend unitary status for Rutland, at 33,000, and ignore every other district that wants the same sort of status. We ought to consider the view that the commission has reported and its consistency, and we should follow the Rutland experiment and give unitary status to districts.

Mr. Gummer: Although I have great sympathy with my hon. Friend's view, my colleagues and I have met a large number of delegations so that we can make those decisions properly. I am sure that he would be the first to be concerned if we had not met the many delegations from every county who wanted to see us. My hon. Friend the Minister of State saw the delegation from High Peak only yesterday, as, like the rest of us, he has been busy listening to people and reading the papers concerned. I will produce an answer as rapidly as possible, but it must be based on an understanding of the issues, and not one rushed through on some ideological basis.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Having listened to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), may I presume that I do not need to urge my right hon. Friend to tread carefully on the sensitivities of the people of Leicestershire?

Mr. Gummer: I realise how sensitive are the people of Leicestershire, and I shall tread most delicately. I hope that I will produce an answer that my hon. Friend will like.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): If we are going to be truly consistent in trying to reflect national identity, may I suggest that now is the time to consider the powers of the huge unitary authorities in the metropolitan areas, to find out whether those heavy-handed authorities can devolve powers to the diverse communities that they embrace, such as the Otleys, the Wetherbys and the Pudseys in highly centralised Leeds?

Mr. Gummer: Our commitment to devolution runs across local government. Subsidiarity is crucial, and should be pushed right down to the bottom. That is why I am so deeply opposed to regional government, which merely puts another row of persons between people and power. That is a very dangerous thing. We need much more devolution. My hon. Friend is right to say that in some of the larger unitary authorities, there is too little concern about what people in neighbourhoods, groups and historic parts think. I hope that we can help that extension.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my right hon. Friend clarify his remarks about Exeter, and confirm that there is no question of the city being the subject of a review by the newly constituted Local Government Commission, but that he is simply acknowledging the fact that he has had firm recommendations that Exeter should have unitary status?

Mr. Gummer: I have received a recommendation for Devon, and am still considering what my response should be. The recommendation covers my hon. Friend's constituency of Torbay and also Plymouth, but does not refer to Exeter. In my statement I said that, if one was considering places where there was considerable local desire for unitary authority status and, historically, a county borough, it might be reasonable to consider Exeter and to refer it to the commission.

In the context of the decisions that I have to make, having consulted the county council and the area, Exeter is one of the places that I might wish to refer to the commission. The reason that I put it like that is that it seems right to make that statement to the House now for the sake of completeness, but the full completeness can be achieved only after I have decided on the Devon proposals. I will then say whether I think it right to refer Exeter to the new commission.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the people of Essex want less expensive, more effective and more accountable local government services, and that the best way to deliver those is via a unitary authority status organisation, with about seven unitary authorities? Does he deplore the campaign run by Essex county council, at a cost of about £1 million on propaganda, and the way in which Essex county council dragooned its employees into voting on that matter? Will he add Essex to his list of authorities that have made promises to district councils?

Mr. Gummer: Essex county council does not appear to be exactly good at handling its financing. I understand that it has had considerable difficulties this week in trying to meet its proper obligations. Those who suggest that it would be better off under Labour control might like to know that the Labour-led council has fallen apart because of the incompetent way in which it was run.

I condemn councils that have spent unnecessarily on these discussions, whatever party controls them. In this case, Essex county council has set a bad example. But I have on my list some clear commitments about how it will deal with the smaller bodies within it, and I shall keep it to those.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, in Derbyshire, two MORI polls—there have been two investigations—have shown that people feel that Derby should have a unitary authority and the rest of the county should be a two-tier structure? Should not the Secretary of State make that the overwhelming consideration in coming to a decision on that matter?

Mr. Gummer: I have not decided about Derbyshire yet, as I pointed out earlier to the hon. Member for

Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). Once I have made those decisions, I shall obviously communicate them to the House. I shall look carefully at what is said, and take into account all that is said. However, my view about MORI polls is coloured by the fact that the numbers voting and the nature of the number of people employed by extremely heavy employers like Derbyshire county council might have some effect on what is revealed. I note that the hon. Member for Bolsover was more interested in the employment of people by the local council than in the services that it provided.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): If the Secretary of State is to avoid the same criticism as his predecessor genuinely deserves for the waste of both time and resources, he must give clear, consistent and transparent principles under which the newly constructed commission will operate. It would be helpful to the whole House if he would give an idea of the time scale, both in terms of the 12 outstanding authorities—the papers on those are still on his desk—and when he expects to clear up the uncertainties on that matter; as well as the time scale for the general review process, so that the uncertainty surrounding it may be brought to an end.

I welcome the Secretary of State's decision to meet relevant trade unions, which will reassure staff. Will he look clearly at the view that the present settlement has been unsatisfactory? Does he accept that, although the list he gave contains many of the authorities that need looking at again, it should be supplemented with those mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson)—particularly The Wrekin and Norwich, where there is a strong case for unitary status?

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for most of those comments. I do not agree with his earlier comments. This is a contentious issue that divides hon. Members within parties, not just across the Floor of the House. In many cases, the commission found itself with a problem whereby not many people had a view about how local government should be structured, although all people had a view about the price they should pay and the services that they wanted. The connection between those and the organisation is sometimes difficult for people to make.

The commission was also hampered by the fact that large numbers of authorities—many more than I would have hoped—ran campaigns that were little short of scandalous in the statements that they made and their attempts to frighten people. Many local councillors will have good reason to look back on this period with considerable sadness. It did local government no good when some councils made threats to school governors, such as suggesting that there would be no education if they were made into unity authorities.

The commission had a difficult job to do, and it has carried it out much more quickly than was originally supposed. I wanted to ensure that it was done with that speed, because I understand the problems that beset people who work for local authorities, and I wanted to try to meet them.

Now that we have reached this stage, we have a sensible way of producing the answers we want. Those answers are the answers of decent local government, providing a proper service, with an enabling council able to ensure that people have the services they need at a reasonable price. I hope that I can deliver that. I hope, too, that the commission will be able to consider those councils that I have mentioned. I will carefully consider the councils that the hon. Members for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) and for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) have suggested.

On the time scale, the new commission will be in place in June. During the period till then, we shall be producing the guidelines. I accept that the concepts that might have been taken for granted in the past must be clearly expressed in the guidelines. I shall certainly ensure that I do that, and that will be subject to consultation, not only with Opposition Members, but more widely, with local authorities.

I hope that then the new commission will be able to start its work in July, and I expect that it would try to fulfil that as quickly as it could, but it is not for me to tell it how quickly to do it. I merely assure the House that I will provide the commission with the resources it needs to do so in a reasonable time.

There are no announcements sitting on my desk about those remaining counties, waiting for me to read them. Those counties are subject to considerable consultation, and a great deal of work has been done listening to delegations from the various parts of the counties. I have now almost completed that. I hope very much to be able to complete the work on them myself with my colleagues, and I would expect to be able to make a further statement to the House about those in the very near future. I have to try to do so as soon as possible, not least because it is necessary for the proper and conventional gap between that and the forthcoming local county council elections.

Business of the House

4.41 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Tony Newton): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the business for next week.

MONDAY 6 MARCH—Second Reading of the Criminal Appeal Bill.

TUESDAY 7 MARCH—Opposition Day (9th allotted day). There will be a debate entitled "The Position of Women in Britain" on an Opposition motion.

WEDNESDAY 8 MARCH—Until 2.30 pm, there will be debates on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Until 7 o'clock, motion on the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order.

Followed by a motion on the Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order.

THURSDAY 9 MARCH—Until about 7 o'clock, proceedings on the South Africa Bill *[Lords]*.

Followed by a motion to approve the first report of the Broadcasting Committee on developing the parliamentary broadcasting archives.

FRIDAY 10 MARCH—The House will not be sitting.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet on Wednesday 8 March at 10.30 am to consider the unnumbered explanatory memorandum submitted by Her Majesty's Treasury on 23 November 1994 relating to the European Court of Auditors' annual report for the financial year 1993, together with replies from the institutions.

[Wednesday 8 March:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Community document: unnumbered, Report of the Court of Auditors for 1993; relevant report of the European Legislation Committee: HC 70-ii (1994-95).]

On Monday 13 March I anticipate proposing the Second Reading of the Gas Bill. I am still considering the exact pattern of business for the rest of the week, but the House may find it helpful to know that on Thursday 16 March I anticipate that Government business will be taken until 7 o'clock, and that that will be followed by a debate on a motion for the Adjournment.

Mrs. Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): I thank the Leader of the House for that information. Who will speak for the Government in next Tuesday's debate, on the eve of International Women's Day, on the position of women in Britain?

The Leader of the House will, I hope, acknowledge that when the statement on Barings was made on Monday, the Chancellor was, understandably, unable to answer many questions because full information was not available. Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for a statement to be made next week to give the House further information, specifically on the 43 pension funds that have been managed by Barings, including a proportion of the London Transport pension fund, about which many people must be worried, and on the charities whose assets are held by Barings and are now frozen? A specific statement on those issues would help many people.

The Leader of the House will be aware of the considerable interest, inside and outside the House, in the Prime Minister's apparent U-turn on executive pay. As Ministers do not appear to know whether they would support an amendment to the Finance Bill or to the Gas Bill a week on Monday, or indeed whether legislation is needed at all, and as the Greenbury committee may not report for some time, would it not be a good idea for the Government to initiate a debate in the House on executive pay and share options, so that the most effective way of tackling those abuses can be found and action taken as quickly as possible, not least because of the wide public concern? May we have a promise that such a debate will take place, or are we to assume that the Prime Minister's statement was merely hot air or window dressing?

The Government announced today that spending on higher education will increase next year by less than the rate of inflation. I am sure that the Leader of the House is aware that the vice-chancellor of Essex university criticised that decision today, and said that the future will be bleak if we do not invest in education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has issued figures today showing that cuts of about £320 million will be made in school budgets next year. When can we expect the Secretary of State for Education to explain to the House the freeze and squeeze in higher education and the dangers associated with the increase in class sizes, which is alarming parents, school governors and teachers alike? The Secretary of State for Education has not been to the Dispatch Box to defend her budgeting since she half promised to do so in the debate that was initiated by the Opposition.

Mr. Newton: I thought that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education made her position and her expectations and the position about funding absolutely clear in the debate to which the hon. Lady referred, but I will bring her remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

On executive pay, again, as on a number of occasions during yesterday's debate, I wondered whether Opposition Members were listening to what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was saying to them. I thought that he said straightforwardly that the Government would wish to consider the recommendations of the Greenbury committee, including anything that it might say about the need for legislation, and would then consider those matters at the appropriate time. I did not think that there was any room for misunderstanding about that, and I see no reason to respond to the hon. Lady in the positive way that I would normally seek to do.

The hon. Lady will be aware that my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor said that issues arising from Barings had been referred to the Board of Banking Supervision. On most of the issues, it would obviously be right to see what emerges from its inquiries, but I acknowledge that the hon. Lady has referred to a number of worrying matters that obviously need to be taken into account. I will bring those remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor.

Our participation in next Tuesday's debate is still under consideration, but I anticipate that at least one of the speeches will be made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mrs. Browning), who recently became chairman of the Women's National Commission.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a Government statement or debate about housing renewal grants in Birmingham? Is he aware of the great public anxiety about that issue, that that

concern will not be satisfied by an internal party investigation, that public money and the misuse of public money are at stake, and that what is needed is an independent investigation and an assurance that such abuse is not taking place anywhere else?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend refers rightly to the need for an independent investigation, and I understand that the district auditor has followed the proper course and is investigating the allegations that have been made.

My right hon. Friend must also understand that I must be somewhat restrained in my comments about the matter. However, in one sense, the scale of the Leader of the Opposition's intervention and the implications of that action speak for themselves. In those circumstances, the Opposition might feel that it is an appropriate subject for discussion on their next Supply day.

Ms Liz Lynne (Rochdale): Will the Leader of the House make time for an urgent debate on the plight of unpaid carers, especially in view of the report from SCOPE—formerly the Spastics Society—which found that many unpaid carers suffer grave financial hardship? Unpaid carers contribute a lot to this country, for which they have a right to be recognised.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Lady will know, I hope, that she is addressing a sympathetic ear. When I was a Minister at the Department of Social Security, I was responsible for extending the invalid care allowance to married women and for a number of other measures designed to recognise and underpin more clearly the position of unpaid carers. It is clear from everything that my right hon. and hon. Friends have done in the spheres of social security and health in recent times that they too are concerned about supporting unpaid carers and about recognising the contribution that they make.

Sir Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there has not been a full House of Commons debate on the Commonwealth since 1987? Since then, not only have we been joined by Namibia, Pakistan and South Africa, but a number of strains have developed within the Commonwealth—such as the Cyprus question—that must be addressed. Will my right hon. Friend choose the week beginning Monday 13 March—Commonwealth Day—for a debate on the subject of the Commonwealth?

Mr. Newton: There will be some opportunity to refer to such matters next Thursday, 9 March in the debate that I announced on the South Africa Bill. There is continuing uncertainty about the nature of business on Thursday, 16 March. In the circumstances, I clearly cannot make a commitment, but I will bear my hon. and learned Friend's suggestion in mind.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): Is the Leader of the House aware of the damning indictment of the district auditor, Mr. Rowland Little, of the behaviour of Wandsworth council in breaking the law for many years when rehousing homeless families in the borough? As the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Sir P. Beresford), a junior Environment Minister, was chairman of that housing authority for three years, when can we expect a statement on his future?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman might have acknowledged that the auditor found no evidence of improper purpose or wilful misconduct, no evidence that the council took account of irrelevant considerations, no evidence of financial loss to the council and nothing to suggest that any council member or officer did not believe in the lawfulness of the council's actions.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on the effect of the action by the Channel 4 television programme "The Word" in paying for another trip by the 14-year-old boy who travelled to Malaysia using his father's passport and credit cards? That sets an extremely bad example to other young people. The boy's parents are apparently under contract to some news magazine and therefore cannot comment on or support that disgraceful decision.

Mr. Newton: I am sure that my hon. Friend's remarks will be studied carefully by those at whom they are directed. I will draw them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Is the Minister aware that yet another child has died as a result of choking on a pen top? Does he remember that my young constituent, Billy Walker, died in that way some time ago, as a result of which the Government introduced a trading standard? May we have a debate on the need to ban not merely unsafe pens produced in this country but those that are imported from overseas, to ensure that there are no more unnecessary deaths of this nature?

Mr. Newton: The safety of pen caps on sale in the United Kingdom—whether they are imported or manufactured locally—is covered by the General Product Safety Regulations 1994 and by a British standard requiring the ventilation of pen caps intended for children up to 14 years of age. Of course, contravention of those regulations is a criminal offence and local authority trading standards officers have the power to remove unsafe products from the market and to bring prosecutions. I am sure that the hon. and learned Gentleman will convey his concerns to the relevant authorities in Leicester, and I will also draw them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Mr. Harold Elletson (Blackpool, North): Will the Leader of the House find time for a statement or a debate on the consultation paper on tourism that the Department of National Heritage issued this week? Does he agree that it emphasises the Government's commitment to the tourism industry and that it marks the beginning of a new drive for higher standards, quality and real value for money in tourism and leisure, which is Britain's fastest growing industry?

Mr. Newton: I am aware of the document that was published this week, which contains an action plan for a variety of bodies and which will assist the industry to take advantage of the opportunities that the growing market in tourism represents. I share my hon. Friend's hope that full advantage will be taken of those opportunities.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The Minister will be aware that yesterday the Government suffered a humiliating defeat in the Committee that considered the Local Government (Compensation for Redundancy or Premature Retirement on Reorganisation) (Scotland) Regulations 1995—the Government's inadequate

[Mr. John McAllion]

compensation scheme for local government workers who were made redundant as a result of local government reorganisation in Scotland.

Technically, the Government can simply ignore that defeat because the statutory instrument was introduced under the negative resolution procedure. However, past Governments who have been defeated in that way have recognised their obligation to take account of the defeat by reintroducing the statutory instrument for further consideration by the whole House. Will the Minister assure hon. Members that he will continue that honourable tradition, recognise the fact that his Government have been defeated, and give the House a second chance to consider that important measure?

Mr. Newton: The only possible response to the hon. Gentleman is: nice try. As I understand it, the humiliation was the Opposition's. All but two Opposition Members on the Committee failed to turn up to debate the matter, and the rest magically arrived only just in time to vote when the debate had finished. I am sure that that brought joy to the heart of the shadow deputy Chief Whip, but others may make their own judgments.

I also understand that, during the last Labour Administration, a similar incident occurred on four occasions—which shows that my hon. Friends are just as good at their job as the shadow deputy Chief Whip is at his—none of which resulted in matters being referred back to the Floor of the House.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): The whole House is pleased that my right hon. Friend has moved on the recommendations of the Procedure Committee and the Jopling Committee and has announced two weeks' business at the same time. He announced the business for Monday 13 March, when there will probably be a Division at 10 o'clock, and for Thursday 16 March, when there could be a Division at 7 o'clock, but he has left the 14th and the 15th blank. If possible, will he consider announcing what the business on particular days will be? If he has to adjust it later, the House will understand, but it would help hon. Members if my right hon. Friend could move in that direction.

Mr. Newton: I think that it is absolutely clear to everyone that I have been trying to move in that direction. I had hoped to move a little further today, but representations made to me led me to allow certain matters to be discussed further in accordance with the proper spirit of the usual channels.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): May I support the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) in his plea for a debate on the Commonwealth? Can the Leader of the House help us in regard to Tuesday's debate, which is on an Opposition Supply day? Is there a particular problem affecting women in England and Wales that does not affect those in Scotland and Northern Ireland, or is it a secret acknowledgement that the Labour party is supporting the independence of Scotland and Northern Ireland?

Mr. Newton: This is one of the occasions when I think that the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) should be able to reply to questions. I am not sure whether she has even heard this one. I wonder whether the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) might draw her attention to the fact that a question has just been asked that is really for her and not for me. It related to why next Tuesday's debate is concerned only with the position of women in Britain, which has obviously caused some affront in Northern Ireland. I am not responsible for the debate or for its title. The hon. Gentleman's question, which is a fascinating one, should be directed to the hon. Lady.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate on youth provision, so that we can consider the decision of Labour-controlled Avon county council to cut its grants to the Avon Scout Association, the Boy's Brigade and to many other groups within the county, most of which are uniformed groups of youths? Perhaps we can contrast the fact that it is cutting grants to youth groups, yet introducing a grant to an organisation known as "Bristol Young Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Group". Why is Avon county council unable to fund proper youth organisations, but only loony-left nonsense?

Mr. Newton: You, Madam Speaker, will perhaps understand that, in anticipating a question from my hon. Friend, I had prepared for every possible question about Kent but not for a question about Avon.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): May we have a debate on football and the plight of football supporters? No one in the House will support hooliganism, but at the Bruges *v.* Chelsea match, many respectable and decent British citizens found themselves subject to some heavy police activity and prevented from going to the match. The House should condemn hooliganism but stand up for decent people who are badly treated at football matches at home and abroad. May we have a debate on the matter?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): It is a pity that they did not lock up the Prime Minister and the right hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) as well.

Mr. Newton: I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) should be trying to divert attention. Just two weeks ago, in response to something that happened in Ireland, he was demanding more heavy-handed action than appeared to have taken place.

Mr. Skinner: No, I did not.

Mr. Newton: Perhaps that shows the difficulty of getting the balance right. Two weeks ago, everybody was asking, "Why has somebody not done more?" Today, someone is asking, "Why has somebody done so much?" It is an inherently difficult problem and we should acknowledge that.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): May we have a debate next week on local government to bring to the attention of the House the latest sad example of incompetence and waste by Labour-controlled Birmingham city council? I refer, in particular, to its intention to pursue a legal action against Sutton Coldfield college of further education and the College of Food from Birmingham. A lower court recently found that Birmingham city council had illegally transferred £13.6 million, which was intended for those colleges for training

purposes, to prestige projects in the city. As legal action so far has cost about £200,000 and interest on the bill is £2,000 a week, is it not a matter for the district auditor?

Mr. Newton: I am not sure whether it would be a matter for the district auditor, who appears to have a growing amount on his plate from Birmingham, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education might wish to consider what my hon. Friend has described, especially in view of some of the observations at the start of business questions on the funding of further and higher education.

Madam Speaker: Business questions are getting long and convoluted and we have other business to conduct this afternoon and evening. I shall do my best to call hon. Members, but will they please ask brisk questions? I am sure that the Leader of the House will give brisk answers.

Mr. John Denham (Southampton, Itchen): May I remind the Leader of the House that a year ago I introduced a private Member's Bill designed to relieve the problems of council leaseholders who cannot sell their flats and who face huge bills? At the time, faced with a huge public lobby, the Government promised action; a year later, there has been no action. May we have a debate on the problems faced by council leaders and a promise of action that will be followed up by the Government?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman may have an opportunity to put that very question to the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he feels it appropriate, on Wednesday 15 March.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 582?

[*That this House is gravely concerned at the unsolved murder, in a British military barracks in Germany, of Christina Menzies the 16 year old daughter of Staff Sergeant John Menzies and his wife Christine; is concerned at reports of poor police work by the Military Police investigating the murder and poor legal work by the Military Police Prosecutor; and, in the light of the acquittal of the accused, Corporal Fisher, and the statement by the Military Police that they were no longer looking for any other suspect, asks the obvious question whether the murderer of Christina Menzies is still at large within the British armed forces.*]

It deals with the bungling by the military police and the incompetence of the military prosecuting authorities who investigated the murder of my constituent, Christina Menzies. As a result of that bungling and incompetence, Corporal Darren Fisher, who killed my constituent, has literally got away with murder and is currently at large in a military establishment in Telford, Shropshire. Does the Leader of the House understand that British military justice and law is increasingly seen as an ass and many cases and issues are now backing up? We urgently need a debate, so that the system of courts martial and the way in which justice is dispensed in the armed forces, especially when crimes are committed against civilians, as in my constituent's case, can be brought under democratic control and modernised so that police and prosecuting work is up to standard, as it should be.

Mr. Newton: I shall obviously bring those remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, but I understand that the prosecuting officer in the case was a qualified lawyer who had experience of prosecuting charges of unlawful killing.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on the first conference on the climate change convention, which will be held towards the end of March, particularly in view of increasing anxiety and alarm and the accumulating evidence that global warming is occurring? Will he arrange for the Government to make a statement on how they plan to achieve carbon dioxide emission reductions by the end of the century and introduce further targets for reductions as soon as possible?

Mr. Newton: Those matters are under consideration at present, in relation not just to the conference in Berlin at the end of the month but to the Council of Environment Ministers next week. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will make the British Government's position clear as and when it is appropriate.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Will the Leader of the House find time to debate the alarming boom in the economy of Colombia as 70 per cent. of its gross national product comes from the growth of coke, which has expanded from 1,000 hectares to 200,000 hectares in a very short time? That expansion has manifested itself in drug abuse and drug-related crime throughout Europe and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton: I think that the right course would be for me to ensure that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is made aware of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. As chairman of the Government's committee on drug misuse, I attach great importance to anything that can be done in Britain or abroad to reduce both the demand and the supply of drugs.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): Has the Leader of the House seen the article in today's edition of *Today*, quoting Judge Stephen Tumim saying that Derek Lewis was not the first choice as director general of Her Majesty's prisons, but was appointed because of his support for the privatisation of prisons? May we expect a statement next week from the Home Secretary on why the recommendations of the interviewing panel were turned down and why we did not have the best person for the job?

Mr. Newton: I must simply repeat what was said previously. The appointment of the director general was approved by the civil service commissioners in the normal way. Three candidates were assessed as being of an acceptable standard. They were then interviewed by the then Home Secretary and the board then reconvened.

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): The Leader of the House will recall the Prime Minister's confirmation during Tuesday's Question Time that automatic train protection is being reconsidered. As the Government have given an absolute commitment to the installation of automatic train protection throughout the entire British Rail network for the past six years, will he ensure that there is a statement, or preferably a debate, on

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

the matter, so that we can examine why the Government are reneging on yet another promise that impacts so strongly on the safety of the travelling public?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is considering advice from the Health and Safety Commission and from Railtrack on British Rail's report on automatic train protection. An announcement will be made in due course and that would be the appropriate time at which to consider a debate.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): May I press the Leader of the House again for a statement on the district auditor's report on Wandsworth council? The right hon. Gentleman failed to mention in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) that in paragraph 6.9 the district auditor specifically states that the council had acted unlawfully in selling thousands of empty properties to Tory supporters and putting homeless families on the streets. How can the Minister with responsibility for housing in London remain in office when as leader of Wandsworth council he was responsible for that policy and escaped surcharge by the skin of his teeth? He must go, or is law breaking penetrating the heart of the Government?

Mr. Newton: I will not repeat what I said in my earlier answer. In the light of what I have already said, any suggestion that my hon. Friend should resign is quite nonsensical.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretaries of State for the various parts of the United Kingdom to make statements on the progress of clinical trials of beta interferon to treat some of the more virulent symptoms of multiple sclerosis? When I raised this matter before on behalf of my constituent, Kenneth Deering, I was promised that clinical trials would start, but my studies have shown that there seems to be sporadic individual prescription for beta interferon in one of its four forms to people who have multiple sclerosis. However, there is no indication of progress towards clinical trials that will allow it to be prescribed to the thousands of multiple sclerosis sufferers who are waiting for it to be made available.

Mr. Newton: As the quite active president of my local MS society, I certainly share the hon. Gentleman's interest in this matter. I shall bring his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Is the Leader of the House aware that it is said that the six members of the Greenbury committee earn more than £4 million between them? Will he ask the Prime Minister to look urgently into that, set up an inquiry, and report back to the House?

Mr. Newton: I shall not add to what I said earlier. I do not accept the suggestion that members of the Greenbury committee are incapable of looking seriously and objectively at serious public issues.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Leader of the House must be aware that three times this week hon. Members have raised the question of the treatment of Sita Kamara, an asylum seeker in this country. Hon. Members make daily representations to the Home Office about the conditions under which asylum seekers are kept and about the fact that more than 700 are currently in custody in detention centres and prisons in this country. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is necessary for the House to be able to debate the whole question of the treatment of asylum seekers, the refusal of asylum and the plight that those who are forcibly deported from this country face when they go back to the country from which they tried to flee in the first place?

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Gentleman says, the matter has been raised on a number of occasions. I have no doubt that a number of responses have been given and I certainly do not intend to add further to those.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): After tomorrow's business, two private Members' Bills are likely to be presented to the House. They are highly significant and have wide support in the House and throughout the country. They are the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill and the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. Given that support, should there not at least be discussions through the usual channels with the Leader of the House to see whether a second Committee can be set up to deal with private Members' Bills? They are not pushed for Government business and we need to make progress in the two areas covered by the Bills in accordance with the will of the House.

Mr. Newton: I realise that it will disappoint the hon. Gentleman when I tell him that I have no plans for changing the ordinary arrangements for dealing with private Members' Bills, which have applied for many years.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Will the Leader of the House ask the Secretary of State for Employment to make a statement next week about an allegation in a newspaper today that the Department of Employment intends to withdraw one of the calculations of regional unemployment on the basis that it shows higher, more truthful unemployment than the calculation that it is proposed to replace?

Mr. Newton: My right hon. Friend will be here to answer questions on Tuesday and I shall give him advance notice of that one.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Is the Leader of the House aware that his reassuring reply to the hon. Member for Rochdale (Ms Lynne) on the SCOPE report on carers and his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) are not consistent? Does he accept that the procedures of the House for private Members' Bills, to which he has just referred, were quite disgracefully abused last year by Conservative Members? In an effort to bring some sanity back to the situation, will he agree to allow appropriate time to the Government Bill on disability, which has just left Committee and which is based on reasonable exchanges on both sides? If necessary, will he grant two days for discussion, and ensure that the Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East, which did not have one vote against its Second Reading, and the Bill to be introduced tomorrow by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks), will be given

sufficient parliamentary time for reasonable debate? If that does not happen, the House will continue to be held in disrepute.

Mr. Newton: I cannot add to what I said to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) in respect of procedures generally. The first part of the hon. Gentleman's question implies that he expects the Government to adopt an unconstructive approach to the Bill to be presented by the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks). Perhaps he will examine with care what my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will say if he gets the opportunity tomorrow.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When may we have a debate on early-day motion 685?

[*That this House calls for St. David's Day to be declared a bank holiday in Wales; notes that no other country in the British Isles or the European Union in 1995 will have fewer holidays than Wales (and England); congratulates the seven cities in the USA that will declare St. David's Day a special holiday; and believes that the ancient and popular celebrations of the Welsh national day should be honoured and elevated to the full status of a public holiday.*]

The motion calls for St. David's day to be made a bank holiday in Wales and states that Wales has fewer holidays than almost every country in the British Isles and the European Union. Has the right hon. Gentleman noticed that the early-day motion has been signed by 30 Welsh Members, which represents more than 90 per cent. of Welsh Members who are eligible to sign early-day motions? Is he not concerned that yesterday the Prime Minister in a one-word reply said that he would not act on this call from democratically elected Welsh Members? Is not that a contemptible way to treat the elected representatives of the Welsh nation?

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that I do not agree that it is. If we were to accede to the request and if that was followed by a request for Parliament to have a day off in consequence, which seems to be the natural concomitant, the hon. Gentleman would find himself in conflict with his hon. Friends the Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

Points of Order

5.16 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: It would not be a normal day without a point of order from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Banks: That is slightly unkind, but I shall have to stand here and take it.

Perhaps you could give the House guidance and direction, Madam Speaker. As my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) has reminded us, tomorrow we shall debate the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill. It is possible that under our procedures someone from the pro-hunting lobby will attempt to talk it out. It will be necessary for us to have 100 hon. Members here, which is rather a large number for a Friday. Letters are circulating and advice is being given to hon. Members by those from the pro-hunting lobby that there will be no vote tomorrow. That is untrue. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) is quite insistent that there will be at least one and probably two votes. It seems that there is an element of dirty tricks and I hope that you will make it quite clear to all hon. Members that you would not approve or condone attempts to sabotage a private Members' Bill.

Madam Speaker: It is very difficult to sabotage private Members' Bills. As the hon. Gentleman may well know, that was not a point of order but a point of information and publicity, which he handled rather well. Perhaps we may now move to the Adjournment motion.

Mr. Michael Stephen (Shoreham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Has it ever been known for the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to sabotage a private Member's Bill?

Madam Speaker: I am in the business not of sabotage but of getting on with the debate on Welsh affairs. The Welsh have waited a long time for that.

Welsh Affairs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Burns.]*

5.19 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. John Redwood): Yesterday, we celebrated a great figure from Wales's past. St. David believed in being joyful. The Labour party would do well to heed him. I trust that it will break the habit of a lifetime and use the debate to spread some joy and hope.

Today, we herald a great future. In the past year, manufacturing output has surged; big urban renewal schemes are under way; and each manufacturing worker produced 6 per cent. more. Since the end of 1992, 25,000 people have come off the dole. We are leading Europe in exporting televisions and we are beating the world at producing steel. That is not a description of South Korea or Taiwan. That is Wales in 1994, and 1995 will be even better.

The television programme could ask, "How did they do that?" We did it by changing attitudes, by attracting investors, by cutting interest rates, and by believing in Wales. *[Interruption.]* We hear already how much Opposition Members dislike it. They know that Wales is on the move in the right direction and that Conservative policies are bringing economic success.

The pace of change is pulling the successful forward at an ever-accelerating speed. The danger is that we shall leave behind the less successful—some people, some towns, even some areas. I want to show that all of Wales and all of her people can benefit.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Will the Secretary of State assist the House? Despite all those wonderful benefits that he and his Administration have brought to Wales, why do the wicked people of Wales refuse to give him the credit, and why, after two years of his rule, is the Conservative rating the lowest in history?

Mr. Redwood: It is real votes in the ballot box at a general election that count. I look forward to that challenge, as there is much more work to be done and more good news before we reach that happy occasion when more Conservative Members of Parliament are elected to represent Wales, to continue and to support the good work of their colleagues.

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): The Secretary of State spoke of joy in Wales and of the upbeat view of the economy. How does that square with the report last week that more than 200 people queued through the night at Neath and Port Talbot jobcentres, not for actual jobs, but for application forms from British Steel for jobs that might arise? A 64-year-old woman, a constituent of mine, queued in the morning and found that the jobcentre had run out of application forms. We are going back to the 1930s; we are not going forward to the next century.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is right. There are still too many people without jobs. I have always accepted that and I have said that we need many more jobs. Today, I shall be sketching more ideas on how those jobs will arise, but the hon. Gentleman should recognise that Welsh unemployment overall is down to the United Kingdom average, that the UK average is well below the continental average, and that 25,000 families in Wales are much happier because one of their members has found a job since December 1992, when unemployment was unacceptably high.

Mr. David Hanson (Delyn): In his list, the Secretary of State did not mention wages. Does he accept that people in Wales are still paid far less than people in any other region in the UK? If he will not support the minimum wage that the Labour party wants, what other measures will he introduce today to ensure that wages rise in Wales?

Mr. Redwood: Of course we want higher wages, which have to be earned. They are earned by skills and by adapting to more sophisticated manufacturing techniques. That is happening in many parts of Wales, including in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I shall outline some more measures that we are continuing with and that will help.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): If we are doing so well, will the Secretary of State explain a simple situation? How is it that, 15 years into the life of this highly successful Government, unemployment is still 50,000 higher than it was when they came to office? How much longer will it be before they get unemployment back down to the 1979 level?

Mr. Redwood: Chronic overmanning and deep structural problems existed in some industries in Wales in 1979, but the good news is that we have done a much better job than many countries on the continent in reducing unemployment. Our relative performance is good, but I want more real jobs, just as the right hon. Gentleman does.

New industry and new services need not pass any part of Wales by on the other side. If the Vale of Glamorgan can have a high living standard and low unemployment—as it does—so can Bridgend. If Caerphilly can, nothing is stopping Merthyr from doing so. It is not written in the stars that some places will do well and others badly. Holyhead has been a bustling port in the past. Merthyr was once the centre of new industry and new technology. Both have promising tomorrows. Today's equivalent of pioneering by puddling in the steel industry is messages by multi-media.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for taking time to mention Holyhead, which clearly has a bright future. He will recognise the important development that is taking place at the port, with substantial investment, which I hope will be backed with European Union funding. Will he give the House an assurance that the Welsh Office will do everything possible both to facilitate the grant and to make strong representations to the European Commission that that grant should be approved?

Mr. Redwood: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman admits that a good future is in prospect for the port. I agree that more work needs to be done and that more investment needs to be made. Of course the Welsh Office will do anything in its power to assist in the way that he suggests and in other ways.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): It is without any great pride that I represent one of the most deprived constituencies not just in Wales, but in the UK. We have

had a lot of talk from a succession of Secretaries of State of this Government about inward investment and improvement, but the real fact is that unemployment in the Rhondda is still running at about 20 per cent. and that youth unemployment is as high as 80 or 90 per cent. What will the Secretary of State do about that? He said that the Rhondda can perform as well as the Vale of Glamorgan, but without practical investment in our valley communities, this downward spiral of depopulation will continue because of the lack of investment in the infrastructure.

Mr. Redwood: Of course we need more investment. There will be public investment and private investment. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have taken action to encourage more of such investment and, like him, I am impatient to get on with the job.

It has taken the actions of the cyber cops in the United States of America to dramatise the Internet. Once a complex idea for computer super-literates, it has exploded into all too earthly life with stories of theft, fraud and pornography on that new ring main of world power. The net and its successors are ways of ensuring that no city, town or hamlet of Wales need be cut off from the next century. Geography does not debar Wales from economic success in a world shifting eastwards. History proves that false, and common sense confirms it.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I welcome what the Secretary of State has said. Does he mean that areas such as rural mid-Wales will gain assistance from the Welsh Office in attempts to include them in the information super-highway? If so, that is a welcome announcement.

Mr. Redwood: I have already said that if grant is needed I shall consider carefully how we could give that under the various powers that we have.

The cabling of Newport, Swansea and Cardiff is under way. Applications have been invited to cable the rest of the valleys and the Vale of Glamorgan. Before the year is out, I want to see a franchise for north Wales. Mid-Wales and west Wales should join in.

British Telecom has always said that it wants to be able to offer a full range of services, using its existing cables where possible. It is more than welcome to offer to do that in any unlicensed area of Wales. Recently, I have been talking to cable companies. They are considering using radio links in less populated areas, which might solve the problem. I am told that it is possible to sling trunk fibre over pylons and maybe on to telegraph poles where routes are available. Between those methods, we must find a way to ensure that mid-Wales and west Wales are part of the system.

What matters just as much as installing the cable or making the links is the use that we make of that. Work is on hand to wire Celtic Lakes industrial park so that it can take the whole range of multi-media business services. I hope that other parks will follow. Cardiff bay can become a teleport.

This week, Super-JANET has become something of a new heroine in the House. A sum of £5.5 million is being spent this year by colleges in Wales to turn JANET into Super-JANET and to equip the colleges for the next century with multi-media technology.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): I want to ask the Secretary of State not about "SuperTed" or Super-JANET but about equipping colleges. The biggest education institution in Wales is the university of Glamorgan. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the distribution of the millennium fund takes into account the university's dire need for new buildings and capital projects, which it wants now? I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman agrees that it fulfils a vital role in Welsh educational life and—if he wants to use super-highway terminology—in the interface between industry and education.

Mr. Redwood: In so far as it is proper for me to intervene in the millennium fund, I shall do everything in my power. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage, who has more influence than I have in these matters, will be shown the text of the hon. Gentleman's intervention and my response. I hope that Wales proposes many good projects for millennium funding, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right when he says that education is one service that could benefit. He is also right to say that the university of Glamorgan is most important. I have stepped up capital investment in colleges in the past year or so and I intend to continue to do so as there is a backlog of work to be done.

I want BT to offer enough cable capacity at a sensible and realistic price. I am looking into allegations that there are some difficulties with band width and pricing for some of the links in mid-Wales.

Mr. Hain: I apologise for intervening again and I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. I find his remarks about BT interesting. I know that BT would be willing to offer fibre optic cabling in, for example, some of the Neath valleys but it is barred by Government regulation from offering entertainment as well as telephony. Will the Secretary of State consider restricted ring-fenced projects in unlicensed areas which would enable it to do so and thereby bring fibre optic super-highway opportunities to many remote areas?

Mr. Redwood: I regret to say that, geographically, much of Wales is still unlicensed, which is why I am trying to drive forward the work quickly. We are now close to a licence for a large new area in Wales. Yes, there is an offer to BT to offer the whole range of services to the unlicensed areas if it were the most sensible prospect on the table. I openly invite BT again to bid on that basis if it would like to do so. Let it not be said that there is a ban on BT operating well in Wales, other than in that small area of Wales which is already licensed under different terms.

Whereas St. David preached from a patch of grass and turned it into a hill, the modern Welsh academic will communicate across a phone line and will, I trust, broaden its band width into a range of new services. Today, I am also offering an additional £3 million for this year for books, equipment and new library space. Libraries are crucial and they, too, need more books and new equipment to carry them forward into the new era. It is time to turn up the lamps of learning.

What has all this to do with the job prospects of the teenager in Tredegar? The answer is, more than one might think. Getting the Welsh economy up to the speed of the new technology will raise the income level of the whole community. It will produce a host of new opportunities extending well beyond software and telephony. The cable investment entails excavating roads, making the cable and

[Mr. Redwood]

designing and manufacturing the switches and boosters. The system, once installed, needs maintaining and using: a host of businesses are growing and will grow on its foundations.

It should be as easy to entice the schoolboy in Mountain Ash as the schoolboy in Cardiff to make the journey from Nintendo and Gameboy to personal computer and multi-media link. A software generation is now growing up around the world comprising children who are used to writing essays on word processors and solving problems on computers. If English or Welsh is their first language, BASIC is their second. They have an entrée waiting to the world of technology. The Internet scarcely recognises political borders or language barriers.

Ideas flash through the cable, cross the continents and are intolerant of Government control. The information revolution moves at the speed of light. No Government can "invest" in it with an eye to controlling it—that would be like trying to bet on the results of last Saturday's 3.40 at Chepstow when it is already Tuesday afternoon. The shadow Chancellor on the Internet would do to multi-media what successive British Governments did to British Leyland and British Steel in the 1960s and 1970s.

Mr. Donald Anderson: What the Secretary of State is telling the House is of great interest, but will he put himself in the position of an unemployed man in Cwmrhydyceirw or an unmarried mother in St. Mellons and ask how relevant what he is saying is to their needs?

Mr. Redwood: That, in a slightly different form, was the question that I was asked a little while ago, and which I am now answering. It is very relevant because the scheme will increase prosperity and job opportunities across Wales—in the valleys, north Wales, mid-Wales and west Wales. Many Opposition Members accept that it is a job generator in its own right and that it will serve to raise the incomes of the country. The hon. Gentleman must understand that, as incomes rise, people spend more on goods and services which, in turn, generates new jobs.

Across the Atlantic, Congress has stepped out on a legislative revolution. The Republicans have realised that in this fast-moving technological world, less rather than more government is what is needed. What people are looking for is leadership rather than the self-serving interests of politicians. More should be expected of individuals and families, and politicians should interfere less and be true to their word. The information revolution demands bright, articulate self-motivated people. Their demands of Government are different from those of 1950s factory workers.

The same process of change brings many more lower-paid jobs in services, requiring the remodelling of welfare to encourage rather than impede work for the young and the part-timer. These jobs can and do lead to better-paid opportunities and should not be run down, as they regularly are by the Opposition. A sense of community, of family and of neighbourhood does not require more government to give it voice or substance; it has a value of its own, fashioned by history and quietly rejoicing in its independence.

British Conservatives should take heart from the American revival of conservative beliefs because American fashions in politics are often followed a year or two later in Britain. The short-lived liberal reaction was seized on by Labour as an augury for its future success. It now looks like an invitation to a wake before the baby was even born on our side of the Atlantic. Americans are discovering that liberal theory does not make for good government. America may be out to reinvent government, but so far there is a failure to reinvent enthusiasm for heavy-handed state control of the old kind.

The Leader of the Opposition is a figure from the past, not the shape of things to come. He is an invitee to the 1960s bring-a-bottle caucus, trying out long trousers over his party's student politics of grievance, grudge and gesture. Already he has disrupted the "happening" with his sartorial approach and caused quite a few hangovers, as I believe the party for Welsh Members did last night.

The traditional revellers' dismay at the changes—the end of clause IV, the acceptance of choice in education and the clumsy ideas about devolution—is ripping the heart out of the customary Labour celebrations. Moss is gathering on the Leader of the Opposition's rolling stones. That, I think, dates him precisely. To a socialist, putting a gag on redistribution or a brake on public ownership is like Christmas without a tree or a present. I sympathise—if I were a socialist, I should be equally disappointed.

What is the point of being a socialist if one does not want to soak the rich and take over the big industries? Labour's dilemma is that it knows where the party's soul lies and it knows that it is against the spirit of the age. It may not be possible to rebuild the mental Berlin wall that kept socialism in.

Lower taxes and curbs on the excessive—

Mr. Rogers *rose—*

Mr. Redwood: I am enjoying myself. I shall give way in a moment.

Lower taxes and curbs on the excessive cost of running big government are just what is needed.

Mr. Hanson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not very often raise points of order, but I wonder whether the Secretary of State intends to talk about Welsh affairs, given that this is a Welsh affairs debate. Perhaps you could remind him of that and suggest that he stop talking about the Labour party.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse): That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Redwood: I shall regard the hon. Gentleman's point of order as an unwanted intervention and say only that I thought that the Leader of the Opposition wanted to be the Prime Minister of Wales as well as of England. If so, his views are of considerable interest to the Welsh people.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Redwood: As I have been interrupted, I shall do so.

Mr. Rogers: We were also enjoying the Secretary of State's speech, especially those of us who enjoy a good comic. Does he accept that the Government have created enormous differentials in wealth and that there should be some redistribution? For example, people such as the chairman of Welsh Water are paid £500,000 while some old-age pensioners in my constituency who live in

one-bedroomed flats have to pay £230 a year for their water. Does he not think that there should be some equalisation of wealth?

Mr. Redwood: Of course I want everyone to participate in the growing wealth of the country: that is what Conservative policy is about. I also agree that monopoly utilities need strong price regulation. They should not be able to fleece people, so it is important for them to be strongly regulated unless and until they become fully competitive. The market will then set more sensible prices.

Mr. Gingrich has begun by pruning congressional committees and staff numbers, leading by example. It is a good beginning—and it is a warning to the Labour party, which is already waist-high in promises of more Ministries, quangos, Parliaments and assemblies. Labour in Wales signs up to those promises, then tries to plead ignorance or protest innocence when asked about them.

I will try once more. Will the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) tell us in his speech whether, in his ideal Labour world, Wales would or would not acquire a regional development bank,

"Local structures to assist innovation and transfer of technology"

and

"Locally based and local responsive Agencies to work with Local Authorities to help match needs with resources, to tackle skills shortages, to link capital with opportunities"?

Those are the Labour party's words; I would not dream of writing like that.

Would Wales be given a network of small and medium-scale dance houses, a community education forum, a project task force for joint public and private investment, a national investment bank, an "investment in industry" unit, Faraday centres, a defence diversification agency and a business development bank? I see some flickerings of recognition on the face of the hon. Member for Caerphilly at last.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): The Secretary of State has done it before.

Mr. Redwood: Yes, I have done it before; but I did not receive an answer last time. I live in hope.

Would Wales be given a business development bank for small business, a cultural education commission, a network of law centres, a transport authority, an environment audit committee, an environment ombudsman and a general teaching council? I could go on for another hour or so, but I will spare the House the rest of the list. We should pity the poor people who would have not only to pay for that lot, but to obey all their rules.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly has completely lost his way. Like a latter day Don Quixote, he tilts at imaginary policy windmills. In his latest joust in *The House Magazine*, he attacks me for wanting to privatise Snowdonia—a policy as credible as the assertion that the moon is made of green cheese. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Gentleman thinks that the moon is made of green cheese. I can reassure him: men have landed there and ascertained that it is not.

The hon. Gentleman condemns me for appointing more administrators and managers in the health service when I have introduced strong controls, resulting so far in a reduction of 172 in such posts in Welsh health authorities. He claims that I am busy transferring powers to quangos; yet he resists practically every proposal that I come up with to switch powers and tasks from quangos to elected local government in Wales. He must explain that to Welsh local government—but, given the standards of Labour local government in Birmingham and Avon, I understand his reluctance to do so.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): None of this is about Wales.

Mr. Redwood: It is all about Wales. All the references to the bodies that I have listed, which are in Labour's policy documents, presumably apply to Wales; but the hon. Gentleman cannot see the connection.

The central ambition of Welsh policy must be to make government work better for the public whom it serves. Governments should show some humility about their own capability in comparison with the actions of families, individuals and the markets. Markets often like to keep Governments guessing, but that does not make them dispensable or anti-social. The origins of many Welsh communities lie in market day, and without fair exchange we would all be a good deal poorer: if I had to rely on what I grew to eat, I would have starved long ago.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I would not.

Mr. Redwood: If we all had to make our own transport, few of us would sport even a bicycle, let alone a car. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) claims to be a good gardener, but I do not suppose that he has built many cars in his back garden.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The Secretary of State speaks of the importance of markets. Will he consider the problem facing Welsh sheep farmers, who will be unable to deliver their sheep to the markets that they have at present if some of the difficulties of recent weeks persist? What are the Government, and the Welsh Office in particular, doing to try to achieve a rapprochement that would make those markets available again?

Mr. Redwood: We shall do all in our power to ensure that fair trade is possible. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has done a great deal in that regard, as the hon. Gentleman well knows.

Not all discipline in a society can or should come from Government. I believe in true devolution: in a Wales where free institutions—the family, churches, companies—can and should also be sources of strength and moral consideration. We do not want all leadership to come from politicians, and we do not want so much of life to be politicised. In that regard, we speak for many Welsh people. The latest poll shows that the majority do not want an assembly.

We certainly do not want Cardiff and London to be mere lobby towns, where the politically correct mingle with the glitterati and the hired hands. Lobbyists and spin doctors deserve each other; the politically correct obey the lobbyist, while the politically astute obey the people. The politician who mistakes the popular will for the sectional interest is either a knave or a fool.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Which opinion poll does the Secretary of State mean? Anyone who knows anything about Wales is aware that the reverse

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

is the case. The right hon. Gentleman is misleading the House. The result of the last opinion poll showed 49 per cent. in favour of an assembly, 25 against and the rest undecided. That is a far cry from the right hon. Gentleman's assertion. Perhaps he would like to tell the House the truth.

Mr. Redwood: If we add those who do not know to those who do not want the assembly, we find that they constitute a clear majority. If the assembly were so popular, people would not say that they did not know; they would say that they wanted it. It is Opposition Members who are abusing the figures, because they are extremely disappointed with them.

Recently, Labour in Wales has tried to argue that, far from providing more income for all, the 1980s and 1990s have been good news for the rich and bad news for the poor. Labour Members did not read their Rowntree report carefully enough: as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has pointed out, it showed that among the bottom 10 per cent. in the United Kingdom are 750,000 people who are declaring zero or negative incomes. They include many accountants, taxi drivers and builders, and a much larger number of students—people whose incomes are currently low to prepare them for much more highly paid jobs when they finish their studies and make progress with their careers.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): In his analysis of that opinion poll, the Secretary of State counted the "don't knows" and the "don't wants" as a single group. Less than 50 per cent. of the electorate voted in Islwyn. Why has the Secretary of State not claimed that 3.9 per cent., plus those who did not vote, represents a majority? Why has he not complained about the fact that the Conservatives were not elected?

Mr. Redwood: It is tempting to go along with that argument, but I see the fallacy in it. It is very different from the argument that I put. I merely stated that the latest opinion poll did not show that the majority wanted an assembly; that is clearly the position.

The picture is not of two immovable nations, but of change and flux. In a recession, some entrepreneurs hit hard times; some students live on low incomes before doing well for themselves; some families, tragically, lose one or two jobs, only to recover at a later date. Some areas of Wales contain pockets of obstinately high unemployment, where too many families have no job for too long. We should recognise, however, that long-term unemployment is down by 49 per cent. from its peak. Like Opposition Members, I want it to fall much further during the current recovery.

The best way out of poverty is through a job, and the best way to a better job is from another job. Regeneration policies are designed to increase the chances of employment for people in the affected areas. I have asked councils to show passion for the business of regeneration. I do not accept that democratic institutions in Wales that are spending £3.3 billion next year are bereft of discretion or the ability to do good. Listening to what is said by some council leaders, one would think that I was giving them less money next year—not £110 million more, if revenue and capital are taken together, which is what Parliament voted. Moreover, I have certainly not been telling them how all that money should be spent.

Following strong representations to me from the owners of Cardiff airport, the Government are considering whether a new relaxation of the capital receipts rules is possible. We shall make a statement shortly, which I am sure will interest the House.

Parliament sends local government money, and gives it freedom in the choice of its priorities. The debate in recent weeks has been about the priorities that some councils have chosen. I am glad to note that some Welsh counties are now finding the necessary money, and reassuring people that teachers will not be sacked. The money is there, and that is how we want them to spend it.

Strong, confident local government would move on from moaning about the settlement, once it is agreed, to being positive about what can be done with the cash. Within the totals, I expect local government to set out its plans for energising tired communities and repairing rundown places. The Welsh Office and its agencies are there to help. If a council has an ambitious plan which it requires more cash to implement, Welsh Office and WDA money is available to assist.

I am looking for bolder schemes than many on offer. I want the strategic development scheme to back vision; to back a cluster of projects that will make a real difference in an area.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): The Secretary of State has been talking about local authorities and some of the increased powers that have been given to them. He must have in mind the mid-Wales development grant. When will he insist that the anomaly of the Lampeter-Aberaeron tunnel travel-to-work area being excluded from the mid-Wales development grant will end? I understand that it requires the Secretary of State's advocacy to the Commission of the European Union. Will he undertake to ensure that that absurd anomaly ends as soon as possible?

Mr. Redwood: I will look into that point and let the hon. Gentleman know when I have investigated it further.

I am also prepared to transfer responsibility for smaller schemes to local authorities as the Council of Welsh Districts has requested. I shall be having further discussions with it on that matter.

The economy is roaring ahead—it is time to harness its energy. The boldest scheme under way is in Cardiff bay. Today I am granting an additional £1.7 million in the current year to the corporation for Bute avenue preparations. Swansea Vale is painting on a broad canvas. In Llanelli, there is a very comprehensive development scheme.

In too many places there is a reluctance to build enough of the types of housing that people want to buy and a caution about encouraging young people to reach for the stars. Many of the new jobs will come from small companies and local enterprise. One cannot rebuild a community entirely from the outside. One cannot bake a good Welsh cake on foreign investment and Government subsidy alone.

The 1960s were not kind to Llanelli. One of the best rugby teams in Wales could not arrest the decline. Steel mills were abandoned, tin plate plants were left open to the elements, there were bare ruined works and mile after mile of coal-stained mud—750 derelict acres behind a polluted coastline where heavy industry once hammered out a living. Today, in place of that, there are 166 new

homes with many more to come, acres of new grass and even a host of golden daffodils. Llanelli is creating a new town in the landscape of Sandy Water park and in the new shops of the town centre. How I welcome that, as, I trust, do Opposition Members.

At the other end of Wales another town by the sea, Holyhead, is welcoming new horizons and is showing how regeneration can happen where there is a will and a way. In the autumn, Stena Sealink announced plans to invest £120 million in its Holyhead service, with a new high-speed service and a £35 million redevelopment of Holyhead port. In February, Irish Ferries announced a new £46 million super-ferry service for its Holyhead to Dublin service, which will double freight output by the end of 1996. In Holyhead, 100 additional jobs are predicted to be created by the end of the century as a result of that investment and I trust that much more will follow.

Cardiff, a city of arcades and architectural magnificence, is building for the 21st century. Walking from Cathay's park to Queen's street takes one past building sites and new developments. The Queen's arcade, the Prudential building and new offices which are rising from an empty lot are all to be seen in the centre of the city. In the bay, the barrage is emerging from the drawing board, Penarth village is growing and the Ely Field, Windsor Quay and Ferryside developments are set to add 1,500 new homes. In the east at Pontprennau, a business park and 1,600 homes are in development. They are capital projects for a leading city.

The Penrhys housing estate is home to more than 2,000 people, but too many are unemployed. By 1986, when John and Nora Morgans came to the estate, it was renowned as having some of the worst social problems in Wales. Since then, with their leadership, the community has built a café, a creche, a launderette and a new church. The Penrhys project has renovated and transformed the centre of the estate, bringing a new village street with health facilities, a chemist and a food co-operative. Graffiti and vandalism have disappeared from the central area and local residents have taken responsibility for ensuring that it is better looked after. It now needs better education and training, to build on the homework club and to work closely with the schools to give youngsters new opportunities to break out of the dead end and into jobs and training. That is what I want to see and I believe that Opposition Members want that as well.

I have spent a great deal of my time since becoming a Member of Parliament working on how less prosperous places can catch the habit of success already imbibed by the more prosperous.

Mr. Rowlands: I am not certain how much of his speech the Secretary of State has left—I am just checking. [Hon. Members: "Not much."] In that case, will he make a statement, fundamental to his whole argument, about the training for work programme in the next financial year? Is he aware that the word is going out that there will be a reduction in, if not elimination of, all bursaries for the manufacturing training programme? Will he make a statement, so we at least know where we stand, on what sort of vision he has for training and skilling our young people?

Mr. Redwood: We are encouraging many new initiatives in training, which will be even better than the training for work programme. The engineering apprenticeship scheme, which I have talked about in meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee and elsewhere, will be central to our ambitions for better training in Wales. This year, we have been spending a great deal of money on ensuring that manufacturing equipment is available in the colleges and other institutes, so that the young people can be well trained. That, of course, is a vital part of the process. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I came to his constituency to encourage the work going on there in a very fine, newly equipped centre. I trust that that centre will lead to many well-trained young people being available for, and finding, much better jobs.

From the time that, as a Back Bencher, I went with a camera crew to the Hulme estate in Manchester to denounce it, to the time that I awarded a cheque to pay for its demolition on behalf of the Government, and from my first visit to Cardiff bay to see the scope, to my present job supervising the progress, I have worried away to find out what works well and what does not work. There is the task of physical regeneration, clearing derelict sites, building new homes and modernising factories and offices, but there is a parallel, central task of giving the community confidence in itself and passing on to people belief in themselves and their town. It is often better to employ someone who wants to learn but lacks knowledge than to employ someone who has knowledge and no will to work. It is clearly fatal to employ someone who lacks both skill and a sense of purpose.

When the mainspring of a community goes, it takes some effort to replace it. It cannot all be done from outside. Restore the council homes without restoring pride and they will soon go downhill again. Build the factories without building a will to work and the workers will come from elsewhere. Hope is an essential commodity. It is easily destroyed or driven out and less easily brought back. If a community loses its driving force, it is difficult to recover. Bright children decide to leave as soon as they can to make their fortune elsewhere. Whole families may have to live on benefit, as the entrepreneurs leave or bypass the place. Incomes fail or stay low, leaving insufficient to maintain the fabric or encourage new business. In some inner cities, those with any business nous who remain are tempted into the black economy to continue enjoying the benefits. The community may even fall prey to loan sharks, drug dealers and others, who can turn a difficult case into a hopeless one.

The problems of deprivation in the valleys are not as hopeless as some inner-city problems around the world. As we intrude new cash and new ideas, we must ensure that it rekindles enthusiasm in the valleys. It is no good at all if building workers come in from outside and the graduate jobs go to people from England.

The spring has to be replaced with one of Welsh steel. Sometimes there will be a Government answer to the problem; sometimes the answer has to come from local people. Those who think that the only answer is money are wrong. I have always accepted that money is part of the answer. If only money were the only answer, it would all be so easy to solve. Money alone cannot recoil the spring and create the determination to succeed and the dynamism that is needed.

Mr. Nick Ainger (Pembroke): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way, particularly on that point. He is aware, following his press release yesterday, that there is a distinct possibility of up to 200 jobs being lost at the Pendine defence establishment. He said in his

[Mr. Nick Ainger]

statement that he is considering extending the West Wales task force. Will he give me and my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) an assurance that if that West Wales task force is to be extended to include the west Carmarthen area, there will be additional finance?

Mr. Redwood: I am very happy for it to be extended, but I wanted to consult further with local interests before being categoric about it. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for saying that that is the wish. I am, of course, very happy to discuss further projects and whether we can help financially with them, as I accept that we may need to do so. I would, however, like to see the projects or the outline of the scheme first before giving a categoric assurance.

There is no substitute for leadership—the leadership of an inspired teacher at school, of the careers adviser, of the intrepid entrepreneur, of the councillor with a conviction of success.

Wales was fortunately spared the worst of the horrors of barbaric architecture. However, the fashion penetrated to Montgomeryshire where the Oldford estate stood as an intrusion of slab architecture and slab mentality. Regimented blocks with deck access on the fringe of Welshpool jarred with the people and the landscape. The mistakes of the 1960s have now been pulled down and new houses, roads, off-street parking and individual gardens have been created. That is what the tenants wanted. They were consulted extensively about the changes—a far cry from the "we know what is best for you" days when the estate was constructed. A problem estate has been restored with some pride and hope.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): On "we know what is best for you" and barbaric architecture, has the Secretary of State any comments to make on the trust's decision about the opera house in Cardiff?

Mr. Redwood: The only lines that I have to remember on this occasion are that I have no intention of using Welsh Office money to pay for the project because that would be a necessary condition for it to attract millennium funding. That being so, it would be quite wrong for me to have a public view as to whether I liked the building or not.

I do not want anyone to be roofless in Wales. In Cardiff I have supported contacting people sleeping rough and offering accommodation to them. I want Swansea, Newport and anywhere else with people sleeping out to come forward with proposals to banish the problem. Of course money will be available to help. We must ensure that no one need sleep rough.

Saint David said, "Be joyful, keep your faith, do the little things." There is much to celebrate already including Welsh success in industry, education and culture. There is a need to keep faith and to believe in Welsh virtues and Welsh talents. There is a need for many to recognise that there is a shared responsibility for the little things that need doing.

Mr. Llwyd: The Secretary of State is building up to his usual crescendo of shouting and of "winning for Wales". We have heard it all before. However, why has he not mentioned Meirionnydd Nant Conwy? We have a big problem. The right hon. Gentleman has been all around Wales geographically, but he has not mentioned my constituency. Is that because there is nothing good to report?

Mr. Redwood: No, but I assume that the hon. Gentleman will represent his own constituency, as he has done in interventions.

When Henry Tudor pressed on from Pembroke to London, he had a kingdom to win. His dynasty showed that Wales and England united are far greater than the sum of the parts—*[Interruption.]* I knew that the nationalists would like this particular peroration.

Henry reformed the nation's finances and paved the way for the nation's glory. Elizabethan translations of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer gave the language and literature of Wales a new foundation. The dragon and the lion united went on to create a thriving, successful country that lived by its ships, its wits and its manufactures. The prophecies of the bards were fulfilled. Wales today is winning in the same way.

6.2 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): I am glad that the Secretary of State enjoyed his speech. We have been entertained by quite a bizarre performance from him. He is obviously more concerned to talk about the Labour party than about his own record of stewardship of the Welsh Office. That is a cause of great disappointment.

In reply to the substance of the Secretary of State's remarks, I want to make two points. First, I welcome, as I am sure all hon. Members do, his comments on cabling. We shall support any initiative that he takes to encourage investment in information technology. Secondly, I am more than happy to debate Labour's plans for Wales at any time and anywhere in Wales.

It is a source of disappointment to me that whenever the Secretary of State has an opportunity to debate our policies, and the Opposition's policies generally in Wales, he turns that opportunity down, as he did last week when he refused to take part in the BBC's "State of the Nation" debate. If it is good enough for representatives of the Labour party, the Liberal party and Plaid Cymru to face the people of Wales to account for their policies, it is a pity that the Secretary of State does not deem it appropriate or good enough for him to account for his policies.

I am sorry that the Secretary of State did not have the courtesy to extend a welcome to the new hon. Member for Islwyn. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig) will attempt to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I very much look forward to hearing from him.

It was uncharacteristically churlish of the Secretary of State not to refer to our colleague Neil Kinnock, the former right hon. Member for Islwyn. This is the first time that we have debated Welsh affairs since Neil Kinnock ceased to be the Member for Islwyn and I want to place on record the affection and appreciation of my right hon. and hon. Friends for his work. He is now a European Commissioner and I am sure that he will perform that task with great distinction.

Neil Kinnock represented Islwyn for 25 years and he had the distinction of being the leader of the Labour party. It is right that, during this St. David's day debate and at

the first opportunity since he ceased to represent Islwyn, we should place on record our thanks for his contribution to Welsh public life and our heartfelt good wishes to him in his new role.

Mr. Redwood: Of course, I am very happy to welcome the new hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig). Of course, I associate the Conservative party with the Labour party in placing on record our thanks to the former right hon. Member for Islwyn for his public service and the wish for a successful tenure in his new role on behalf of all of us in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Davies: That is very gracious of the Secretary of State, and I accept his comments in the genuine spirit in which they were offered.

I am sure that the Secretary of State does not want to talk about the Islwyn by-election, because it represented a fairly dramatic low point in the fortunes of the Conservative party, in what can only be described as another dismal year for the Conservative party and for the Secretary of State. Despite the Secretary of State's characteristic bluster, the promised upturn in the economy has not materialised. People in Wales are poorer as inflation is now outstripping pay increases and tax increases are biting ever deeper.

Public services are failing to deliver the quality and extent of provision required of them as funding is cut and the Secretary of State's reforms fail to work. Our democracy is in a shambles. Social divisions are deeper as the super-rich become ultra rich at the expense of the poor and successive Tory privatisations show that all too clearly.

Personal insecurity has never been higher, with negative equity, fear of crime and economic insecurity blighting the lives of hundreds of thousands of our citizens. Presiding over all that is a party whose members, Government and Cabinet are split from top to bottom, and a Secretary of State for Wales who is barely in touch with reality.

In the foreword to "Views from Wales", a collection of the Secretary of State's speeches published last year, he claims that "the Welsh liked him". He wrote that his brand of Conservatism struck a chord

"way beyond the confines of the Conservative Party in Wales."

It must be said that quite a lot is beyond the confines of the Conservative party in Wales. The people of Wales demonstrated in a very funny way their affection for the Secretary of State in the Islwyn by-election on 16 February.

In that by-election, the Conservative party candidate received precisely 3.9 per cent. of the vote. Fewer than one elector in 50 supported the Government and the Conservative party. It was the Conservative party's worst parliamentary election result in Wales since it took only 1.1 per cent. in the Pontypridd constituency in 1918.

At Islwyn, the Conservative party was barely in fourth place. If Screaming Lord Sutch had polled 404 more votes, the Conservatives would have been fifth. They would have been sandwiched between the Monster Raving Loony party and the UK Independence party. It is tempting to speculate that those Tories with Welsh interests could well slip quite effortlessly from one fringe party to the other. However, to be fair to the Secretary of State, he would probably take the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) with him down into the UK Independence party rather than up into the more successful loony party.

The Secretary of State's brand of Conservatism has not struck much of a chord, either, with senior Welsh Tories. One of them, the prominent Cardiff Tory and former adviser to the Prime Minister, Marc Cranfield Adams, actually left the party because of the distinctive contribution of the Secretary of State for Wales. On leaving the party, he said:

"When you see people following a system where the rich get richer at the expense of the poor, if you care you want to do something about it. The reason why I am quitting is because I care. Passionately."

It is not only the electors and his own party members with whom the right hon. Gentleman has fallen out during the past 12 months. He has fallen out with the Secretary of State for Health over his short-lived "health initiative". Our very own Secretary of State decided that he had had enough of the men in grey suits running the health service, and he was going to do something about it. It took a very well-publicised rap over the knuckles from members of the Cabinet to remind him that it was their and his own policies that he was attacking. It is their reforms that have seen the number of health administrators rise from 187 to more than 1,000 in only four years.

The right hon. Gentleman has fallen out with the Secretary of State for the Environment over his refusal to issue planning policy guidance on transport, noise and pollution control, and his deliberate attempt to wreck the Government's commitment to the Rio declaration and European directives on flora and fauna habitat. *The Independent on Sunday* of 29 January quoted Whitehall officials saying that the Secretary of State for Wales was "declaring UDI" by refusing to involve the Principality in a national attempt to reduce fire deaths.

The right hon. Gentleman has fallen out with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for his refusal to join in the preparation of the rural White Paper, and he has offended the farming unions in the process. He has fallen out with the Secretary of State for Education on the funding of teachers' pay. For good measure, a couple of weeks ago, he showed his own lack of grasp by criticising schools that held balances, when those balances were held in accordance with the advice of his own Government.

The President of the Board of Trade forced the right hon. Gentleman to rewrite his speech on regional aid when the *Western Mail* of 11 September last year reported him as describing Wales as

"Keynes by the Sea, dishing out candy floss grants to everyone."

Of course, he was developing his perverse theory of "reverse Darwinism" to justify his personalised campaign against regional policy. It is small wonder that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was forced to describe him as

"a mad professor in his laboratory"

when he attempted to rewrite the Government's budgetary policy.

"Batty", "hypocritical", "inaccurate" and "lacking in political judgment" are words that have been used by the right hon. Gentleman's parliamentary colleagues to describe him this year. It is only 2 March. I suspect that we shall have a very rich crop of adjectives as the season progresses.

[Mr. Davies]

Unemployment is the biggest single problem that we have in Wales. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) pointed out in his intervention, we are still 160,000 jobs down on when Labour left office, and 58 per cent. of respondents to yesterday's *Western Mail* poll identified that as Wales' No. 1 problem. The Secretary of State's response, having seen the damage done by his own Government's destructive policies, has characteristically been to decide that more of the same is necessary.

Investment in infrastructure is down. Regional aid has been cut by 50 per cent. Training and enterprise council budgets have been cut by 7.5 per cent. This week's announcement of the details of the forced asset stripping of the Welsh Development Agency makes it abundantly clear that the public sector or public-private partnerships have no secure long-term future in the right hon. Gentleman's long-term ideological plans.

The Secretary of State will not find a single supporter in major Welsh companies for his free market, anti-European attitudes. He does not even realise the political folly of a Conservative Secretary of State for Wales falling out with his few remaining allies. Even the Confederation of British Industry in Wales has now said, "Enough is enough." It is small wonder that the Conservative party faces an electoral wipe-out as soon as it is forced to face the people.

Mr. Donald Anderson: At the risk of stealing my hon. Friend's bull point in his litany of vituperation from the Secretary of State's Cabinet colleagues and others, does he recall that the Prime Minister even went so far as to doubt the paternity of the Secretary of State?

Mr. Davies: I am far too sensitive a soul to refer to that episode.

The Secretary of State's whole strategy has been based on a publicity offensive to convince Welsh electors that we are experiencing an economic success and to convince his potential Tory allies in England that he is bringing about a social revolution. That is precisely why he has failed us in Wales. He does not have his eyes on Wales. He has one eye on his place in the Cabinet and the other on the leadership of his party. His aspirations for social revolution would be risible if they did not offend so deeply our own standards, values and aspirations in Wales. The facts deny any claim that the right hon. Gentleman has to economic success.

Whatever he argues about employment figures or growth rates, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the serious, most objective test of the success or otherwise of Welsh Office policies is the extent to which Welsh GDP, expressed as a percentage of British GDP, has grown? Does he accept that that is the best objective test? I am asking the Secretary of State a direct question. He does not accept that the best objective way to assess the success of the Welsh Office is by comparing the success of the Welsh economy, measured in terms of GDP, at the start of the Conservatives' term of office, with the current position. That seems to be the best, honest, most objective test. I can understand why the Secretary of State does not want to accept it.

We now have figures relating to 14 years of Conservative Government since 1979. In 11 of those 14 years, Welsh GDP was lower, as a percentage of United Kingdom GDP, than it was during the last year of the previous Labour Government in 1979. The latest figure shows a further fall of 1.4 per cent., so we are still worse off now in relative terms than we were in 1979. I can understand the Secretary of State's reticence to accept the basis of that argument, but it is odd, is it not, that he is always prepared to take credit when anything goes right. That does not happen very often, but when it does, he is anxious to take the credit.

There is another great paradox. The Secretary of State is a great devolutionist. He wants policies made in Wales. He is quite happy to develop a distinctive agenda for health, local government or education, but it must be his own agenda. He is quite happy with devolution, provided that it allows him to practise his own maverick right-wing views. Somehow, we are supposed to place the state of the Union in great peril if those self-same decisions that he now takes in secrecy are taken openly and publicly by the elected, accountable representatives of the people whom those decisions affect. The Secretary of State still has to explain why an assembly in Northern Ireland will help to secure the future of the Union, whereas a similar proposal for Wales will endanger that same Union.

No doubt, the Secretary of State will argue that he is answerable to Parliament.

Mr. Redwood *indicated assent.*

Mr. Davies: It is true. I am glad that we have a basis for agreement. However, I wish to examine what happens in practice.

Mr. Llwyd: The hon. Gentleman might be interested in a reply that I recently received from the Secretary of State, after I asked him how often he had been to the Council of Ministers on behalf of Wales since he had been in post. The answer is, not once. The second paragraph of his letter stated, "But when I was Minister for the DTI, I went there very often." That is an insult to the people of Wales.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman makes his point very cogently.

I shall examine the Secretary of State's argument that he is answerable to Parliament, because that is his defence of the policies that he operates. Last year, on legal advice, he was forced to accept, against his own previously stated wishes and instincts, the recommendation of the Countryside Council for Wales on the future of eight acres of land at Mostyn docks on the Dee estuary. In order to exact his revenge for that defeat, he decided to cut the budget of the CCW by more than 16 per cent.—more than £3 million—and required it to obey a series of detailed prescriptions. He did not even consult his own quango, let alone other conservation organisations in Wales. Undoubtedly, they would have told him how deeply damaging his ideas were. That was devolution in action, albeit over a decision that never would have been taken in a democratic framework.

Mr. Redwood: Devolution in action is what would happen if the hon. Gentleman and Welsh local government wanted some of the functions that they could carry out transferred to them from the Countryside Council for Wales, which is the kind of body that he

normally criticises. Why will he not support me in the true devolution that was the purpose of my plans for the CCW?

Mr. Davies: Because devolution as currently practised, and as it has been practised since the Welsh Office was created by a Labour Government, has involved a policy of successively devolving matters from central Government Departments to the Welsh Office. The Secretary of State chooses to use the powers devolved to him by virtue of his office. For example, he chose unilaterally to distribute the budget for the coming financial year for Wales—almost £7 billion in public expenditure—without reference to the people of Wales—

Mr. Redwood: Rubbish.

Mr. Davies: It is not rubbish. The Secretary of State does not stand for election in Wales and he does not listen to the majority of the elected representatives of the people of Wales, to Welsh conservation organisations, to Welsh local government or to Welsh industry. I doubt if he even listens to his Welsh Back Benchers. He can claim no mandate in such matters.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman should withdraw that remark. Of course I listen to Welsh public opinion all the time. I meet all the bodies that he has mentioned on a regular basis and I spend a lot of time travelling around Wales finding out people's opinions. I also listen to Opposition Members and Conservative Members who represent their constituency interests. That is the basis of the policies that I put before the House, in a democratic process approved by the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Davies: I am glad that the Secretary of State has said that he is prepared to listen to the views of the people of Wales, because the people of Wales spoke yesterday in the *Western Mail* poll: only 12 per cent. of them were satisfied with his conduct of government. If he pays attention to the results of that poll, on the basis of his own statistical arguments, why does he not resign and give the people of this country a chance to get rid of him and his crew?

The only defence that the Secretary of State has offered for the form of devolution that he practises is the notion that he is answerable to Parliament. But let us look at what happens in practice. On 14 December 1994, I asked him in the House about his intentions towards the CCW. He refused to answer. He did not even avoid the question; he simply refused to answer it. On 30 January in the Welsh Grand Committee that met in Cardiff, specifically charged with considering Welsh public expenditure, the Secretary of State was again asked that question directly. He specifically refused to give any information whatever, let alone to debate or to try to justify his actions.

The right hon. Gentleman has been asked the question 16 times since he took his decision. Sixteen parliamentary questions have been tabled asking him about the consequences of and the justification for that decision, and 16 times he has avoided answering for the consequences of his actions. The Secretary of State cannot maintain that he is answerable to those elected to the House of Commons to represent the people of Wales.

The decision that the Secretary of State took was a horrendous gaffe, which led to justified public outrage. If he really listens to the people who express views to him, I refer him to a report in *The Independent on Sunday* on 19 February—*[Interruption.]* It is interesting, and I hope that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, who is supposed to have some responsibility for such matters at the Welsh Office, will listen carefully.

The article said:

"In an unprecedented move, the leaders of 22 top environment, heritage and scientific bodies, representing a combined membership of 4 million people, have written a joint letter to Mr. Major warning him that his Cabinet colleague's policies threaten to cause breaches of the law.

This follows exclusive reports in the *Independent on Sunday* last month that cuts imposed by the Welsh Secretary were causing severe reductions in protection for wildlife and habitats . . .

The signatories of the letter"—

those are the people whom the Under-Secretary wishes to laugh at—

"include Sir Angus Stirling, director general of the National Trust and chairman of the Royal Opera House, Peter Melchett, the executive director of Greenpeace, Barbara Young, chief executive of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Richard Morris, director of the Council for British Archaeology, Dr. Franklyn Perring, president of the Botanical Society of the British Isles, and Colin Logan, chief executive of the Youth Hostels Association.

They attack both Mr. Redwood's decision to slash the budget of . . . the Countryside Council for Wales—which has successfully opposed him over several major schemes—and the way in which he went about it, which they say is 'undermining confidence and generating suspicion'."

Is that the action of a Secretary of State who listens to the people of Wales, when he is condemned by such a range of bodies?

Mr. Dafis: There is a connection between the letter that the hon. Gentleman has read out and the fact that the Secretary of State was recently awarded the booby prize at the green awards ceremony a fortnight ago.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Who won?

Mr. Dafis: Modesty prevents me from answering that question.

There is an even better reason for giving the Secretary of State the booby prize than what he has done to the Countryside Council for Wales. In February last year, the Prime Minister published a sustainable development strategy for the United Kingdom. The Scottish Office then announced the formation of an advisory group on sustainable development, which was a very important development, but the Secretary of State for Wales failed to announce the formation of such a body for Wales. Several times in correspondence I have asked him to do so, yet he has still failed to act. That represents a failure even to begin to tackle the enormous challenge that sustainable development will pose to Welsh society and to the Welsh economy in the future.

Mr. Davies: The hon. Gentleman is right. Although of course I take issue with the quality of the Secretary of State's decision, I am now arguing about the process whereby that decision was taken, and the fact that, having taken it, the Secretary of State is not answerable to the people whom it will affect and has not even consulted the people for whom he has statutory responsibility. That is

[Mr. Davies]

the case that I am making at the moment—although I understand the case that the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) is making.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones) *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I would rather not give way to the Minister.

Mr. Jones *rose—*

Mr. Davies: In previous debates, the Under-Secretary of State has shown a casual regard for the truth, but I hope that today he will demonstrate that he is prepared to be the honourable gentleman that we call him when we use the term by which we address each other in the House.

Mr. Jones: I had not meant to bring up that aspect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the House well knows that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) cannot usually manage to answer my attacks, so all that he can do is accuse me of lying. That is the height of his powers of public debate. Will he be so kind as to confirm that the article in *The Independent on Sunday* that he quoted, which I have read too, made no mention of the ludicrous April fools day claims that that newspaper had previously made about Snowdonia being privatised? While he is doing that, will he also confirm that the Secretary of State gave increased spending power to the CCW exactly in line with what it had asked for?

Mr. Davies: On the substance of the case, the Secretary of State took two decisions that severely affected the CCW's ability to discharge its statutory responsibilities, to such an extent that the scientists—the people employed by the CCW and charged with advising the Secretary of State—are making it clear that their ability to perform their statutory legal functions is being prejudiced. That is a measure of the financial cut that the Secretary of State has imposed.

The Secretary of State also sent those people a detailed management prescription. I have a copy of that, and I have seen how the right hon. Gentleman, defying the advice given to him by his officials in the Welsh Office—they knew what damage would be done—wrote to the CCW imposing his decisions on those people and overriding their scientific judgement. That is what happened. If the Secretary of State's proposals had been carried through, there would have been a very real threat to the future ownership of our national nature reserves in Wales. That is a fact.

It so happened that enough people involved in the CCW were prepared to blow the whistle. It so happened that the representatives of 4 million people were prepared to draw the matter to public attention. It so happened that enough people were prepared to ring the Chief Whip's office and the Prime Minister's office to ask who the lunatic in Wales was who wanted to privatise Snowdonia. Only as a result of that public outcry did the Secretary of State withdraw his proposals.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North referred to the green ribbon awards for parliamentarians. It was reported earlier this week that the Secretary of State wanted to leave his mark on Wales, and he went to Dyffryn gardens to plant a giant redwood that will last for 3,000 years. I suspect that that tree will last longer than our memory of a Secretary of State who wanted to privatise Snowdonia. The right hon. Gentleman got the booby prize in the annual green ribbon awards, but I do not suppose that somebody who last year publicly fantasised about being Mr. Blobby will find being Mr. Booby too disconcerting.

It is a sad commentary on the whole process when the varied, fragile, precious and unique Welsh environment is in the hands of someone so manifestly unfit to hold that responsibility.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman should accept that I met the whole board of the Countryside Council for Wales. I granted the CCW the amount that the board said it needed to meet its obligations, and the board members clearly stated that the CCW could meet all its statutory obligations.

Mr. Davies: Why on earth have we then had the conflict between the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary? Why did not the Secretary of State give a clear account of his actions when we debated the matter on 14 December, on the 16 parliamentary occasions since then when it was raised, or during the Welsh Grand Committee on 30 January?

I accept at face value what the Secretary of State has said this afternoon because he is an honourable man, and I know that he would not want to mislead the House. I shall seek advice from those who monitor closely the work of the CCW. If the right hon. Gentleman has been in error in assessing the impact of the budget cuts on the CCW, I hope that he in turn will recognise that, and take the necessary steps to restore those cuts to the CCW.

Mr. Redwood *indicated assent.*

Mr. Davies: I see that the Secretary of State is nodding.

We have a clear picture of a Secretary of State who is isolated in Cabinet and adrift in his own party, and whose perception of Wales is far removed from reality. There is a great gulf between the aspirations of the people of Wales and the right hon. Gentleman's own self-serving political agenda.

Mr. Wigley: Is not that the nub of the problem? It is not so much that the Secretary of State is not a capable or hard-working man, but that he does not and cannot represent the balance of political will and the aspirations in Wales. Given that the Conservative party has not had a majority of the Welsh seats in 120 years, is not the impossibility for the present system to deliver democracy to Wales seen most clearly? Does not that point underpin the whole argument about why it is necessary for us to have our own democratic Parliament in Wales?

Mr. Davies: I fully endorse the view expressed by the hon. Gentleman that we make no personal criticism of the Secretary of State. *[Interruption.]* If the Secretary of State thinks that I am being unkind now, he should see me when I am being serious.

The case against the Secretary of State is that his ideology is alien to the ideals that we hold in Wales, and the system that allowed him to be appointed, and that holds him to be accountable, is defective. That is the case against him that I have made today. His perception of Wales is far removed from reality.

I believe that there is a growing consensus in Wales, which recognises personal choice and asserts equal opportunity. That consensus wants to build public services and nurture the concept of community. It is a consensus which recognises our identity and wishes to safeguard our heritage. It wishes to operate through a democratic and pluralistic framework. That consensus excludes the Secretary of State and his party, but it will prevail as soon as the people of Wales have a chance to vote for it.

6.34 pm

Sir Wyn Roberts (Conwy): The annual Welsh day debate on the Floor of the House is—quite properly—an occasion for state of the nation speeches, although I am somewhat surprised to find Newt Gingrich added to the Welsh pantheon quite so soon.

First, I welcome the hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig) and, at the same time, bid farewell to his predecessor, Neil Kinnock, who was elected to this House in the same year as I was, in 1970. The right hon. Gentleman had a distinguished career here, rising to the leadership of his party, and we all wish him well as a Commissioner in Europe. Of one thing we can be certain: he will never forget that he is Welsh.

The debate has begun interestingly enough. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State opened with a tour d'horizon of Wales, referring to some of the favourable developments in the Welsh economy—the continuing fall in unemployment, the remarkable buoyancy of our inward investment, and so on, which were also mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at Question Time today. There is not much doubt that if we are able to keep down inflation, the prospects for sound and sustainable economic growth in Wales will remain good. That is important to all of us in Wales, and it is even more important for us than it is for the more prosperous parts of the United Kingdom.

I fully appreciate the remarkable transformation which has taken place in the Welsh economy in the past 15 years or so. We now have a firm foundation for continuing growth, especially in modern manufacturing industry. I am aware—as are other Members—of the long way we have to go to achieve the levels of prosperity attained by certain other parts of the United Kingdom and by Europe.

I am accustomed to hearing Opposition Members highlighting statistics which show that Wales is trailing the league in one aspect of life or another, and I am as concerned as anyone about the reality behind the figures, especially those relating to comparative income levels, and I fully endorse every genuine effort to improve those matters over time. However, having listened carefully to the speeches of Opposition Members over the past few months, so far as I can see it is only the Government who have any real policies of substance to deal with the situation rather than short-term palliatives to deal with current deficiencies and inadequacies in the Welsh economy.

I greatly welcome what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had to say about the development that he foresees in information technology in Wales. I am delighted to tell the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) that the Development Board for Rural Wales is one of the few prominent organisations in Wales already on the Internet system.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I share the right hon. Gentleman's welcome for the fact that the Development Board for Rural Wales is on the Internet, but we have yet to hear any policies from the Government that will help to arrest the decline in the biggest industry in rural Wales, which is agriculture, as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) said. What advice would the right hon. Gentleman give the Government, who have produced nothing on the subject today, as to the policies that they should introduce to ensure the survival—it is now a question of survival—of the sheepmeat industry in upland Wales?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I believe that the hon. and learned Gentleman was present yesterday when we heard the chairman of the Development Board for Rural Wales talking about the prospects for rural Wales. The need for development to compensate for the decline in farming, which has been going on for a considerable time, was one of the subjects that he covered. On the present state of the sheepmeat regime and sheep farming, I am surprised that the industry is surviving as well as it is—despite the bans and obstacles to the export of sheep, which my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is doing his utmost to deal with at a European level.

The Opposition are fond of recasting existing Government policies in what I would call Sedgefield-speak and then claiming them as their own. Nevertheless, the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) did not mention Labour's attitude to the inward investment which has produced some tens of thousands of jobs for Wales. I do not think that he mentioned it at all; yet inward investment brought some 110,000 jobs to Wales between April 1983 and April 1993 and a further 10,000 between April and December 1993. I heard what the hon. Gentleman said about unemployment and I agree about the importance of that subject and the need to do everything that we possibly can to reduce it. One of the ways in which the Government have been very successful in reducing unemployment is by attracting inward investment. The question is this: why did the Labour party not commit itself to supporting the Government's inward investment policies?

Mr. Ron Davies *rose—*

Sir Wyn Roberts: Before I give way to the hon. Gentleman, I have two other questions for him to answer.

Mr. Davies: On that question—

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have two more questions that the hon. Gentleman will have to answer and I intend to press him on this.

Should the Opposition come to office, will the present policy on inward investment be continued or abandoned? We are entitled to know. Secondly, the Welsh Office export promotion policy has brought millions of pounds' worth of orders to small and medium-sized Welsh businesses, enabling many of them to expand and take on more employees. What is the Labour party's policy on that? Welsh business needs to know, and so do its employees. Thirdly, I recall the Opposition, and the hon. Member for Caerphilly in particular, placing some

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emphasis on the encouragement of local business formation. We heard nothing about that today. Is that policy extant or is it defunct? We are surely entitled to know.

Mr. Davies: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way at last. I wanted to focus my remarks on one aspect of Welsh affairs, which I did, but I must draw his attention to the fact that the last Labour Government started the process of inward investment and established the Welsh Development Agency, which has been so successful in bringing about many of the achievements to which he referred. The right hon. Gentleman bitterly opposed the establishment of that agency when he was in opposition under the last Labour Government.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We have still not had an assurance that the hon. Member for Caerphilly will continue the inward investment that the Government have so successfully pursued over the past 15 years.

Mr. Davies: Yes.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman tells me that the answer is yes and I am delighted to hear it. That is the first time we have had any such assurance from the Opposition.

The question of how the continued reduction in unemployment achieved by this Government is to be maintained is a key issue and it is of prime importance to the people we represent. It demands a proper answer from the Opposition and we have certainly not had one today or in any other debate that I have attended. I must warn the hon. Member for Caerphilly that there is a black hole in his economic policy. It is all very well to talk of reducing unemployment, but he must tell us how he intends to do it. It is no use simply assuming that the progress made under this Government will continue automatically, whichever party is in power. The Government's actions are supported by a raft of pragmatic policies which have evolved from experience. The people of Wales should be warned that much that they take for granted may be lost due to the lack of understanding and of a properly developed commitment to the aims of those policies on the part of the Opposition.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the progress made in employment. Will he comment on the Government-sponsored research which shows that in former coal mining areas in south Wales male adult unemployment is about 33 per cent?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I well remember 1979, when we came to office, and I know that there was a great deal of overmanning in the coal and steel industries. The elimination of overmanning and the changes in those industries are the answer to the question posed earlier by the hon. Member for Caerphilly. I have already acknowledged that we still have a long way to go to catch up with the more prosperous regions of the United Kingdom and Europe. Of course we have black spots in different parts of Wales, but there are fewer as time goes on.

Mr. Rogers: In his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith), the right hon. Gentleman missed the point. It is not a matter of reducing manning in industry. The Government have wiped out an industry in south Wales. It is not a black spot, but a black region. The right hon. Gentleman talks about inward investment into Wales, but does he acknowledge that it was the Government's malicious policy of inward investment in coal from China, Australia and Chile which annihilated jobs in the south Wales valleys? That policy was born out of spitefulness.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I entirely disagree with that last remark, which is unworthy of the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Rogers: It is true.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I will not be drawn into an argument on the viability or otherwise of the coal mining industry. I merely remind the hon. Gentleman that more pits were closed by the Labour Government before 1979 than have been closed since.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Rod Richards): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir Wyn Roberts: No, I want to make progress and change tack.

The Opposition have stated their top priority for Wales: to establish a bond of trust with the people—that is an electioneering euphemism, if ever I heard one—and establish a Welsh Assembly in their first year in office to make all the quangos more accountable. We all know what that will mean in practice. The quangos will be packed with somewhat inferior Labour placemen, as they were when the Conservative Government came into office in 1979. I well remember the state of the quangos then and how some people had to be removed from them because there was no obvious reason why they should be there, other than the fact that they were Labour party placemen. It will be a repeat of the old story: jobs for the boys. We are familiar with that in Wales. The Labour party will appoint its party faithful with a ruthlessness that would have been the envy of the old Soviet commissars. That is what "new Labour" really means.

I wonder whether the Opposition have decided where the assembly will meet. Will it be Cardiff, as per their election manifesto? I am sure that other places will lay claim to the location of the assembly, and the Opposition may have to borrow the National Eisteddfod canopy to shield the assembly until that issue has been decided. Meanwhile, we can be sure that there will be burgeoning bureaucracy and mounting costs, all to be paid for by the British taxpayer—or perhaps the Welsh taxpayer alone, as the legislation may provide.

What strikes me in listening to some of the arguments about a Welsh Assembly is that its populist appeal is pathetic in its false simplicity. Some people think that it will protect them against unpopular taxes such as a future poll tax imposed by central Government; to others, it means that they will no longer have to contribute to Trident. At times, it seems as though all the old left-wing phobias have found a new and respectable focus in the devolution issue, and that the assembly is to become the legitimate forum for the expression of their political neuroses.

The question that bothers me is this: who is to safeguard and promote the interests of Wales as a whole as the local assembly men and women squabble endlessly among themselves for bits of the cake handed down to

them annually by central Government in Whitehall? What if the cake is not so big as the appetites of those who are to share it? I doubt whether it will meet their requirements. There will certainly be no Secretary of State, as we have known holders of that office, if the powers now vested in him are vested in an assembly. So far as I can see, there will have to be a Welsh Government with a premier at its head and a string of Ministers, all answerable to the assembly. The minor parties will argue for a panel and a committee structure similar to that proposed for discussion in Northern Ireland, but I do not foresee the Labour party conceding one iota of power to the minor parties unless it has to.

Mr. Rogers: Quite right.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman confirms that I am right.

Mr. Ainger: I believe that tomorrow morning the right hon. Gentleman is to meet the president of Catalonia. As president of a region with a delegated Parliament, will Señor Pujol be told the same as the right hon. Gentleman is telling us today?

Sir Wyn Roberts: He will know the circumstances of his country as I reckon to know mine. If he asks me, however, I shall tell him certain things that I am about to tell the House. I will draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to those facts in a moment.

I have given an outline sketch of the political scenario that the Opposition have unveiled to the House in their various statements to date. The old, essentially centralist-socialist philosophy encapsulated in clause IV is about to be finally defenestrated—thrown ceremoniously out of the window—and replaced by a hitherto undefined, let alone tested, political philosophy based on social justice as propounded by the philosopher king of Sedgefield himself. If the British electorate fall for it, they will be opting for an inferno—a bonfire not of the vanities of those who fancy that Wales will do better on its own, which it will not, but of the present-day realities, which are that Wales benefits enormously from being part of the United Kingdom.

We cannot get away from those facts. One has only to compare the public expenditure figures per head in Wales with the lesser figures for England to see the extent of the support given to Wales and the still greater support given to Scotland and Northern Ireland. Those figures are available in the statistical supplement to the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1995-96", Cm. 2821, published last month. The figures show steady growth in public expenditure per head in Wales, from £2,685 in 1989-90 to £3,913 in 1993-94. That last figure compares with £3,458 in England—£455 per head less than the sum spent in Wales. The amount spent in Scotland is even higher, at £4,185 per head, and in Northern Ireland it is £4,781.

The breakdown of that expenditure shows that it is higher in Wales than in England in a range of areas, and higher than in the English regions, too. For example, £809 per head is spent on health and personal social services in Wales, compared with £717 in England. I advise Opposition Members to study the tables in that document.

Mr. Rogers: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Wyn Roberts: No. Let me ask this key question: how long could a Welsh Assembly sustain that comparatively high spending? How long could an assembly justify it? What guarantee can the Opposition give me and the people of Wales that the same differential between expenditure per head in Wales and expenditure in England would be maintained in the event of an assembly being established? We might well lose that favourable treatment. It will be eroded over time. That is the price that the Welsh people will have to pay for an assembly.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I have not been impressed by what the right hon. Gentleman has had to say against the assembly. Does he accept that the economic arguments that he is making are arguments against independence, not arguments against an assembly?

Sir Wyn Roberts: If the hon. Gentleman does not think that our power here at Westminster will decline when an assembly has been established in Wales, he is gravely and grossly mistaken.

Mr. Williams: May I reply to that?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I have answered the hon. Gentleman. He can make his own speech.

I believe that the Labour party is being very short sighted in reacting as it has to the passing phenomenon of electoral support for the Scottish National party in Scotland—running at about a third of the votes cast in the European elections, I understand. The Labour party has been through its own hell, losing four elections in a row, but it is foolish to imagine that it can ride the nationalist tiger. My guess is that it will cause untold damage to the Labour party in its strongholds in the longer term, but that is a matter for right hon. and hon. Members on the Labour Benches to consider. I leave it at that.

There is a major consideration—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] Yesterday, we debated a major consideration in those matters—our relationship with the European Union. Few of us would deny that Wales has been a major beneficiary economically. Most of the investment from overseas has come because we were part of the Union. In January 1994, no fewer than 343 foreign-owned manufacturing plants had been established in Wales—over 100 more than in 1983—providing about 70,000 jobs. We all appreciate the value of that investment.

The single European market has further potential for good, I believe, for us and for other member countries, and it is in our interests to realise that potential. We should assess the costs of forgoing such development as well as the political costs of further development along the lines of economic and monetary union. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister dealt with the position admirably yesterday, as did the Governor of the Bank of England when he outlined the parameters of the argument with great clarity in his recent speech in Luxembourg.

As a result of that Luxembourg speech and the Prime Minister's speech yesterday, I find the prospect of a single currency, especially the idea of a hard ecu co-existing with national currencies, possibly for a generation or longer, less daunting than before.

What is still fear-provoking is the concentration of power at a Europe-wide level that may be involved, and the lack of control of it. It is the old fear that

"Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

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The history of Europe tends to confirm Lord Acton's dictum, and the European Commission's strength in contrast with the European Parliament's weakness is not reassuring.

We are right to be sceptical, but we should not allow our scepticism to become septic and to poison our minds. Neither should we behave like innocents and think of Europe as a garden of Eden before the fall. We must weigh the advantages and disadvantages of further integration with the utmost care and secure the best deal for Britain. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his colleagues in the Government will do that.

We celebrated our patron saint yesterday, and I hope that the House will allow me a moment for an historic excursion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Half an hour."] He, too, lived in troublous times. He was renowned for his humility, and we could all do with a generous measure of that virtue. The modern nation state in Europe was far off in Dewi's time in the 6th century, and the first requirement a century or so later was a defence against the Muslim invaders of Spain, France and south-eastern Europe, who threatened Christendom with far greater force and persistence than even the Vikings, who came a little later and struck unimaginable terror along the coasts of northern Europe. So the tradition of the pax romana survived into the holy Roman empire which, with the backing of the mediaeval Church, organised the defence of Europe against the might of Islam.

The subsidence of the threat from Islam, from the 15th century onwards, was one of the preconditions for the growth of the nation state. There were many others, including the discovery of the new world. In our own times, the subsidence of the threat from the USSR may have a great deal to do with the revival of the ambition of small nations for a greater degree of self-government. Defence against external aggression is not the great primary concern that it was as recently as a decade ago, and the great nation states have undoubtedly lost something of their raison d'être. We are now rather more afraid of a trade war than of the traditional form of hostilities, and defence in those circumstances consists in being in a major trade bloc such as the European Union.

In the current debate on devolution in the United Kingdom, which I regard as a major diversion from the main task of improving people's lives and conditions—a task that should be in the forefront of our minds—the issue will ultimately turn on the ability of small nations to support themselves. Scotland is confident that it can do so, but on what is that confidence based? I heard a similar confidence expressed in Quebec in the 1970s, but it weakened as major companies withdrew from that province to the comparative safety of Ontario. I remember, as others do, René Leveque, the premier of Quebec, losing a referendum among his 80 per cent. French-speaking electorate.

There has been a great deal of talk about the German Länder, the revival of which in post-war Germany was insisted on by the French as an antidote to the powerful centralised German state. The establishment of the Länder was meant to be a handicap, but it turned out to be a major advantage. Although large in population terms, they still recognise the value of the Federal Government in Bonn and the cohesion that it provides. Some of the Länder contribute more to Bonn than they receive from it, but they do not seek on that account to break away from the federal structure. They realise all too well that unity is strength.

I would not argue *[Interruption.]*—this is my final point—that everything is perfect in the governance of Wales. I should like the energies of our people to be better harnessed, better expressed and better employed. Perhaps the new unitary authorities will contribute to those ends. They are bound to have some type of national forum, and that forum may provide the cohesion required at national level. But a further expensive tier of government is not the answer: it would weaken our power here at Westminster and do nothing to raise the standard of living and improve the quality of life of the people of Wales.

7.9 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) spoke for some time and ranged widely, but I will be charitable and merely say that it is difficult to break the habit of 15 years on the Front Bench and in the Welsh Office.

The Secretary of State spent much of his speech suspended in cyberspace. I do not know where he is now, but his speech seemed to be immune to the laws of gravity. When the Secretary of State was not suspended in cyberspace, he was communing—or perhaps commuting, if that is possible—with his friend Newt on the Internet. There was certainly not much reality in the Secretary of State's speech.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about one thing: there is a lot more grass in Llanelli now than there was in 1979. Unfortunately, grass is not a valuable means of international exchange. I think that we would trade our grass in Llanelli for the jobs—the "real jobs", as Sir Keith Joseph used to call them—in the steel works and in industry that we had throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

The sad reality is that Wales is one of the poorest countries or areas in the whole of Britain—it is not quite as poor as Northern Ireland, but the difference is small. Like the gap between Britain and central states of the European Union, the gap between Wales and the rest of Britain in terms of gross domestic product is widening.

The Secretary of State mentioned the fact that the centre of power in Europe is moving east, and he seemed to think that that problem could be solved by using Internet. The gap in Britain today is not between north and south, but between east and west. Whatever we may think about the single market—we are supposed to venerate it on both sides of the House—we must acknowledge that it will make it more difficult for the western areas of the UK to compete with those in the east. If the Secretary of State thinks that that problem will be solved easily, I will give him an example to consider.

Last year, the Mercedes car company announced the quite momentous decision to build a factory outside Germany. It had never done that before—although it has since built a factory in the United States. In the end, the Mercedes factory was built in France, just inside the Franco-German border, but the company looked initially at locating in Britain.

There are a number of car component factories in Llanelli, but it was extremely difficult for me to conduct negotiations with Mercedes, especially as they were overseen by the Invest in Britain Bureau. I will return to

that in a moment. It proved extremely difficult to persuade Mercedes to look at locating anywhere other than the east, preferably the north-east, of England, because that region faces the continent and is thus closer to the countries of Europe. Our communications in Llanelli and Swansea are not bad—we have good roads, railways and the port of Swansea—but we could not persuade Mercedes to look at our area, and I understand the company's point of view.

Since then, other investors, such as Samsung Electronics, have established factories in the north-east of England. I do not decry those investments; I wish that we could have them. Those investments are going to the north-east because of the aggressive policies pursued by the Invest in Britain Bureau and the North-Eastern development corporation.

The Times of a few weeks ago contained a report about a gentleman by the name of Mr. Foster. He used to work for the North-Eastern development corporation based in Hong Kong and the far east, and he has now been hired by the Invest in Britain Bureau. The Invest in Britain Bureau is now the Welsh Development Agency, WINVEST, or the inward development arm of the Department of Trade and Industry. It is no longer a bureau which seeks investment in Britain; it is being used by the Department of Trade and Industry to channel investment aggressively into parts of England. I think that the Welsh Office and the WDA should wake up to that fact.

I read the London newspapers like the Secretary of State reads the Welsh newspapers, and the press in the capital recently carried a report about the speech made by the Minister for Energy and Industry in which he extolled the virtues of the Thames corridor. Development is taking place along the Thames from Canary Wharf to the sea. He pointed out how a car component factory could be established next to the Ford factory in Dagenham.

That area is ripe for development; it is close to the new City airport, and the thrust of our trade is towards Europe and the single market. As a consequence, I believe that Wales faces an even harder task in attracting future investment to the west of Britain.

We face a further problem in Wales because government—the state—has ceased to be fashionable. Politicians from all parties now decry government. We heard the Secretary of State do that today, and we have come to expect him to hold those views.

Unfortunately, there is a consensus among politicians generally that somehow or other the state is a bad thing. Countries must now have level playing fields. Wales will not get anywhere with a level playing field. We do not want that; we want Governments to intervene to ensure that the playing field is tipped in our favour, because the gap is widening between Wales and England, and between Wales and the countries of central Europe.

There is a constant attempt to decry the powers of government. "Government" is now a dirty word. That was not so in the 1950s, 1960s or 1970s, but apparently we should not put our faith in Governments any more. We are constantly exhorted to follow other theories—I call them false gods. We have been told that the concept of community will replace government and that we should look to that for salvation.

We have great communities in Wales; we are a great nation of communities. But I do not see how the very nebulous concept of community will replace the power of government and the state in performing necessary tasks in Wales.

I recently read a full-page article in *The Times* written by an American of Italian extraction who was born in Israel, which extolled the virtues of community. It was the most awful drivel that I have read for a long time. According to him, community will perform the functions that the state is no longer allowed to perform. That will not benefit Wales.

We also hear about the dynamic market economy, which apparently we enjoyed throughout the 1980s. It has merely increased the gap between the poorer regions and the rest of Britain. It has kept wages in Wales low compared with those in England.

I do not know why people call it a "dynamic" market economy; I do not think that the word "dynamic" is necessary. We have a market economy which is sometimes dynamic and sometimes not dynamic. Occasionally it is dynamic for a few people—perhaps it is too dynamic for some bankers in the far east—and at other times it is not dynamic at all. It was certainly not dynamic for Wales in the 1980s. The dynamic market economy that the Secretary of State seems to worship was not good for my constituency in the past 10 to 15 years.

We are also told that public expenditure is bad. When the Government came to power in 1979—and even before then, when the Conservatives were in opposition—Baroness Thatcher, Lord Howe and others said how terrible public expenditure and public borrowing was. I am sorry to say that those once heretical views have now become fashionable. It is sad to say that it is not only the fashion in the Conservative party, but the fashion and the consensus in many political parties.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will not wish me to mention Maastricht in your presence for a long time, and I shall skate over it very quickly, but the basis of the Maastricht treaty was to reduce public expenditure and public borrowing.

The Secretary of State was waxing lyrical about his friend Newt, but his friend Newt is madder than the Maastrict treaty, because he and his colleagues are now trying to hand over the control of public expenditure in the United States to the Supreme Court. I am a great admirer of the Supreme Court of the United States, which has seen great judges like Frankfurter, Brandeis and others, but neither they nor the present judges would have been very happy to police any possible budget deficit in the United States.

The Secretary of State waxes lyrical about what is happening in America. Let me explain what is happening there. For the past 20 years or more, most working people in America have seen no increase whatsoever in their standards of living. The great American dream has come to a stop for most people in the United States.

There are many reasons for that, and they may relate as much to the global economy as to internal causes, but Newt and his crazy mates are trying to cut public expenditure and get rid of the budget deficit so that they can hand some money back to the great American middle class in tax cuts as compensation for the fact that there has been no growth in their earnings. It cannot work. It is extraordinary desperation. They are trying somehow to give some money back to those people. After year one, it will not work; where will the money come from in years two, three and four?

The Secretary of State tried to put forward his philosophy. We heard much about the Internet, and we accept the importance of technology, but he did not

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

address the danger that not everybody will benefit from intellectual capital. Only a few people will benefit—not the old capitalists of socialist hatred in the past or the old rentier classes, but the new intellectual capitalists. If I were able to operate a computer programming system called C++, and if I were only 22 years old, I could earn £50,000 a year or more in London today. Very few people can operate C++, and when a new system is developed and then another, the same will happen.

The benefits of technology to which the Secretary of State refers will fall on only 10 per cent. of the population.

Mr. Gwilym Jones *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Davies: The Under-Secretary shakes his head, but he has not really thought very much about it. Perhaps the Secretary of State has. The benefits of new technology may well fall on only 10 or 15 per cent. of the population, and not many of them will be in Wales.

Research and development investment in Wales is the lowest in Britain, and we are not involved in those developments. I appreciate the Secretary of State trying to get us in, but if I and other commentators are right, the danger in future is that most people will not see any economic growth—only the 40 or 50 per cent. who have been accustomed to it, and a few at the top.

Some old-fashioned rentier capitalists will benefit, because western investment will still be needed to develop the markets and the industries of China and India, and no doubt income will flow back to Britain as well as income from intellectual capital. What may well happen is that the country's GDP will reduce in proportion to its GNP, and the gap will get wider as more income comes in from outside without producing wealth in Britain. That is why we need government, and we return to the contempt for government.

Only government can redistribute that wealth to create some economic and social justice in a society where most people—not just the unemployed, the underclass or those who do not want to work—will not benefit from the fruits of society and the global economy. The Secretary of State tried to present the problem in a glib way, but I believe that only by actively interfering in the economy can the Government do anything about it in future.

I well remember hearing from Lady Thatcher, Keith Joseph and Lord Howe, and from my right hon. and hon. Friends, that the British economy would benefit from lower rates of taxation and that we should abolish progressive rates of taxation which were inhibiting as the rates were too high.

The Government have abolished the progressive system of taxation. We now have a top rate of 40 per cent. and it has not done my constituents or the Welsh economy much good over the past 10 or 15 years, because the gap between Wales and other parts of the economy has grown wider. The idea that we can benefit from a lack of progressive taxation is again trying to make us worship false gods. All the emphasis is on inflation. We must not say anything about inflation. Of course we are all against inflation, but the whole emphasis on inflation as opposed to every other economic policy has not done the people of Wales much good, either.

How much do entrepreneurs or small and medium-sized business persons in Llanelli have to pay the National Westminster bank or the Midland bank in Llanelli for a loan? It is probably 10 per cent., or 4 per cent. above base rate, yet the bank suffers a decline of only 2 per cent. in the value of the money it lends—perhaps even less than that. The banks are able to borrow money and suffer very small losses through inflation, and the business man who is supposed to invest and create growth has to pay 10 or 11 per cent.

I agree with those who say that we must not look outside but create our own economy. Why are only banks allowed to beat inflation? Sometimes they try too hard or are too foolish, and we see what happens. Why should a business man in Llanelli have to pay 10 or 11 per cent. to borrow money when inflation is only 2 per cent.?

Why is it the fashionable political consensus that central bankers can determine all the levels of growth and investment in the economy, when the Government are concentrating everything upon inflation? It has not done, and is not doing, my constituents much good.

Finally, I must mention the single currency. The Secretary of State waxed lyrical about all the growth in manufacturing. There has been some growth in manufacturing, and I welcome it, but he will be the first to admit that one of the main reasons for export growth is that the Government were ejected from the exchange rate mechanism.

I was pleased to see in the newspapers today that the Spanish Finance Minister is beginning to get worried because there is 25 per cent. unemployment in Spain. He was foolish to have said that it would not really matter if Spain were also shunted out of the exchange rate mechanism, because the peseta is now down on the floor.

I was a member of the much-reviled Labour Government of 1975-79. I was the Treasury Minister who, after considerable consideration, took the decision not to enter the exchange rate mechanism—and not merely for political reasons, but because of some brilliant analysis and destruction of the idea by Treasury civil servants. It is no thanks to the Government that we have an increase in manufacturing.

We are now talking about a single currency; the right hon. Member for Conwy touched upon it. Why does nobody ask the Welsh about the single currency? We have had a single currency since Henry VII or Hywel Dda. I am not sure what the currency in Wales was before the Act of Union.

I have spent much of my political life in the House for 20 years—and so have my colleagues—trying to fight the centralising tendencies of single currencies. That single currency was in London. Am I now being told that I must give up that battle and fight against the centralising tendencies of the ecu or whatever it will be called in Brussels? What hope is there for the Welsh economy on the western periphery of the empire if there is such a central currency?

All those concepts that we are being asked to pursue are false gods. We should return to the simple, old-fashioned idea that Governments should try as best they can in a global economy to keep the levers of economic power to themselves. They should not be afraid to use them democratically and face the democratic consequences of doing so, instead of shunting power away to quangos and communities and indulging in other sorts of escapist notions. At the end of the day, the people who sent us here want us to exercise power, and they want to hold us to account for it.

7.30 pm

Mr. Walter Sweeney (Vale of Glamorgan): I join other hon. Members in welcoming the new Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig), not only to the House but to his first debate on Welsh affairs. I wish him every joy in representing his constituents, in the footsteps of his illustrious predecessor.

In every debate on Wales, I listen to Opposition Members and wonder which country they are talking about. It does not seem to bear much resemblance to the Wales that I see when I go home to the Vale of Glamorgan. We are used to hearing gloomy messages, such as those in the speech by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). He talked down the Welsh people and the Welsh economy.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) seemed to depart from his usual script, because instead of concentrating on running down Wales, he concentrated on running down the Secretary of State for Wales. When will he realise that it is not through running down Wales or the Secretary of State, but through building and developing policies for the future of Wales, that we can hope to see a better future for its people? That future will be built on the successes of the past 15 years.

Perhaps the Labour party cannot bear to face reality. I should like to address some aspects of that reality in terms of Wales as a whole and from my vantage point in the Vale of Glamorgan. By any standards, my constituency is a marginal seat, which means that it may serve as an economic and political barometer of Wales. First, I should like to look at the economy.

Conservative policies have secured record inward investment. Between April 1983 and April 1993, more than 11,000 new projects have invested nearly £5.5 billion in the Welsh economy, creating or safeguarding nearly 110,000 jobs. The Ford plant at Bridgend, and Bosch near the M4 on the edge of my constituency, have provided extra jobs in the Vale of Glamorgan.

The expansion of Dow Corning and Cabot in Barry are good news for the chemical complex there, and for jobs. The British Airways aircraft maintenance base near Cardiff-Wales airport has provided new, highly skilled jobs. RAF St. Athan, the biggest employer in the vale, is doing magnificent work in aircraft maintenance, using a successful mix of RAF and civilian staff.

Conservative Governments have created a climate for investment. The number of days lost through strikes in Wales has fallen from an average of 1,590 working days per 1,000 employees in 1979 to 10 in 1989. Welsh unemployment is now in line with that of the rest of the UK, and is below the European average.

Mr. Llew Smith: The hon. Gentleman compares the days lost through strikes in 1979 with those lost at the present time. Would he care to compare the number of days lost through unemployment in 1979 and those that are lost at present?

Mr. Sweeney: I agree that there has been a substantial increase in unemployment, but there has been an increase throughout the European Union. Over the past 20 months, there has been a steady fall in unemployment throughout the UK. Britain has been leading the way and setting an example for the rest of the European Union.

In education, Wales has made considerable progress. More young people are obtaining better grades in GCSE and A-level examinations, and more are going on to further education. Sixty-one per cent. of our 16 to 18-year-olds continued their education in 1992-93, compared with 45 per cent. in 1987-88.

Local management has enabled schools to have more control over their budgets, and those which have advanced to grant-maintained status have proved popular and successful. There are now 15 such schools in Wales. My only regret is that many more schools which could benefit from grant-maintained status are not doing so, because of misguided, doctrinaire, left-wing campaigns against them.

So far there are no grant-maintained schools in my constituency, but elsewhere in the Vale of Glamorgan, in Penarth, the schools that have acquired that status are demonstrating how worth while it can be. I look forward to seeing many grant-maintained schools in my part of the vale in the near future.

I particularly welcome the Secretary of State's recent announcement about more resources to provide extra places in popular schools. That is a fundamental, central part of Conservative policy. We believe in encouraging parents to send their children to the best available schools in their neighbourhood, and it is clear that at least some Opposition Members understand that very well.

Spending on the national health service has increased by over 70 per cent. in real terms since 1979 to more that £2 billion in 1994-95. That amounts to £716 for every man, woman and child. Our health reforms have cut waiting lists and increased the number of patients treated. Since 1979, general practitioners have increased by 337 and there are nearly 6,000 extra nurses. The number of in-patients has gone up from 350,000 to more than 500,000. We have halved the infant mortality rate, and men are living some three years longer and women some 2.8 years longer than they were when the Government came to power.

In the Vale of Glamorgan, the Llandough hospital trust is providing various sophisticated day care treatments. The complaints for which those treatments are used once required hospitalisation, but day care means that people do not suffer the trauma of going into hospital and staying overnight. It also means that beds are released for patients who need in-care treatment. In Barry a brand new neighbourhood hospital is virtually complete and will provide a high standard of service for the people of Barry.

More people than ever own their own homes. Home ownership rose from 59 per cent. in 1979 to more than 71 per cent. in 1993, which is higher than anywhere else in the UK. That is good news, and we should be singing it from the rooftops instead of running down Wales all the time. Nearly 102,000 public sector tenants have bought their own homes, giving themselves the freedom of choice and pride of ownership that that involves.

[Mr. Sweeney]

In local government, we have succeeded in introducing unitary authorities, which will provide more local accountability and more efficient local services for everyone in Wales.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): There is no evidence for that.

Mr. Sweeney: The hon. Gentleman says that there is no evidence for that, but we must wait and see. The shadow authorities are due to be elected on 4 May, and a year later we shall see the success of that Conservative policy.

In my region, we look forward to the new Vale of Glamorgan county borough council with joyful anticipation. The Vale of Glamorgan will be slightly enlarged, which will contribute to the efficiency of that new authority. We will be free from the domination of the Labour-controlled, Cardiff-based South Glamorgan county council. Local government reorganisation is a cause of celebration. By the time that we next celebrate St. David's day, the new shadow authorities will be close to taking over full control of local government. People will recognise the success of that Conservative policy.

We have invested nearly £2 billion in improving the motorway and trunk road network in Wales, completing 25 miles of motorway and 154 miles of trunk road. *[Interruption.]* I notice that some Opposition Members are not listening. They should be aware of such good news. Those are the achievements of a Conservative Government.

Effective transport links are a vital aspect of the competitiveness of Welsh businesses. I welcomed the assurance of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State some months ago, in response to my question in the House, that he would entertain a bid from South Glamorgan county council for funding for a good road between Culverhouse Cross and Cardiff-Wales airport. I hope that South Glamorgan was listening to that, and that it will put in a realistic bid that will attract support from the Welsh Office.

Judging from my postbag and my surgeries, the biggest concern of my constituents has been the crime level in the Vale of Glamorgan. It is good news for Wales that, thanks to recent legislation, the crime level has at last turned downwards. I particularly welcome the announcement of my right hon. Friend, in conjunction with the Home Secretary, of a big increase in funding for the police, which is to be paid directly to the police. That is good news for my constituents, and we truly appreciate it.

There is a great deal of good news for Wales. Let us take the message back to Wales that we are proud of Wales, of the Welsh people, of our Secretary of State and of our Government.

7.41 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I join in the welcome that has been given to the hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig). He follows a man who was popular in the House and unpompous in his attitude to all hon. Members, even when he was leader of his party. I am sure that the hon. Member will prove a worthy successor.

We heard the Secretary of State for Wales give some welcome assurances about the information super-highway, especially in relation to the fact that it will reach rural mid-Wales. That has much wider implications than merely allowing a few people to move into rural areas to work as derivatives traders, or in similar enterprises. It has yet to impinge on farming, the biggest industry of rural mid-Wales, which faces a critical situation.

I welcomed, as did others, the statement by the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency and of the Development Board for Rural Wales, Mr. Rowe-Beddoe, in this building yesterday. He said that close attention was being given to the possibility of bringing into Wales significant meat processing facilities that are currently not available. I hope that action will be taken quickly on that promise. I invite the Secretary of State to remember that significant meat processing facilities already exist in Wales. For example, Edward Hamer International Ltd. in my constituency has such facilities. It is run by Edward Hamer, a tough, hard-headed and experienced business man. I hope that efforts will be made to build on such indigenous businesses. We should not merely look outside for possibly another disastrous and failed Fortex-type enterprise.

Like the Secretary of State, I welcome the destruction, for it was needed, of the Oldford estate on the edge of Welshpool. I am not sure that he can claim much credit for that. That move arises from a partnership between Clwyd-Alyn housing association and Montgomeryshire district council, which the Secretary of State has seen fit to abolish, despite a decision to the contrary by the Standing Committee that dealt with the matter, but I do not especially want to reopen old wounds.

I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to what sounded like the rough sleeper's initiative, which has been successful through the efforts, for example, of the Salvation Army and of the Salvation Army housing association in Mile End road, Whitechapel. One should bear in mind the fact that a large number of people were not sleeping rough in Wales before the Government came into office, but now a large number are. Tonight, I do not want to debate whether a cause and effect relationship exists there, but I hope that a full commitment is made to removing homelessness from the streets of Wales.

It would be tempting to use this debate to address a host of concerns about various aspects of Government policy, but I want to deal with just one issue, which is of wider relevance, but has a particular and important relevance in Wales. The Government's policy on community care funding is evidence of their talent for frustrating the democratically expressed views and wishes of the people of Wales for a decent level of service from local and national Government. It is important to test promises against reality. The Government's promises on community care and the reality of the funding that is being delivered are different.

Increasing evidence exists that community care in Wales is underfunded, undervalued by the Government and variable in its application in different parts of Wales. I would not cry "crisis" if none existed. The critical realities of community care in Wales warrant the immediate attention of the Secretary of State. He could start by reviewing his failure to cover the transitional cost of the shift to community and council organisation of care. He could then realistically appraise growing long-term demand.

It is not a problem of substantive policy. Community care is a policy with sound aims, but we should not lose sight of the significant group of people who will always need institutional care and who seem not to be fully catered for in current policy. For me, a particular constituency interest is involved in that context.

There is no comfort in a policy of community care if there is no corresponding policy of investment in its implementation. Demographic changes are well documented as a sign of need and demand. In the United Kingdom, the number of people aged over 85 amounted to approximately 900,000 in 1991 and that number is expected to rise steadily to 1.2 million by 2001. The number of elderly people living alone has risen from 35 per cent. in 1971 to 45 per cent. by 1991. The dependency ratio is rising dramatically across the country. That should be reflected realistically in Government policy. It is a particular problem in rural Wales, where people tend to live longer.

Today, the British Medical Association published its report, "Taking Care of the Carers". It has cogently brought to our attention the growing number of unpaid carers—a group of people whose position is often ignored by the Government. It is estimated that, nationally, unpaid carers provide the equivalent of a huge £34 billion worth of care. That is an astonishing amount when compared with the cost of institutional and professional care, which amounts to £10 billion. Less than a quarter of care is being provided by the state and local authorities; three quarters of it is being provided by volunteers.

It is estimated that there are 340,000 unpaid carers in Wales, of whom just over half are main carers, that 80,000 care for more than 20 hours a week, and that there are 485,000 people whose lives are limited in some way by long-term illness and who need some care. That is the scale of the problem. Government policy relies—reasonably to some extent but, unfortunately, too much—on the love and affection of those carers, who are often wholly unrewarded for the devotion that they give to those for whom they care.

Of the eight counties in Wales, four have projected overspends on their community care budget. In more than half of the counties, planned development of the service has been cut when it needs to be increased. Extremely tight limits have been placed on the costs of care packages, and the limits have been based on cash, not need. That cannot be right. Eligibility criteria have been tightened and charges for care have been increased. These are not the actions of financially irresponsible councillors but are sometimes cruel economies which have been caused by Government policy.

The figures are self-evident. Clwyd projects a £500,000 shortfall on its community care budget. Powys has introduced new eligibility criteria for services under the new social care plan and has implemented cuts in the provision of social domiciliary services that are especially important if people are to remain independent in remote rural areas. Residential and day care services have also been cut. The cuts in day care have given rise to many complaints by elderly constituents and their families. Despite those cuts, Powys still faces a possible shortfall of £300,000 on its budget for 1995-96.

I am advised that in Gwynedd there is an estimated shortfall of £500,000 in 1994-95, and it has had to borrow money from next year's budget. In South Glamorgan, there is an estimated shortfall of £1.3 million and the cost of care packages has been cut to the bone. In short, in all eight counties there is a tight squeeze, not on the basis of need but on the basis of obedience to central Government.

A recent and, I think, objective report by the Assembly of Welsh Counties on the implementation of community care in Wales has shown where the blame lies. The assembly acknowledged successes where it was appropriate to do so but also highlighted the failure of the Welsh Office to take realistic account in its funding settlements of the additional costs of the implementation of community care.

The total funding so far announced for community care in Wales is no more than the amount spent in 1992 on supporting people in residential care. Taking into account the implementation costs for community care, the result is a chaotic, variable and inadequate service. The Government must have realised when they decided to go for a community care policy that it was bound to be more expensive. Having made the policy decision, they failed wretchedly to fund the policy. If a policy merits being introduced—as I said, I support many of its objectives—it must surely merit the necessary investment.

The reality is that achieving the aim of providing choices and individual care packages looks very unlikely when some authorities are struggling to find the money. As an example, I cite the plight of small care homes in the private sector which have two or three residents. The owners are placed in the hopeless position of not even having funding for respite care, so they cannot have a few days' holiday and come back refreshed to look after their residents.

The community care settlements for Wales no longer have an adequate element of infrastructure funding—the money required to make the system work, as opposed to the money required to purchase the care that people need. That is despite the constant warnings of Welsh authorities that care in the community needed to be phased in over a number of years.

The Welsh Office should also examine the mismatch between health and social services authorities in respect of payments for care. While the Government's recent guidelines are at least an attempt to deal with the issue, reliance on the decisions of individual health and social services authorities means that different areas have different arrangements for the payment of care. That leads to the breakdown of sound common standards and fuels the anxiety and uncertainty felt by those who need care. They feel that they are merely numbers in a national lottery of care.

In rural Wales in particular, where there is a very high level of owner-occupation, uncertainty about payment for community care is leading people to believe—in some cases wrongly but, I fear, in some cases, rightly—that they will have to sell the family home or the family farm, family institutions which, in rural areas, might have existed for centuries.

If the Secretary of State does not wish to deal with such matters; if he is saying that he cannot afford to provide the money for decent care services or that he has no commitment to invest enough in the future of community care, he should make it clear that that is his view. If that is not his view, he should summon up from somewhere

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

the leadership and imagination that he so strongly advocates as a general principle in *The House Magazine* this week, and of which he spoke earlier today.

Mr. Redwood: The House should remember that, in the current year, an additional £86 million was made available for care in the community, and that will rise to £124.4 million next year. That was the original planned amount even though inflation—I am glad to say—is much lower. I was recently pleased to visit the many new nursing and residential care homes being built on the back of the money that will be available in future for the people who need those places. I agree that some people need institutional care, and I have asked that we do not lose sight of that fact.

Mr. Carlile: I am grateful for the Secretary of State's final remark, to which I shall return in a moment. However, I remind him that the gap between grant and need was £20.7 million for 1993-94 and £38 million for 1994-95 and will be £71.8 million in 1995-96. Local authorities have no prospect of filling that gap. The Welsh Office has outlined a grant rise of £25.2 million for 1996-97, which will increase the overall funding for community care to £149.6 million, but that has to be set against the £346 million originally assessed to be the long-term additional cost of implementing community care in the period to which I have just referred. Although funding is being increased, it is falling ever shorter of what the Government knew perfectly well was needed. The mismatch to which I referred is therefore proved.

The Secretary of State holds the old-fashioned view that care of the elderly is the responsibility of families first and, where no alternative is available, possibly of the community. Of course families should take more responsibility for the care of the elderly if they can, just as they should take more responsibility for the actions of their children, if they can. But that philosophy—if it be his philosophy—is that of the poor law and workhouse for those who do not have loving, caring and responsible families.

Finally, I shall deal with those who require long-term institutional care. There are two excellent mental handicap hospitals in my constituency—Brynhyfryd near Welshpool and Llys Maldwyn at Caersws. Some people have been transferred between those hospitals in unsatisfactory circumstances. Some have been transferred from them, and have lost the standard of care that they received before. There has been one sad fatality as a result. Many face great uncertainty. We should not transfer, for instance, adults with serious mental handicaps from institution-based care to the community if adequate community resources do not exist. There is no sanctuary in the community if the community means isolation, limited support and poor staffing.

The patients and former patients of those hospitals—especially the least independent—provide a benchmark for the way in which the care in the community policy is working. If so, the verdict of the carers, of the energetic advocates of the residents' interests and of their relatives is one of bewilderment, uncertainty and, in some cases, anger. Surely a policy that leaves experts and the lay public alike in that state of mind cannot be judged a success. I appeal to the Secretary of State to re-examine both its funding and its implementation.

8 pm

Mr. Don Touhig (Islwyn): As I rise to make my maiden speech in this St. David's day debate, I am conscious of the privilege of standing here as Labour and Co-op Member of Parliament for Islwyn. I am privileged to follow in a great tradition—from Sir Charles Edwards, who was elected in 1918 and became a Labour Whip, to the much-respected Sir Harold Finch, who became a Welsh Office Minister in 1964 and was an acknowledged expert on miners' compensation. I am, of course, also privileged to succeed Neil Kinnock, my immediate predecessor.

Right hon. and hon. Members have already paid tribute to Neil Kinnock and his service in the House. I echo that tribute. Neil Kinnock was a great leader of the Labour party, and a fine and hard-working constituency Member of Parliament. He is held in high regard and a great deal of affection by the people whom he represented in Islwyn for 25 years. The fact that he did not become Prime Minister is one of the great political and social misfortunes to befall our country in this, the last part of the 20th century.

My constituency comprises a series of small towns and villages scattered along the mountains and valleys of west Gwent. Its people are warm-hearted and friendly, generous and good-natured. They possess a strong feeling of community and belonging, forged by generations who have known struggle and hardship. They are proud of their own and their children's achievements, which have often involved considerable sacrifices, but, like people everywhere, they want the best for their children and grandchildren. They want work, not benefits; they want opportunities to enrich their lives through education; and they want a decent standard of health care.

Those benefits are not available to a great many of the people who sent me to the House of Commons. We have 2,000 people unemployed in Islwyn; one third are under the age of 24, and one third have been unemployed for more than a year. The day after the Islwyn by-election, 80 job losses were announced at Hawker Siddeley in Blackwood. We have schools struggling to deliver education with budgets that have been squeezed because the Government have held back funds for public services. As for our health service, a hospital adjoining my constituency recently appealed to the public not to come to the casualty unit because there were not enough doctors to treat emergency cases.

My predecessor stood here to make his maiden speech in 1970 during a debate on health. Nearly a quarter of a century later, I too wish to speak about the national health service and the care that it provides for my constituents. A man from Gwent dreamed the dreams and gave us all the vision that became the NHS—Aneurin Bevan: he did it with drive and energy, in the face of the fiercest opposition from the Conservative party. He succeeded because all right-thinking people agreed that if our claim to be a civilised society had any legitimacy, no sick person should be denied treatment because he or she was unable to pay for it.

In his book "In Place of Fear", published in 1952, Bevan wrote:

> "A free health service is a triumphant example of the superiority of collective action and public initiative applied to a segment of society where commercial principles are seen at their worst".

That, 50 years on, the present Government have eroded the ideal of a free and accessible health service and once again allowed some of the worst aspects of commercialisation to creep into health care is proof of how far they have turned the clock back.

In his maiden speech, my predecessor said:

"Public confidence in the National Health Service will be eroded by governmental neglect and by the garish shop window of private health schemes."—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1970; Vol. 803, c. 1183.]

Ministers make much of so-called reforms of the health service, but—speaking for those who use it, as opposed to the Conservative Members who legislate on how it should be funded—I can tell the Secretary of State that he and his party have lost the confidence of the people of Wales, who do not trust them to care for our health service.

A few days ago, the Under-Secretary of State wrote to me—and to other Welsh Members of Parliament—about the NHS's responsibilities to meet continuing health care needs. He said that health authorities had been issued with new guidelines that confirmed that the NHS had a clear responsibility to arrange and fund a range of services to meet the needs of people who require continuing health care. Would that the Minister was so diligent in ensuring the availability of adequate funds for primary health care.

A lady whom I shall see in my surgery on Saturday morning has been suffering pain for a long time. She needs an operation on her spine, which has been postponed four times because the providers of the funds cannot reach an agreement with the hospital where the operation will be performed about the mechanisms of treating her and providing the money.

Similarly, if the Minister had been diligent the wife of a good friend of mine would not have been in considerable pain for some time. Her family recently had to make a difficult decision. She was told that she would not be able to obtain an appointment to see a consultant for six to eight weeks, and that if she needed treatment it could not be delivered for a year to 18 months. She was also told that she could be treated privately. The pain has been considerable, and the family has now decided that she will become a private patient. She saw a consultant on Tuesday this week, and will be admitted to hospital tomorrow morning to have the treatment that she so badly needs: and the Conservative party says that it is not delivering a two-tier health service!

On Wednesday, *The Times* reported that four fundholding general practices in London were sharing nearly £1 million of budget savings that they had made on drug provision and health care. Last night I talked to an old friend of mine, Dipak Ray, a respected GP in Pengam. He said that there might be some justification for making savings on drug provision—but savings on hospital care? Who is suffering as a result of that?

I understand that on Monday the Public Accounts Committee heard of another fundholding practice in Essex that had used £30,000 of savings in its budget—a budget given to those GPs for health care—to open a health shop selling woks. The GPs offered patients £1 off the cost of a wok if they brought in their own frying pans. It reminds me of the pantomime about Aladdin and his lamp. I recently attended a performance of that pantomime at Cefn Fforest junior school in my constituency.

I am sure that hon. Members know the story of Aladdin and his lamp, and how the wicked Uncle Abenazer managed to get possession of the lamp by offering new lamps for old. The Secretary of State is a modern-day Uncle Abenazer, peddling cranky economic theories to fund our health service, which he offers in exchange for the values of a free health service accessible to all.

In Gwent, we have 17 GP fundholding practices. The Welsh Office has recently announced a change in the guidelines and now GPs with just 4,000 patients may apply to become fundholders. Under the guise of giving GPs control of their budgets, the Welsh Office is continuing to develop a two-tier health service.

In Islwyn we have no general hospital. Recently, a plan for health care in the Islwyn area showed that in 1993-94, 30,000 people from the constituency went to their nearest general hospital out-patient department, some 15 miles away from Blackwood at Newport. The No. 1 priority identified in that health plan is the need for a hospital at Islwyn with in-patient, out-patient and minor casualty facilities. Gwent health authority proposed a neighbourhood hospital for Islwyn in its "Gwent 2000" document some years ago. I hope that the new health commission will honour this commitment, for which I have launched a petition and gained support throughout the constituency.

In Islwyn, the percentage of babies with low birth weight is higher than anywhere in Wales. Islwyn has the lowest vaccination rate in Gwent for children under two years old and for pre-school vaccination boosters. Islwyn has the highest level of untreated dental disease among children. Breast cancer, the commonest cause of death among women between 45 and 54 years old, causes great concern. Although the number of cases may be comparatively small, their incidence has considerable impact on families. Unfortunately, there is a great lack of knowledge among the public about how to cope with those difficulties. People do not seem to know where to get help.

The Islwyn Cancer Link group, which is run by a voluntary team of women who operate from a portakabin, is doing the job that should be done by the health service in Islwyn. It is so desperately in need of funds that the mayor of Islwyn, Joyce Morgan, has made Cancer Link and raising funds for it her charity this year. We are returning to flag days to raise funds for the health service.

In Islwyn, people over 65 years old already form 15 per cent. of the population. That number will increase to half the population by 2026 and population projections show that the proportion of people over 75 in Islwyn will be the highest in Gwent by 2006. We must begin to prepare care for those people.

There is an increasing incidence of asthma among the young and an increasing death rate from respiratory diseases such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema among men. Known cases of Huntingdon's disease are four times the national average and there are twice the number of deaths from the disease than are expected in a constituency the size of mine, yet there is only limited genetic counselling available.

Those figures are given as an updated audit on the state of health care in the constituency of Islwyn. Health service resources should be available to the patient when he or she needs them. Provision of health service care is the responsibility of the community and its Government. Refusing people treatment when they need health care

[Mr. Don Touhig]

because of problems with organising funding or if they cannot go private is acting like those who passed on the other side of the road to Jericho. It may make sound economic sense to the Conservative party, but it is morally indefensible for the Government of Britain to behave so at the end of the 20th century.

8.13 pm

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I warmly welcome the hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig) and thank him very much for his important speech and his critique of Government policy on the health service. I enjoyed my occasional stay in Islwyn during the campaign, saw something of the hon. Gentleman and appreciated the spirit in which the campaign was fought. My one regret is that, during his maiden speech, there were not more Conservative Members present to listen to what he said.

Mr. Ron Davies: There are too many.

Mr. Dafis: Indeed, but more should have been here to listen to the hon. Gentleman's speech.

I want to speak about the education service in Wales, especially about what is going on in Dyfed. Three weeks ago, I attended a packed meeting—so packed that some people had to be excluded—at Trinity college Carmarthen that was convened by the federations of school governors in Dyfed and the parent-teacher associations. It was attended by parents, teachers, school governors and councillors united—I emphasise—in anger at the crisis facing schools as a result of cuts in county funding.

The catalyst for the meeting was the Welsh Office's refusal to fund the teachers' pay rise of 2.7 per cent. The immediate objective of the meeting was to urge Dyfed county council to use some of its reserves to fund the shortfall. It was said that unless Dyfed dug into its reserves, about 150 teachers would be dismissed in September, there would be cuts in the schools' budgets of 2.8 per cent. despite an anticipated increase in pupil numbers and one third of Dyfed's schools would find themselves in budget deficit.

The immediate objective was achieved. The following day, Dyfed county council agreed to release £1.3 million from its £4 million reserves to fund the 2.7 per cent. pay award over what had been originally intended. The meeting recognised too that there was an underlying and severe funding problem that pre-dated the teachers' pay award of 2.7 per cent. Underlying that crisis, there was something much deeper.

Since 1993, Dyfed county council has found its budget squeezed in an intolerable fashion. In 1994-95, for example, the budget was increased by 1.75 per cent. in a year when inflation ran at more than 2 per cent. In 1995-96, the increase will be 0.4 per cent., when inflation is anticipated to be between 3 and 4 per cent. On top of inflation, of course, which is crucial, the county council in particular, along with other local authorities, has faced additional responsibilities and demands—many of them statutory. It has found itself facing the results of demographic changes—an increase in the number of elderly people and the associated cost—and an increase in the number of schoolchildren.

I shall cite one example of the additional statutory requirements faced by a county such as Dyfed—indeed, by all counties in Wales in recent years. The Education Act 1993 created a statementing procedure for special educational needs that local authorities are obliged to implement. The increase in the amount of statements over recent years is worth noting and is very significant. The number of statements has increased from 646 in 1990 to 2,117 in 1995. In other words, it has more than trebled, which requires resources and involves costs. That constant increase has been driven, first, by parent demand—parents' awareness of what could be available to them and their awareness of their rights in that regard—and, of course, by statutory provision.

In 1993-94, Dyfed budgeted £5.4 million for special educational needs. It actually spent in that year, because it was obliged to, nearer £6 million. In 1994-95, the budget was set at £6.167 million, but it is likely to be £6.76 million. The 1995-96 budget has meant that Dyfed has had to cut education spending by 3 per cent.—£4.5 million. That cut in education is the lowest proportional cut across the departments of the county council.

I want to give some examples of what is being cut. People have been perfectly justified in demanding additional resources for discretionary awards in further education. However, Dyfed is having to cut £150,000 in respect of discretionary awards. Over recent years, community education has increasingly been becoming a Cinderella. That is regrettable. However, Dyfed is having to cut £100,000 from its community education.

Dyfed is also having to cut the repair and maintenance of school buildings by £1.4 million. That is a hopeless approach to housekeeping. Dyfed is also having to cut £100,000 from in-service teacher training. In doing so, it loses the opportunity of GEST—grants for education support and training—funding from the Welsh Office of a further £150,000.

More important than any of that is the fact that there is no provision in Dyfed's budget this year for inflation in school budgets for non-pay items—books, materials and equipment. At a time when we are talking about the need to raise education standards, the basic materials are now being cut because there is no provision for inflation.

The lack of provision for inflation means that schools will have to fund a significant part of the teachers' pay rise from their own budgets. They will have to find that money from their reserves—some schools have reserves, but others have deficits and no reserves—or from a further cut in the funding for books, materials and so on. The euphemism used in that regard is efficiency savings.

When the basic provisions in schools are cut, the situation becomes critical. At the very best it means that a school's parents and supporters will have to raise funds to make up the shortfall. They are raising funds now, not for additional luxuries that one might think it reasonable for parents to contribute to, but for the fundamental necessities of education in schools. That is entirely unacceptable because it is an unfair burden. Parents find that they must contribute constantly to all kinds of causes. It is also pernicious because it is inequitable. Parents in some areas are clearly better able to make up the shortfall than parents in other areas. Inequity is increasingly becoming a feature of the school scene.

That state of affairs has led governors in Dyfed, not councillors, to ask for a meeting with the Secretary of State for Wales. I do not know whether he has received

the request yet. If not, he will receive it soon and I hope that he will agree to the meeting. Tomorrow, representatives of people in Dyfed will hand in 2,000 letters to the Welsh Office in Cardiff and a petition will be presented in the near future.

People are very angry. I have rarely felt such anger among people in respect of the implementation of policy. There is deep anger, resentment and hostility towards the Government. People now understand perfectly what is happening. They understand what is afoot. They understand the hidden agenda, which has been exposed to all and sundry. The agenda is to undermine and remove local authority responsibility for schools. The intention is that that should be achieved by a combination of Government-imposed financial constraint and privation and the promotion of grant-maintained status, complete with inducements. These are the pincers the Government are using in order to bring their aim to fruition.

Part of the process involves obliging local authorities to dip into their reserves to reduce those reserves to perilously low levels. That weakens the position of local government in the process of reorganisation.

The Government are zealous in their promotion of grant-maintained status. Last July, the former Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) announced new measures in relation to GM status that meant that governors were obliged to consider the issue annually; the issue had to appear on the agenda every year. There was always an increased aid package for schools considering becoming grant-maintained.

The former Minister of State's successor, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), the hammer of local government, is even more fanatical in his zeal for GM status. In September, he announced that information packs were to be sent to schools—and these are his words; I would not use them—

"outlining the advantages and opportunities offered by grant-maintained status."

Those information packs include significant inducements. Special purpose grants, capital grants and transitional grants are on offer. Those grants are significantly more generous than anything that could be available from a local education authority. For example, an 80-pupil school would, if it opted for and obtained GM status, receive a total of £53,400 in its first year. That is quite an inducement and it is difficult to resist.

Dyfed county council has calculated the difference between what the Welsh Office would provide in that way and what the local education authority would be able to provide. If all schools in Dyfed were to become grant-maintained, the difference between what the Welsh Office is offering as an inducement and what Dyfed can offer would be £14,936,000. That is a nice sum which Dyfed could use to combat its shortfall.

An extrapolation of that concept on an all-Wales basis shows that the Government are offering £124 million if all the schools in Wales were to choose GM status and the Welsh Office agreed to that. It is worth asking what would happen if that occurred. Would the Welsh Office be prepared to foot such a bill?

Significant inducements are on offer and all that is happening at the same time as local government reorganisation. Local authorities will soon have to prepare and present their service delivery plans for the new unitary authorities. Those plans are the descriptions of how they are going to deliver services, and that includes education.

How can local authorities possibly decide how to deliver education services? How can they decide the size of the establishment which will be available or which they will have to recruit? How can they decide how best to collaborate with adjoining local authorities to arrange the delivery of services if they cannot even be sure how many schools they will have to service?

It is quite clear that it is the Government's intention—I believe this; it is not just rhetoric—to achieve their aim of making GM status the norm and having all schools in Wales grant-maintained by creating disorder in the existing system. When the Conservative party presents itself as the advocate of social order and the orderly implementation of policies, it is astonishing to find a Conservative Government employing tactics of the worst kind of anarchism to achieve their aim. They believe that if they undermine the present system, they will be able to create their new Jerusalem according to their own values and model. The greatest deceit is that that is done in the name of choice and diversity.

I was very disappointed to hear the leader of the Labour party recently defend the grant-maintained sector as providing a welcome element of choice. Of course, we know that choice exists for those who can afford it and for those who are themselves chosen. Grant-maintained status and its development are really about selection. That is what it will inevitably lead to, and that is implicit in the Education Act. The reintroduction of selection at 11-plus is its intention. In part, grant-maintained status is a vehicle for that. The statement of the Labour leader clearly shows the need for distinctive Welsh policies and for the power to legislate in Wales, whatever party is in power in London.

Hardly any aspect of policy demonstrates more clearly the need for Welsh self-government than education. The so-called reforms of the past decade have been designed in a way that, at best, is inappropriate for Wales and they are certainly incompatible with our values and aspirations. That is true of the encouragement of competition between schools, the design of the curriculum, which is inappropriate to the Welsh situation, and the setting up of two parallel systems of public sector schools and then letting them fight it out to the death. That is what the Government are imposing.

Mr. Richards: The hon. Gentleman said that the design of the national curriculum for Wales was inappropriate. Does he mean, therefore, that making Welsh a core subject in the national curriculum was inappropriate for Wales?

Mr. Dafis: The hon. Gentleman would be surprised if I answered yes. I am referring not to that but to the structure of the curriculum and the fact that the curriculum has not been designed on the basis of the knowledge that pupils in Wales should receive. I am referring, too, to one very simple fact: that the design of the curriculum, which is uniform across England and Wales, ignores the fact that we have an additional subject in Wales, to use rather old-fashioned language, which takes up four to five

[Mr. Dafis]

lessons a week, yet the content of all the other subjects is designed for a curriculum that does not include that additional subject. That is a perfectly good example.

Mr. Richards: The hon. Gentleman must know that the orders for the national curriculum in Wales are designed for Wales and are different from those for England—in Welsh subjects.

Mr. Dafis: I anticipated that that would be said. Of course, we have some variation in the orders in some subjects. We have what is called a Curriculum Cymreig. It is totally inadequate. What we need in Wales is a curriculum based on Welsh values and Welsh ideas and the knowledge that is appropriate to our needs. We need something much more radical than the present curriculum. By the way, we also need to strengthen the powers of ACAC—the Curriculum Assessment Authority for Wales—which is little more than a subsidiary of the London-based body, the Schools Curriculum Assessment Authority.

I think that I have made my point about what the Government's agenda is. The good news is that the Government's agenda is now well understood. The Government have been rumbled good and proper. The people of Wales are enraged by the combination of subterfuge and bullying that now occurs. Matters have reached the stage at which, as the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) mentioned, the Welsh Office was actually afraid—I use that word advisedly—to send a Minister to an important BBC television debate on the state of the nation, which was broadcast on Tuesday. That is an extraordinary state of affairs—the Government were not prepared to be represented in such a debate.

It is infuriating that the situation in Wales is being driven by a Secretary of State who has the democratic mandate of the people of Wokingham only, who, within the Cabinet, has led the drive for public expenditure cuts, and who is now leading the drive for tax cuts before the next election. The Secretary of State is the arch-proponent of competition as a motive force of public sector services, including education. The Secretary of State, of course, has been overwhelmingly rejected by the Welsh electorate.

While that mayhem is occurring, the real education issues in Wales that should be occupying our minds are largely unaddressed. We should debate how to raise school standards in Wales—standards need to be raised—without recourse to the irrelevant market mechanisms that the Government regard as their only instrument. What examination and assessment system is likely to contribute to raising standards in Wales? We need to look carefully at the ideas that have been put forward by the Institute of Welsh Affairs in its recent document on the Welsh education system.

How best can we deliver education for 16 to 18-year-olds within an integrated framework instead of the present mish-mash in which education for that age group is funded from two different sources and in which we have the ridiculous competition between further education colleges and school sixth forms and so on? What structure should there be for a truly Welsh national curriculum? How can we best expand the advantages of Welsh-medium education and knowledge of the Welsh language so that they become available to all?

Those are the real issues. They remain undiscussed because we do not have a democratic forum in which to debate them. Those issues will remain unattended until we have a self-governing Wales that sets its own priorities and is charged with the task of building our own national future. The achievement of a self-governing Wales is now being assisted daily by the Government's opposition to it. Every time they open their mouths, they strengthen the case for Welsh self-government, but the achievement of it must be the central theme of Welsh politics.

8.35 pm

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig) on a remarkable contribution, which I would have expected from him. He represents a constituency with a fine tradition and a fine past. If things go well in the next couple of years, he will also represent a constituency with a fine future. We all look forward to that day.

If the Government had been in office for only the past 15 months, I could understand their refusal to accept responsibility for many of the problems that we face in communities throughout Wales, but they have not been in office for 15 months—they have been in office for 15 years. Because of that, they must accept responsibility not only for the problems but for the devastation that they have inflicted upon our communities.

That devastation shows itself in many ways. It shows itself, for example, in poverty levels in communities such as mine in Blaenau Gwent. I am continually reminded of that devastation. Indeed, I was reminded of it at a meeting last year with the local authority, the Welsh Development Agency, the training and enterprise councils and the Department of Employment. In response to a question that I asked about the wage levels for all job vacancies on one day in Blaenau Gwent, the Department of Employment replied that the average hourly wage rate was just over £3. How would the Minister advise people in that situation on bringing up their families in decency and dignity, with that money? I go one further: I ask him to visit my community in Blaenau Gwent and to tell those people how to bring up their children when faced with hourly wage rates of £3.

That problem is not peculiar to my community; it is happening in working-class communities throughout the United Kingdom. I am sure that all hon. Members could give many examples of wage levels below £3 an hour. My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) gave such an example some weeks ago, when he referred to a vacancy that was advertised in the local jobcentre. It was for a security guard, who was to be paid the grand sum of £1.80 an hour, and who was advised to bring his own guard dog. That is not an isolated example. Such jobs crop up in Blaenau Gwent and in the communities that my hon. Friends represent.

We can see how bad the situation is, but for the unemployed it is even worse. May I allow some of those unemployed people to speak, and try to explain to the House the feelings and frustrations that they experience every day of their lives? I shall do that through a document which some of us produced a year ago, and which contains what some of the families facing the problems of unemployment say.

First we hear from an unemployed couple with one child at home. Father, aged 49, is on invalidity benefit, suffers from spondylitis arthritis and has not worked for 11 years. He said:

"The Hoover's broken, it'll cost about £70 to repair so we'll just have to go without. We don't go on holiday—just day trips. We don't go out, we don't drink . . . We have got into debt, but we learnt from that. If we want something now we sit down and talk about it. You've got to watch every penny . . . I think we go from day to day. We feel a bit depressed. It affects your whole life—it's monotonous. Some days we get up thinking if only something was different."

Next comes a single parent aged 23, with three children, living on £90.60 a week. She said:

"It's a struggle to live. I don't manage on the money. I've got a lot of debt but I get help from my mam and aunties. We never go on holiday."

The next family consists of an unemployed couple with a son who is also unemployed. Father, aged 62, had been unemployed for 10 years. He worked on the buildings for 30 years, often on low pay, and he said:

"People like us will get into debt. The social will only give you a loan and then you have to fight for it. We put in for a £70 loan for a cooker and they wanted £8 a week back off us. Well we didn't bother—we couldn't afford to pay that . . . We went on holiday once—we paid for a caravan—that's in more than 30 years of marriage . . . I came from Manchester and people who did well gave back to the community. They built the library and created parks but people don't do that now . . . I'm not optimistic for me, nor for my grandchildren. The chosen few will be getting all the resources and all the others will get left out."

In many ways, that sums up the frustrations felt by the people who face the problems of unemployment and the linked problems of poverty.

We are all aware that we cannot measure unemployment by the statistics provided by the Department of Employment, because it has been proved time after time in the House that those statistics have been fiddled on a regular basis for the past 15 years.

I was interested to read the results of a survey sponsored by the Government, on unemployment in the former coal mining areas of south Wales. The survey said that male adult unemployment stood at 33 per cent. When I put the figures to the Secretary of State some weeks ago, he did not deny them, and agreed that there were still pockets of unemployment. The south Wales coalfield is not a pocket; it is a vast area experiencing vast problems.

Perhaps the Minister would like to comment on one pocket of unemployment in my constituency. In our study of poverty, we interviewed families in one street, and the results were staggering. The survey said:

"Of the 58 households, we were able to interview 54, making a total of 91 adults and 86 children. Of those 91 adults, 22 people were working, 60 people were out of work, of whom 13 were single parents, five were retired and four classed themselves as housewives. At least 16 people were suffering from some kind of disability or illness. Of the 86 children, 57 came from homes where no one was working.

In 40 of the homes at least one person was without work, in 32 homes all the adults were out of work, including single parents, and in 15 of the homes at least one member was working."

When I see so many people unemployed, it always serves as a reminder of how crazy the system is. For example, we are going through one of the worst housing crises for decades, yet we have hundreds of thousands of building workers on the dole. Our national health service has been devastated and has long waiting lists, yet there are nurses and other people with tremendous skills on the dole. That is just crazy.

When the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts) was talking about the coal industry, he said that it had been necessary to respond to the problems of overmanning. The response was novel. I have never known anyone else who has responded to the problems of overmanning in an industry by totally wiping out that industry.

When we discuss poverty, we are not talking about unemployment and low wages alone. We are also talking about bad housing, poor health and an environment that is often savage. For example, the 1991 census revealed that 41 per cent. of all households in my constituency have a member suffering from long-term sickness or disability. That compares with a proportion of about 33 per cent. for the rest of Wales. Blaenau Gwent has one of the highest levels in England and Wales.

A Gwent health survey for the years 1985-89 confirms that the most deprived parts of the county experience the worst health. Again that is true of Blaenau Gwent, where deaths from lung cancer, respiratory disease and heart disease are all above the national average, and even the county average.

In the face of such problems, one would have thought that the area health authority for Gwent would be composed of people who had devoted their lives to the health service and knew what was required to make it better and to respond to the health needs of the people in my community. But that is not so. The area health authority is made up of building specialists, roofing experts, former gas purchasing officers and even fruit farmers. But where are the people who have devoted their lives to the national health service? Would not that service have been far better managed over the past decade or more if nurses, ancillary workers, doctors and consumers had had a greater say in its running and the business people out to make quick money had had less of a say?

While I am talking about health, may I ask the Minister when he sums up to explain why student nurses attending the purpose-built centre at Caerleon have had to move to Llandaff hospital, where the facilities are inferior, in order to continue their studies? The costs and the travel time for nurses in my constituency are now much greater, and their examinations are only a couple of months away. That is another loss for Gwent and another disincentive for people contemplating nursing as a career. Will the Minister also explain why those nurses had only five days' notice of the move?

Another way of measuring poverty in an area is to examine its housing stock. The 1991 census shows that housing conditions in the borough of Blaenau Gwent have improved, but remain poor. For example, 2.6 per cent. of pensioner households do not have their own bathroom or inside toilet. More than 40 per cent. of housing was built before 1990, almost all by the private sector, and much of it is in poor repair.

Much of the public housing also has its problems, for two main reasons. First, there is a high percentage of prefabricated concrete council housing. Secondly, most council estates are on hillsides, where the conditions make homes hard to heat and where homes need regular maintenance. Government policies and low income among owner-occupiers have made it increasingly difficult to maintain or improve the quality of the existing housing in the borough. At the same time, homelessness and the demand for homes are growing.

[Mr. Llew Smith]

I have heard many Ministers extolling the virtues of a dynamic market economy. If it is a dynamic market economy, why are we faced with the problems that exist in my constituency? Why are millions of people unemployed throughout the United Kingdom? Why are we experiencing the worst housing crisis for decades? Why are the differences in wealth and income growing? Finally, if the economy is so dynamic and successful, why is it that the Government will soon be dumped from office?

8.49 pm

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): I would have loved to chase at greater length aspects of the Secretary of State's speech, which, in some ways, was extremely revealing. Where did he turn to for his economic and social models? The United States. That was a very interesting choice.

The shape and character of the communities for which the right hon. Gentleman now claims to speak are based on anything but American styles of society. The economic and industrial experience shaped social cohesion and it was often the battle against capitalism which gave the distinctive character to the communities that I and my hon. Friends represent. We are now told that the economic, and presumably social, model to follow is one that has led to a huge and growing underclass and a largely alienated population who are turning more to guns and drugs than to any form of social values. Is that the model that the Secretary of State wants us to follow?

I want to make health the focus of my remarks. It is to the American-style model that the Government have turned to find a health model. We have in the purchaser-contractor-provider system a half-baked version of the American health system. One of the characteristics of the American system is that it is extremely expensive in administrative terms. Everything that I have read suggests that 15 per cent. of the costs in the United States go on the contracting, accounting and administration of the health service.

The NHS has always been inexpensive in administrative terms, with only 3 per cent. to 4 per cent. of costs going on administration. But the figure is now rising progressively. We should be worried that the right hon. Gentleman is seeking to apply American models to our services, and in particular to the health service.

I shall pay the Secretary of State, who is a curious mixture of a man, a compliment. The right hon. Gentleman did something that few Secretaries of State would have done. He came up to see a hospital that was under threat of closure, and talked to the people involved. That was much appreciated. The meeting on that occasion was revealing and illustrative in many ways. The Secretary of State was greeted by the chairman and chief executive of the area health authority and by the accountant unit manager of the district. They were on one side.

On the other side were the people whom I wanted the right hon. Gentleman to see and who represented the views that I was expressing. They included the nurses at Mardy hospital, the people interested in maintaining the fabric of the building, the carers and the patients. The Secretary of State was hearing two separate voices, and he will have to make up his mind on which he wishes to listen to.

One of the growing consequences of the right hon. Gentleman's reforms—he cannot wash his hands of it—is the increase in the number of men in grey suits. The growing need for accountants, negotiators and contractors is a consequence of the purchaser-provider model that the right hon. Gentleman is trying to impose on the NHS.

I am pragmatic in most respects. I have heard all the arguments, claims and counter-claims about expenditure, and about the huge amounts that the Government claim to have spent on the health service. Like the Secretary of State, I have talked to the people who are trying to deliver the service. In one way, half of what I have been told proves the Government's case. Those involved in the service have said that they never thought about costs, or about the way in which they ought to have utilised their resources in the most efficient manner.

That is certainly a factor in the matter. But while we might accept the diagnosis, the Government's prescription is equally senseless. Top specialists now spend more of their time accounting for the service than delivering it, and more time administrating than administering the service. The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) referred to a similar situation in education. In that area also, the prescription is half-baked.

The purchaser-contractor-provider concept is now a problem rather than a solution. While that is bad enough—it is absorbing energies and costs that ought to be delivering front-line services—it is now also distorting clinical judgments and affecting the delivery of the service.

I shall illustrate that in a couple of ways. First, an elderly person who was suffering from advanced lung cancer was admitted to a district hospital, although it was not a hospital that I represent or, indeed, even in Wales. Her family were told that she was terminally ill but not acutely ill, so she should be discharged from the hospital. The semantics of that are interesting.

I can just about understand something like that happening, because the prognosis was that the person did not need the acute facilities of a major district general hospital. But the family were told that they should make arrangements to send the patient to a private nursing home, which would cost about £300 or £400 a week, because she was terminally ill and not acutely ill. Those are the distinctions which are creeping in and which have grown in the service. We are counting costs more than thinking about the quality of service to patients.

This week the Department issued a revealing document as a result of some health ombudsman cases in Leeds. Let me read out what it was necessary to tell the health districts and authorities not to do. The document that the Secretary of State has just published states:

> "In addition patients who have finished acute treatment or inpatient palliative health care in a hospital or hospice, but whose prognosis is that they are likely to die in the very near future should be able to choose to remain in NHS funded accommodation".

I support that. The very fact that such advice has had to be issued shows that it cannot have been happening.

Terminally ill people, as in the case that I have just described, have been pushed out of hospital. Why? Because of the cost argument and the implications for beds in district general hospitals as opposed to elsewhere.

Fancy having to issue such a document in 1995, and having to tell the people providing the service that that is the guideline that they should follow. It is a powerful illustration of the corrosive influence of contracting and purchasing and of the way in which they are affecting our service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig) made a powerful speech. It was almost the speech that I would have liked to make on health.

I shall give the Secretary of State another illustration. Let us turn from the Mardy to the Prince Charles hospital. We are trying to save money. Opposition Members understand the need for minding costs and being efficient. We also understand the need for new technology. One of the consequences of new technology in eye surgery is that everyone can be treated on a daily basis. Patients do not need to stay in a hospital, which sounds ideal. But in practice, 80-year-old patients are having to get up at 5 am or 6 am to turn up at the hospital by 8 am for day surgery. They are discharged by lunchtime or early afternoon and told to put drops in their eyes. I am 55 and my hands are shaky enough—I could not put drops in my eyes—so imagine telling 80-year-olds to put drops in their own eyes and to come back the following day and the day after for new dressings. That is the other side of the coin of driving through this contracting and purchasing model, and everyone is conscious of it. Service and the concept of care are becoming less important than cost. We need to strike a balance, but at the moment it is being struck the wrong way.

We can all quote cases. On Saturday, a chap whose shoulder was destroyed in an accident came to see me. It means that he cannot work. He went to the hospital in Newport—not to the Prince Charles in my constituency—and was told that he would have to wait six months for an operation. He cannot go back to work and will become a dependant of the state. He was also told, however, that he could meet the same surgeon and have the same operation within a few days, if he paid his £1,000 or £2,000. That is an illustration of the corrosive influence of the growing queues—people are profiting from protracted pain.

I do not think that the Secretary of State wants that sort of national health service. I have had extensive correspondence with him, his predecessor and with junior Ministers who have dealt with health, including the Under-Secretary of State. I have seen them about more than one patient and told them about my worries and concerns and about the corrosive influence of this evil business of private patient care and the national health service beginning to mix—the so-called green book guidelines and all the rest, and the fact that people can drive a coach and horses through them. That is the sort of worry that we have over a major area of public service and care.

Frankly, there is an alternative model. The Secretary of State has tried to produce one and now I shall. Whether in education or health, in hospitals or schools, unlike Wokingham, London and other suburban areas, we do not have the choice in my constituency. The services are near monopolies. There are only one or two general practitioners whom we can go to and only one hospital. Our children are likely to go to one primary or secondary school. The Government try to use the concept of competition, contracts and that type of model to attack the concept of the monopoly. I understand why, if there is a monopoly, one must make it very accountable, both in terms of cost and sensitivity to the public, but the Government have got their model wrong. They are trying to graft a competition model on to what, for the vast majority of people, is a monopoly service, whether it be the health service or schools.

Instead of contractors and providers and all these competition models, we should try to adopt another system. I have a couple of recommendations for health. Let us pack up the nonsense of purchaser-contractor-provider. By all means have a powerful, lean and hungry bunch of people, who can act as health auditors. The Government have taught us the power of regulation in gas and electricity, which has delivered power to consumers. I must admit that we were poor supporters of consumers in many curious ways. The regulator is an interesting model to follow. The concept of regulation can be used in both health and education as an alternative to the purchaser-provider model and the pretence of competition, which exists in neither health nor education in most of our communities.

We could also borrow from local management of schools, which has worked in education, devolving responsibility downwards, by putting sisters and matrons back in charge of hospitals. I now meet chief nursing officers whom I have never seen in uniform as they no longer work on hospital wards. I come from a family of sisters and matrons and know that, when sisters and matrons were responsible for the accounts, they were the best and meanest at them. We need neither accountants nor trusts at the top, but responsibility should be devolved back to where it belongs.

Above all, for philosophical reasons we must change the language. Let us talk about a public service and engage people who want to serve. I do not want my health service or hospital run by a chief executive who demands a car, performance-related pay, share options or some kind of bonus in order to activate him into being committed to the show. Patients should not be referred to as clients or customers. Let us put the concept of service back where it belongs—in the service, whether it is education or health. We must get away from the ethos of contracts, money and commercialism driving the system, but by all means retain a tough regime in terms of cost. That is the model which my hon. Friends must promote as a distinct and clear alternative to commercial values, competition and the corrosive influences that the Secretary of State and others have brought into our health and education services.

9.6 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I suspect that the Secretary of State shares many of the values which my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) has just set out in terms of community and service. Our argument against the Secretary of State is that his ideological impulses push him in the opposite direction and lead to results which are wholly contrary to the values that I believe he espouses.

I join my hon. Friends the Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney and for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith), and the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis), in paying fulsome tribute to the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig). He comes from the valleys and brings with him

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

much of the breath of the valleys. The examples that he gave show that he will represent powerfully the constituency of Islwyn.

St. David's day is our annual Welsh day and this is the only opportunity that we have to review the state of the nation. In my brief contribution I shall try to sermonise on two headlines in yesterday's *Western Mail*. The first may be a little partisan. It says:

"Tories in Wales face wipe-out at elections".

The second is a charming little headline which reads:

"John Redwood wants the dragon to roar".

With regard to the first headline, the current 12 per cent. support for the Conservative party in Wales illustrates a fundamental contradiction in Welsh politics: although the Labour party has consistently had about half the popular support, for the past 16 years the Conservative party has ruled Wales. Are the Government and Conservative representatives in Wales not embarrassed by that? Have they sought to combat the inevitable frustration and potential alienation of the Welsh people? Are they aware of the sensitivities of Wales? Have they tried to promote community and a sense of Welsh identity? The record is patchy.

On language, the Government have a pretty good record. Here I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts): on the whole, he handled with great sensitivity an issue which could have been explosive in Wales. The package, which continues to evolve, will—for a time, at least—meet the general consensus in Wales.

Overall, however, the Government's record is not good. They have sought in many ways to emasculate the local elected representatives by means of increasingly severe financial constraints and have also sought to attack their personal competence for the work. The Secretary of State well knows the record of the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), in that respect and I shall not repeat what is well known to Members of the House. The Government have also sought to bypass the elected representatives by creating and encouraging a series of quangos, which are a form of outdoor relief for friends and relations of members of the Conservative party and create disillusion and frustration in Wales.

Nationally, the political maturity of the people of Wales is attacked by the Government by injecting into the argument about devolution—I well understand that there are cogent arguments on both sides—the suggestion that an elected assembly in Cardiff would inevitably, as night follows day, lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. Surely Wales is more sophisticated than that.

Mr. Rowlands: They used that argument against appointing a Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Anderson: Indeed. The right hon. Member for Conwy will shortly visit Catalonia. Does the fact that Catalonia has an elected assembly, which encourages the language there, of itself inevitably entail the break-up of Spain? Has not every one of the motor regions with which Wales is linked—Lombardy, Baden-Württemberg, Rhône-Alpes, and so on—at least some focus at regional-national level where people can feel that their problems are tackled more sensitively than at the overall national level? Why must the Conservative party try to frighten people with a Domesday scenario, saying that the heavens will fall, the Rhine will overflow and the United Kingdom will break up if we, like every other country in Europe, have an elected regional assembly? Surely the argument can be conducted on a more elevated level.

On the theme of Welsh identity, Government policies have eroded the sense of Welsh identity of institutions in Wales in many ways. Let us take the privatised utilities. Some, like Welsh Water, encourage Welsh identity, but others are moving their centres of operation increasingly away from Wales; one thinks of the gas industry in that respect. British Rail, which remains a nationalised undertaking, is moving increasingly away from Wales.

I wish to mention to the Secretary of State one further institution—the traffic commissioners. I hope that the Secretary of State will, in his usual courteous way, seek to inquire into that problem and perhaps respond to me. The Secretary of State may be aware that, five years ago, we fought successfully against the threat to move the traffic commissioners away from Cardiff. I understand that that threat has now reappeared, and I hope that the Secretary of State will try to fight for their retention. Will the Secretary of State inquire into the matter and try to provide an assurance that south Wales will continue to have its own licensing authority and traffic commissioner, notwithstanding what may or may not appear in the review of traffic area offices currently being carried out? Large and small institutions are moving away from Wales. I welcome the arrival of the Chemical bank and other groups in Cardiff, but they do not underpin the financial structure. Such moves are relatively shallow and fragile. I hope that we will seek to develop institutions—both private and public—as a focus of Welsh identity in Cardiff rather than stand by and watch as they are increasingly dragged away from Wales.

Having described the erosion of many institutions, I thought that there had been a great change when I read the headline,

"John Redwood wants the dragon to roar".

Had there been a Damascus conversion? Was the Secretary of State donning the cloak of Wales and seeking to promote Welshness? Alas, no—he was making a rather petty attempt at parading his anti-European feelings.The Secretary of State has many virtues. He is intellectually rigorous. As my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney said, he will look at things in person and he has an open-door policy. However, he must recognise that his political views are those of an English nationalist and that his ideology is not consonant with the interests of the Welsh people. It is no wonder that the polls show only 12 per cent. support for the Conservative party in Wales.

The Welsh people sometimes feel like the African leaders of the 1950s who pleaded, "Please, let us make our own mistakes." The Secretary of State is out of touch with our radical traditions and the forces which have helped Wales to develop its own sense of identity. He will always put market-based solutions first, even if they are against the interests of the Welsh people.

One example is the likely announcement about a cardiac unit at Morriston hospital. The Secretary of State will be aware that there are strong suspicions that he has been pushing for the BUPA solution, which constitutes a vote of no confidence in the in-house bid from Morriston hospital. I shall be delighted if the Secretary of State will

confirm that there is no foundation to the rumour about the unit going to BUPA and that the in-house group will win.

Mr. Redwood: I should like to reassure the hon. Gentleman that I am not pushing for any solution. There will be a proper assessment of the relative strengths of each case and the right answer will be reached. I am not trying to bias the assessment in any way and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will accept my reassurance.

Mr. Anderson: I hear the Secretary of State's reassurance and I hope that that is true.

The Secretary of State was most eloquent about the super-highway and the virtues of computer technology. Of course, Wales cannot be exempt from such technology, but we should not be beguiled when the fact is that in many ways computers can destroy jobs.

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Morriston announced last year that the Government's expenditure of £12 million on a new computer would mean the loss of 700 jobs in an area of high unemployment over a two-year period. That sector is not subject to competitive pressure and the decision does not make sense. The Secretary of State must be aware that a job means a personal identity for many individuals. I am not arguing for inefficiency, but the Government can help to provide identities for people by creating new jobs in depressed areas.

Finally, I make an appeal to the Secretary of State on the subject of drugs. He has been most eloquent about the drug menace and the evil men behind it. However, a key project in my county—the west Glamorgan drug prevention unit—is to close this month. The Home Office has withdrawn funding and the people there are already dispersed. In the current financial year the Government are spending less than £400 million on drug prevention. Yet the Secretary of State's only response—again, he will correct me if I am wrong—was that on 20 October last year he announced with a flourish that he would be establishing a small new team of officials to take practical steps for prevention and cure. My understanding from experts in west Glamorgan is that the rest is silence and there has been no evidence of any action on behalf of that group. Experts in the field tell me that nothing has been heard of it; yet one knows the extent to which drugs can lead to crime and destroy lives. On the face of it, it seems to be a example in which saving public money has been put ahead of the social needs of the country.

Finally, what is the audit of Wales on this annual Welsh day? Clearly the Government are divided, and in many ways they are alien to the people of Wales. They are insensitive to Welsh needs and that insensitivity leads to frustration and impotent anger on the part of our people. The Government are not a good model for democracy. Yes, the dragon will indeed roar: it will roar at the next election, both within Wales and outside, and I am confident that those poll findings or something like them will be confirmed.

9.20 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): I shall be brief as I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) wishes to wind up for the Opposition. I wish to make a few comments about unemployment in my constituency.

Earlier this week, an announcement was made by the Ministry of Defence about Pendine. We are delighted that it has been reprieved and we thank the Welsh Office for lobbying on our behalf. Virtually all the work at Pendine will continue, but with a very much reduced work force. The current 340 jobs will be reduced to 110, partly because of a slim-down and partly due to some of facilities at the port being used to support the work there. There could be job losses of around 200 at Pendine over the next two years.

A Welsh Office press release issued yesterday promised to examine the possibility of Pendine becoming part of the west Wales task force area. I hope very much that when the discussions are followed through Pendine will become part of that initiative and so will Whitland, which is adjacent and where 150 jobs were lost last November. We also want extra finance because 400 jobs have been lost in an area where it is impossible to replace them.

My second point is about Capel Hendre near Ammanford. The Amman valley is an unemployment black spot with something like 15 or 20 per cent. unemployment in many villages. We now have an excellent industrial estate at Capel Hendre, thanks to the Welsh Office, the Welsh Development Agency and Dinefwr borough council. We now want to attract a big inward investor bringing something like 500 jobs. I make a plea to the Welsh Office to carry on its good work at Capel Hendre and to find a customer for that site to create 500 jobs to revive the Amman valley in my constituency.

9.23 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Let me start, as several of my hon. Friends and the Secretary of State have already done, by complimenting my hon. Friend the new Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig), although he is not in his place at the moment, on an outstanding maiden speech. Let me also repeat the kind and courteous references that he made to his predecessor, a personal friend of mine and our party leader for nine years from 1983 to 1992. I was particularly pleased to hear my hon. Friend following a proud Gwent tradition by laying so much emphasis on the national health service, as did many Opposition speakers, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) and for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson).

The speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn, however, has to take pride of place tonight. Not only was it a very good speech, but my hon. Friend won a unique by-election victory. The Government percentage of the vote at that by-election was probably below the ruling interest rate. That record may stand for some time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn spoke about the important issue of GP fundholders, the loose cannons in the system. We have an estimate that about £7 million of fundholders' so-called savings are currently sloshing around in the national health service. It is up to the fundholders to decide what to do with that money, whether to expand their premises, or so on.

It is doubtful whether that money represents savings because it is generally produced by fundholders prescribing cheaper drugs for their patients. That is fair enough, but non-fundholders are also prescribing cheaper drugs and they are not allowed to keep the savings from that. The degree to which fundholders are getting on with the job of prescribing cheaper drugs is no greater than that

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of non-fundholders, but fundholders are allowed to keep the money, which is now a large sum. According to Welsh Office figures, it was £4.7 million last year and it is probably about £7 million this year. That is a dangerous new feature and we need to get hold of it. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn mentioned that issue.

As good parliamentarians we need to be sure that we know what is happening to that £7 million that is sloshing around the system. Ministers should possibly take more responsibility for finding out what is happening to that money. The Secretary of State's speech did not contain a great deal about health, although Opposition speakers tended to emphasise it. There has been some reference to waiting times and I think that the hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) said that waiting times had come down. That is contradicted by an article in this morning's *Western Mail* which was based on the publication yesterday of waiting times information produced by the Secretary of State's Department.

We are concerned about those figures because the Government are giving their Back Benchers the impression that waiting times are going down. We are at a critical moment because in four and a half weeks, on 1 April, the Welsh health service will be put to the test of last year's initiatives by the Secretary of State, by which he caused all consultants to offer a maximum waiting time of six months for a first out-patient consultation. That is what the right hon. Gentleman said last year, but now that we are getting close to 1 April, the message seems to be slightly different.

It seems that some consultants in Wales are already booked up to the year 2000. That applies especially in long-wait specialties such as orthopaedics and there are out-patient waiting times for consultations of more than two, three or four years. In at least one case that I am aware of in south Glamorgan, the waiting time is more than five years. Anyone who gets an appointment now will keep it in the new millennium. However, four weeks from now we shall be expected to believe that the maximum will be six months.

As I have said, booking dates now are for the year 2000. How we can get from that to a booking date in October this year for anybody coming into the system on 1 April I do not know. It is a bit of a mystery to us all. What is to be done is partially revealed in the waiting times initiative which lists all the consultants and the length of their waiting times. Under the heading "Patients choice" the document states:

> "This bulletin does not include details of consultants who are unable to meet the existing patients charter guarantees on maximum waiting time."

Mr. Rowlands: How many are there?

Mr. Morgan: Of those published, 29 consultants are listed in only two specialty areas, orthopaedics and ophthalmics. Those 29 consultants have waiting times of two years for treatment and the waiting time for 12 or 13 consultants for a first out-patient consultation is more than two years. The Government reckon that in four weeks that waiting time will be down to six months. They have left out all those whose waiting times are longer than that. They have simply taken the long-wait consultants out of the system. They do not publish their names so that we do not know that the guarantee is a load of rubbish. The consequence of the Secretary of State's action is that it will pay every health authority in Wales to have a duff consultant in each specialty. He will have a short waiting list so that they will be able to say, "We have met the patient minimum time guarantee because this consultant"—whom nobody wants—"can be offered in less than 26 weeks." The consultants whom everyone wants to see still have waiting lists of two, three, four and, in one or two cases, five years plus. That is the problem that everyone has when seeking some credibility in the Secretary of State's alleged guarantee of a two-year waiting time.

Mr. Redwood: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that a successful and popular consultant should have to work even longer hours so that he is available more rapidly? Surely the hon. Gentleman understands that the guarantee is that, for every patient, there is a consultant of a decent standard, who is capable of seeing that patient and of giving him the necessary treatment. It is never possible to say that one specific consultant will always be available next week.

Mr. Morgan: The Secretary of State confirms my hypothesis that for every half dozen consultants in a specialty in a major hospital, there will be one tail-end Charlie or Charlotte, who is not a popular consultant and who will therefore have a short waiting list. The average waiting list will not differ from what it is today—104, 150 or 300 weeks. The position will not be any different, despite the sales pitch that the Secretary of State put on it. The Secretary of State has that problem. It is no wonder that he did not touch on the state of the health service in his speech.

Nor, strangely enough, did the Secretary of State do much in the way of an attack on devolution, which we had half expected. We did hear a weak, half-hearted attack on devolution by the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts). He did not mention the dreaded words, "the Ulster framework document", but perhaps good reasons exist for that. That document contains proposals for a non-tax-raising, devolved assembly that covers a wide range of central Government powers—everything barring defence, central Exchequer tax-raising powers and foreign policy. Those proposals offer a wide range of devolved powers, which are well beyond what has been proposed by Opposition Members in relation to Wales and to Scotland.

In general, all we heard were half-hearted suggestions that Labour was interested in breaking up the United Kingdom, but nothing could be further from the truth. No amount of wriggling by the Government can avoid millions of people in Wales drawing the conclusion that, if such proposals are good enough for Ulster, they are good enough for Wales.

Given the choice in Wales between Secretaries of State from Worcester, from Wirral, West or from Wokingham and a body that will be accountable to the people of Wales, no doubt exists as to which option the people of Wales would choose. It must be said of the Secretary of State, and I say it with great courtesy, kindness and respect, that he is our trump card in arguing for a Welsh Assembly. If he wants to know why, he should read his speech in *Hansard* tomorrow. Most people in Wales will have concluded that he is not from the same planet as them. It is no wonder that the Conservative party lost its

deposit in Islwyn or that the Secretary of State sought solace 3,000 miles away in the rantings and ravings of Newt Gingrich, the Republican House of Representatives Speaker.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Conwy, who said about Newt Gingrich and the Secretary of State's reference to him, "What's it got to do with Wales?" He was right about that. I enjoy finding things on which we agree. Newt Gingrich is a friend of the shock jocks, the rednecks and the roughnecks. I never thought that "John Redwood" would become "shock jock redneck".

As was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, not satisfied with moving 3,000 miles away, the Secretary of State then moved off into cyberspace and tried to interest us all in the idea of Super-JANET suddenly landing in Cardiff bay, possibly to meet SuperTed. Many people, however, will find his alternating between cyberspeak and penny-in-the-slot, pseudo-philosophical, right-wing, mid-Atlantic, think-tank gibberish extremely unappealing. That was not what people in Wales wanted to hear. It was like a trainee accountant on crack.

I think that it is fair to say that the Secretary of State realises that what people in Wales are interested in is why, after 16 years of Conservative Government, their incomes are still 15 per cent. lower than the average income in the UK, whether one measures it by family expenditure or by gross domestic product. Incomes were 15 per cent. behind in 1979. Despite the so-called economic miracle, they are still 15 per cent. behind and they are falling, according to the latest statistics. That is the bottom line. The Secretary of State was very interested in the bottom line in his previous careers in merchant banking, industry and the City. For the people of Wales, the bottom line is: why are they still so far behind?

Why is there talk of an economic miracle when it is difficult to find one in the streets of Wales? The Secretary of State goes in for philosophical rantings that are meant to appeal primarily to audiences in the home counties and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East said, possibly to a kind of English nationalist audience.

In any event, the Secretary of State's rantings are certainly part of the battle for the leadership of the Tory party after the Government's defeat at the next election. They are meant to state his position and are nothing to do with Wales. They are grandstanding for the readers of *The Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, and the *Daily Mail*—the Murdoch, Conrad Black and Rothermere newspapers. They are the audience that he is trying to reach and he is using us as a way of doing so. If he did not have Cabinet status, he would not be able to make such speeches or get noticed. It is a case of "Welsh Cabinet Secretary Makes Major Attack on Single Parents in St. Mellons". His comments are tuned up to be a great philosophical statement about the need for community and family.

The same happened with the popular schools initiative. It was meant not to go down well in Wales but to appeal to an audience that reads the right-wing newspapers. The Secretary of State is positioning himself and getting ready for the future battle for the leadership of the Tory party. However, such issues are not of great interest to us in Wales.

The Secretary of State does not have to go very far to find out why his party is so far behind in the polls. It is because we are so far behind in the economic stakes and because he is not on the same wavelength as the people of Wales, who overwhelmingly support the Labour party, not him.

Mr. Ron Davies: We have a lead of 54 per cent.

Mr. Morgan: My hon. Friend refers to the latest opinion poll, which confirms what most of us know simply by living in Wales. I am sure that the Secretary of State knows that to be the case from the blank faces of Welsh audiences when he starts making one of his philosophical speeches. That is why he makes many of his speeches not only in his constituency of Wokingham but in Reading, in Woking, in Guildford and in Winchester, which are so similar in their social character. Speaking in such places makes it easier for him to get his press releases through on the Friday night drop to the newsrooms of *The Sunday Times* and *The Sunday Telegraph*. He can then develop his obsession and appear on "The World at One" and the other heavy political Sunday programmes to prove his philosophical right-wing credentials.

The hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) said earlier that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had been appointed under a defective system. If there were a Welsh Assembly and, apparently, a different system, how would the Secretary of State be appointed?

Mr. Morgan: I am grateful to the Minister for bringing up that point. It is eight years since the people of Wales had a Secretary of State who represented a Welsh constituency. They have had Secretaries of State who represented Worcester and Wirral, West and the present Secretary of State represents Wokingham. They have not been represented by the right hon. Member for Conwy. It was a shock to the system for all of us that he was missed out—perhaps it was because his constituency does not begin with the letter "W". In any event, it was awful for the people of Wales to realise that they were not going to have a Conservative Secretary of State who represented a Welsh constituency. Perhaps the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), thinks that he is still in with a chance and can alter that, but if he does not realise that the system is defective, he has another think coming. An overwhelming proportion—90 per cent.—of the people of Wales acknowledge that the system is defective.

Many of us were amazed at the extent to which the Secretary of State quoted Newt Gingrich as the inspiration for his philosophy. One could say that he wants to station himself as mid-Atlantic, right-wing American and anti-European. However, I can tell my parliamentary colleagues that that is all a bit of a con. In fact, he has a secret second life as a pro-European. I have here a pamphlet that refers to him as "European Redwood". That is almost a contradiction in terms. It is like referring to the sincerity of the Home Secretary, or to the Prime Minister's authority. What are we being told? It could be said that the Secretary of State has two junior Ministers who are two planks—obviously, I shall not use the word "short" in this context—and it could certainly be said that "European Redwood" goes against the grain.

I raise the matter only because the Secretary of State raised it himself. He had a wonderful photo-opportunity down in Dyffryn gardens, planting a seedling that will still be there in 3,000 years—by which time the Conservatives might have gained more than 5 per cent. of the vote in

[Mr. Morgan]

valleys by-elections. I must tell the Secretary of State, however, that although that seedling was planted on Tuesday, an army of death watch beetles came down from Islwyn on Wednesday and ate it.

The Secretary of State pointed out that St. David was a successful missionary for Christian values many centuries ago. I can only tell him that he himself is the most unsuccessful missionary for Newt Gingrich's values who could be imagined. We are talking of a man in America who does not believe in the welfare state or in any public involvement in the health care system. The Secretary of State, however, tells us that he wants to sell those ideas and still make us believe that the national health service is safe in his hands.

If the Secretary of State wants us to believe that, he had better not keep talking the language of Newt Gingrich to the people of Wales or in the House of Commons. If he does, the people of Wales will reject him and his party at the next election, and at every by-election before that, as they have done consistently ever since the secret ballot was introduced.

9.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Gwilym Jones): I appreciate the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) about the fact that we may have to do something different, or we shall risk defeat in the next election. I take that very much to heart. We always appreciate a wind-up from the hon. Gentleman. It is a wind-up in every sense of the term: there may be no substance in it, but it is invariably hugely entertaining.

This is our traditional Welsh day debate. It is traditional in the best sense. There has been many a repetition: comments that have always been made are trotted out once more. I must, however, express my pleasure at the fact that nearly all Opposition Members welcomed some of what they heard—especially what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about his aims for communications. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) went further, welcoming various other developments. I hope to touch on those later. The hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) acknowledged the efforts of all of us to encourage the process at Pendine; I thank him for that.

It has been a traditional debate. Reading the report of last year's debate, I noticed that the result of an opinion poll had just been announced then as well, and that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) trumpeted that as our worst-ever opinion poll result. [HON. MEMBERS: "This one is worse."] No; the latest opinion poll result is better. It shows an improvement for us of some 10 per cent. I should be consoled by that if I am worried about the poll.

The most traditional feature of our Welsh day debates, however, is the increasing number of hon. Members who try to tempt the hon. Member for Caerphilly to enunciate a policy, usually with the least possible success. The most successful of them today was my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts), who, by means of a series of interventions, dragged out more policy from the hon. Gentleman than he had revealed in his 33-minute speech.

That, too, is traditional. I note that last year the hon. Member for Caerphilly spoke for 32 minutes. A minute before the end of his speech, the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) asked him to say something about a policy. The hon. Gentleman probably remembers the response that he received as well as I do. The hon. Member for Caerphilly said:

"I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to invite me to attack my own party. I can assure him that I have enough friends without having to launch an attack on my colleagues."—[*Official Report*, 3 March 1994; Vol. 238, c. 1111.]

That was the hon. Gentleman's sole contribution to policy last year, and he almost managed to put his consistent duck on the record this year.

This has been a traditional debate in other ways as well. We have had rant, lament and a statesmanlike—elder statesmanlike—contribution from my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy. We also heard a maiden speech from the hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Touhig), who is now returning to his place.

I have a fellow feeling with the hon. Member for Islwyn. I have the closest of connections with Crosskeys in his constituency and with other parts of the western valley. I readily appreciate what he said about his constituents wanting the best for their children and their grandchildren, especially when he said that they want jobs and not benefits. Those are the people of Islwyn whom I know as well as he.

Having listened to the hon. Gentleman, I felt that in him we had a most appropriate hon. Member to follow in his predecessor's footsteps. I reject the spurious calculations of the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), which somehow suggested that the hon. Member for Islwyn had not been elected. I am sure that the hon. Member for Newport, West does want to pursue that.

The hon. Member for Islwyn devoted his speech to health. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Sweeney) also made significant reference to health, but he dwelt on the facts such as the considerable increase in the number of patients being treated by the national health service in Wales. There is not only a dramatic increase in the number of patients treated, but a most marked increase in day surgery. The figures do not convey the lesser trauma involved in the treatment of patients under day surgery and how they are able to return home to their families far more quickly.

Good progress is being made on introducing the new total waiting times patient charter guarantee in April. Health authorities and GP fundholders are reporting shorter waiting lists and waiting times. The reduction in out-patient waiting lists in the last three months of 1994—more than 6 per cent.—was especially striking. The latest forecasts of health authorities and GP fundholders show that very few out-patients will wait longer than a year and virtually no in-patients or day cases will wait longer than 18 months by the beginning of April. I expect further progress early in 1995-96—the second year of the three-year waiting time initiative.

Mr. Rowlands: Time and again our constituents see a consultant and are told that they cannot be seen for another six months, yet when they pay the same consultant some money they are treated within a day or two. Does the Minister find that as offensive as we do?

Mr. Jones: As the hon. Gentleman knows, he and I have met to discuss such problems and I fully share his

apprehensions of any improper queue jumping through the use of national health service facilities. Like the hon. Gentleman, I hope that any such case can be tracked down and tackled properly.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) mentioned cardiac treatment in Morriston. Hon. Members will know that there has been considerable interest in our development programme for specialist cardiac treatment, which is centred around the University hospital of Wales. I am delighted to announce that, following detailed evaluation, a new cardiac unit is to be developed by Morriston hospital NHS trust. That has been a difficult decision because we had received a number of innovative proposals. We are most grateful to all those who contributed. The Morriston team's proposal will provide top quality as well as offering the best value for money. It will be fully funded by the Welsh Office. We are convinced that the right option for the people of Wales has been chosen.

The Government attach the highest priority to the completion of the investment programme, which is making a significant contribution to the fight against cardiovascular disease. I expect everyone involved to co-operate in ensuring that the centre is completed as soon as possible.

Mr. Donald Anderson: I thank the Minister for that announcement. There will be great delight in west Glamorgan that the flirtation with the private sector has been overruled and that there has been a vote of confidence in the in-house bid.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his thanks. I think that he understands that a decision has been made on the best application. I believe that the Government and Opposition Members, particularly the hon. Members for Islwyn and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) are united in wanting to see the NHS in Wales continuing to go forward, continuing to expand and continuing to improve.

The hon. Member for Swansea, East also mentioned drug abuse and prevention. In England, a Green Paper on drug abuse has just been published. It was said that Wales and Northern Ireland would produce their own strategies. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we are drafting and aim to produce a consultation document very soon. That is in addition to my right hon. Friend's announcement on 19 October that he would establish a Welsh drug and alcohol unit which will be responsible for implementing the strategy which is now being developed.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery referred to the funding and quality of community care. My right hon. Friend was able to tell him about the extra sums that have already been provided. We intend to go further than that: in 1996-97, we will add a further £25 million and in 1997-98 we will add an additional £19 million on top of that. The annual figure will then be an additional sum of almost £170 million.

The closest attention is being paid to how that money is being used, not least by the carers who can see the situation at the sharp end. Very possibly the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery went to meet the carers, as I did, at their function in the House last week. I can understand their calls for the money to be ring-fenced in Wales as it is in England.

However, that money is not the full extent of the financial support that we provide. The Welsh Office also has grant schemes which amount to £4.5 million in the current year for projects for older people and those with disabilities. In addition, total funding for the mental illness strategy is £5.5 million this year. That includes £1.1 million to local authorities across Wales.

Funding in that regard is used by local authorities to offer practical support for individuals with mental health problems and it includes the enhancement of day care services and facilities, night time cover, supported accommodation and social worker posts for resettlement teams. In addition, there is our much respected mental handicap strategy the total funding for which this year is almost £56 million, almost £49 million of which goes to local authorities across Wales. That encourages the development of new patterns of local community-based care with increased choice for better quality and more independent lives for individuals.

With regard to the importance of resettlement, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are at one with the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery in the belief that care should be right for each individual. We will need a range of forms of care, involving some forms which have already been developed and some that we will probably need to develop further. I had an opportunity to visit the charity RESCARE in Manchester last year when I had responsibility for such matters. I saw the imaginative way in which it was developing slightly larger homes than we are at present used to. We must try to do all that we can to ensure that each individual has the right care.

The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) asked what the Government have done for Llanelli. I must point out that, under the strategic development scheme this year, we are providing no less than £1.25 million for servicing new industrial land, commercial renewal grants, pedestrianisation and improvements to the centre to complement the new retail development. There is also the valleys private finance initiative. The local authority identified the Llanelli development as the key economic development opportunity and we are marketing it aggressively together with the Welsh Development Agency and the local authority.

The hon. Members for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith) and for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), in interventions, expressed readily understandable feelings about excessive unemployment in the valleys. However, I totally reject the point made by the hon. Member for Rhondda when he suggested that spite had motivated the Government's approach towards the coal industry.

We all have to face up to the realities of life, but no Government seek to create unemployment in coal or any other industry and certainly not for ridiculous motives such as spite. That would be as incorrect and as futile as to suggest that Lord Callaghan sought for similar reasons to close down Eastmoor steel works in Cardiff or that the former right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, Michael Foot, closed down the Ebbw Vale steel works. It would

[Mr. Jones]

be just as ridiculous for the hon. Member for Rhondda to suggest that Michael Foot was acting as someone's agent in that regard—

Mr. Touhig: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jones: Well, I fear that I am running out of time. However, as the hon. Gentleman made his maiden speech today, I will give way to him.

Mr. Touhig: I believe that the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) made remarks about getting his own back on Wales by closing the pits and changing all the constituencies. I wrote to him during the Islwyn by-election, but I have yet to receive a reply.

Mr. Jones: Knowing my hon. Friend, he will not be shy about giving the hon. Gentleman a reply. I will leave him to do that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan stressed the need for good road links. I readily appreciate his comment about South Glamorgan council and a proper updated link to Cardiff airport. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today updated his plans for future improvements to the trunk road network. Fifteen schemes totalling £267 million are programmed to start before April 1998, improving nearly 47 miles of road. The plans take forward the strategy set out in "Roads in Wales: 1994 Review".

Resources will continue to be focused on the major strategic routes: the A55, the M4, and the A465. We attach great priority to the Heads of the Valley road, and we have consulted on route options for dualling between Abergavenny and Hirwaun. It is intended to publish a preferred route by midsummer. Plans for scheme starts next year include the A40 Whitland bypass, the M4 Magor-Coldra widening, the A550 Deeside park interchange, the A40 Fishguard western bypass, and the A470 Lledr valley stage 1.

We continue to attach high priority to ensuring that roads in sensitive areas are managed in such a way as to protect the beautiful environment of Wales. We will shortly commission a study of the A5 on the mainland to help to determine how best to ensure that it does not develop in ways that encourage through traffic. We wish to see a logical and cohesive strategy developed for the future management of that section of trunk road that takes full account of the beauty of Snowdonia and the need to preserve it for future generations.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Dafis) will be interested in the matter of St. Dogmaels, which I visited with him during the summer recess. I can now announce that supplementary credit approval of up to £500,000 will be issued to assist Preseli Pembrokeshire district council in meeting additional costs that it has sustained relating to its response to the St. Dogmaels landslide and the investigations that it has commissioned into its mechanism and possible corrective measures. That is in addition to assistance towards the cost of proposed surface drainage works eligible for grant aid under the Land Drainage Act 1991, which are due to be undertaken over the next two years. I am writing to the local authority to provide it with full details of that assistance.

We have inevitably heard many references to the vexed question of devolution. Perhaps it should more properly be referred to as centralisation; taking powers from local authorities in Wales and giving them to a Welsh Assembly—the ultimate quango. *[Interruption.]* Of course, Opposition Members may crow at the results of the BBC Wales-*Western Mail* opinion survey, which was published yesterday. The poll purports to show 47 per cent. of those surveyed in favour of some form of assembly for Wales. Opposition Members will say that that is a huge swing in favour of an assembly.

We all know that polls taken in isolation produce unreliable results. We must remember that last year's opinion poll involved a sample of 1,500. This year's poll involved a sample of 521. Thirty-five per cent. were highlighted as wanting an assembly that was independent of Westminster. That means 86 people—that is all. How representative is that?

Have Opposition Members forgotten the real test of opinion, when 1.2 million people voted on 1 March 1979? The results were clear then. It was not a case of 86 people out of a total of 521. True, almost 250,000 people voted in favour of an assembly, but almost 1 million decisively rejected it. That is a far more reliable test of public opinion.

Mr. Flynn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jones: No, I cannot give way.

At least we have a policy from Opposition. They say that, some time, they will define what sort of assembly they will put forward. It is their only positive contribution. It is a job-creating policy, is it not? At least it is meant to be a job-creating policy for the old dinosaurs of the Labour party whom they mean to accommodate in a Welsh Assembly. That will be the only job-creating aspect of it.

Mr. Morgan: Will the Minister give his views of the Ulster framework document proposals for a devolved assembly to Northern Ireland?

Mr. Jones: Not in the time available.

The proposed Welsh Assembly will be a home for the old dinosaurs of the Labour party—rewards for their records of non-achievement. They are just like the Simpsons on Channel 4—underachievers, and proud of it. Those who failed to get into this place or into the European Assembly would be sent to it.

Mr. Win Griffiths: The ultimate quango.

Mr. Jones: Yes, it is the ultimate quango. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Conwy said, we would be back to the bad old days—every quango stuffed with Labour placemen. Do we not recollect that the 30-odd members of the Trades Union Congress shared 140 quangos between them—about four per head? That is not bad going, but that is the way things were.

The assembly is the Labour party's latest answer, and it is the only job creation proposal that the Labour party has, unless we want to take in the long list of crazy proposals that my right hon. Friend read out in his speech. We noticed that again there was no answer from the hon. Member for Caerphilly to the question whether he would have all those regional development banks, Faraday centres, defence diversification agencies, general teaching

councils and all the rest of the loony list that is being dragged out. It is all job creation for the boys—or rather, for the boyos.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

DEREGULATION

Ordered,

That Mr. Peter Atkinson, Mr. Roger Berry, Mr. Michael Brown, Judith Church, Mr. Anthony Coombs, Mr. David Evans, Mr. Barry Field, Mr. Neil Gerrard, Mr. John Gunnell, Mr. Alan Keen, Mr. Patrick Nicholls, Mr. Peter L. Pike, Mr. Gordon Prentice, Mr. Graham Riddick, Mr. William Ross, Mr. Allan Stewart, Mr. John Sykes and Dr Ian Twinn be members of the Deregulation Committee.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Sir David Mitchell be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Mr. Tim Smith be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That Mr. Gordon McMaster be discharged from the Select Committee on Procedure and Mr. Peter L. Pike be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR ADMINISTRATION

Ordered,

That Mr. Mike Watson be discharged from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Mr. Michael Connarty be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

Rugby Cement Works

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wells.]*

10 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): The subject of the debate is of great importance to my constituents, and I know that it is also important to my hon. Friends the Members for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) and for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), both of whom have taken a keen interest in it on behalf of their constituents. The subject is also of concern to the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), whom I see here tonight.

The consequences of burning secondary liquid fuels, and indeed of burning conventional fuels, need to be considered calmly and rationally. It is useless to consider them in an hysterical manner; the last thing that one wants to do over such an issue is to cause panic in an area.

Rugby Cement works is an efficient industrial plant long established in the village of Barrington in my constituency. When it was first built in the late 1920s, it was regarded as manna from heaven by the unemployed and by the impoverished farms in the region. Indeed, many of the families of those who were first employed there and given relief are still employed there now. The firm therefore provides valuable employment, and also produces a vital material for housing and for the construction industry in general.

Rugby Cement is environmentally conscious, and has planted many trees in the area. It has always been open with the community, the people who live in the neighbourhood. Happily, I can say that, in its 70 years in Cambridgeshire, there has been no evidence to link its activities in any way with ill health in the local communities.

About four years ago, during the recession, when conditions were extremely competitive, Rugby Cement became aware of the potential use of secondary liquid fuels as substitutes for coal and petroleum coke—solid fuels that have historically been used in the process. The company studied that use in the places where it was commonly accepted practice—Germany, France, the United States, Belgium and Scandinavia; it sought the advice of risk assessors, consultants, the Health and Safety Executive, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, the National Rivers Authority and the fire brigades; and it came to the conclusion that secondary liquid fuels—SLFs, as they are known—could safely be burnt in its cement kilns.

Various trials took place, starting in 1993. The company submitted the results to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, which considered them and said that the activity was safe within the limits set. Nevertheless, the issue remains one of considerable concern to the people in the villages in the area concerned. Those include Barrington itself, Harston, Haslingfield, Harlton, Hauxston and Trumpington.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, although we have three licensed hazardous waste incinerators in the UK, the cement kilns can undercut them, since the emission limit for the cement

[Mrs. Anne Campbell]

industry is considerably less stringent? Does he further agree that the cement industry is becoming the UK's hazardous waste disposal industry?

Sir Anthony Grant: I do not agree with the hon. Lady's second point, but I shall be raising the other matter to which she referred later in my speech. I understand the hon. Lady's concern, because the prevailing winds from Barrington go up towards Cambridge. I hope that Cambridge city will be immune because I happen to live there, and the last thing I want is to be affected.

The parish council of Barrington—the site of the cement works—has gone into the matter with care, and engaged experts. They came to some conclusions, to which I shall refer. They said that the level of dioxin measured in the trials was comfortably below the European limit, and that heavy metals emissions were within Euro-limits also. The matter has also been considered by Cambridgeshire county council and, in particular, by South Cambridgeshire district council, which is more directly involved.

South Cambridgeshire held a debate on the subject, and said that it was going to hold a watching brief

"to ensure that pollution from SLF firing should not exceed that permitted during the burning of traditional fuels at Rugby Cement, Barrington".

The council further expressed the view that

"Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution should be made aware of the Council's concern . . . and of the further particular concern expressed by Committee at the possible increase in heavy metals and dioxins in emissions".

Everyone in the area is taking the matter seriously.

According to the Minister of State—with whom I have corresponded for the past year—in a letter sent to me on 8 February, the results of the test

"indicated that, compared with conventional fuel burning, the use of SLF resulted in a decrease in the emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, particulate matter"—

I call that dust in my simple language—

"and HCl and no significant difference between stack emissions of dioxin and heavy metals. Emissions of dioxin and heavy metals were within the limits set for incineration plants".

Further trials are taking place, but Rugby Cement has applied to Her Majesty's inspectorate to vary the cement process authorised and to allow the permanent use of SLF up to 25 per cent. of calorific value. There is a consultation period of 42 days, in which people can make their views felt and express their objections.

The trouble with the subject is that there is a mass of technical detail which can be resolved only by experts. I am not an expert. I do not believe—with great respect—that the Minister is an expert, and I do not think that you are an expert, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Nevertheless, anxieties do exist in my constituency and in those of my hon. Friends who are also deeply concerned about the matter.

The main anxieties revolve around health. What is the effect of the emissions on health, and children's health in particular? Are there any long-term effects? I can understand that my hon. Friend the Minister may wish to leave the matter with the Department of Health. If he says that this is a matter on which he would wish to take advice from the Secretary of State for Health or a Minister from the Department, I will completely understand. I hope, however, that the point will be taken on board.

I know enough about the matter to know that dioxins and heavy metals are very nasty things indeed. They are linked with cancer. Dioxin also results from smoking, and is found in the transport and steel industries, to name but a few, so it is not something that one can stop entirely without closing down some activities in our society.

The question that I must put to the Minister is, what are the safe levels? We are told that all the activities are within the safety limits, but can he assure us that that is correct? Secondly, are the tests that are being considered by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution adequate, or should they be more stringent? Are the inspectors properly qualified and have they the resources to deal with the tests? Will atmospheric tests be conducted in the various areas—there is concern about that? Most important of all, will monitoring of the atmosphere continue?

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my hon Friend accept that the public have genuine fears, and have a right to know that what comes from the stacks is environmentally safe? Does he also accept that there is an onus on cement firms to ensure that the plumes coming from the stacks do not ground, and an onus on Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution to ensure that that does not happen?

Sir Anthony Grant: Yes, I agree with all that, and I think that Rugby Cement would agree, and would be anxious to comply with that obligation.

Has the inspectorate sufficient qualified staff? It has been suggested in Bedford—the area in which it carries out the tests—that that is not so. Will the Minister check, and clarify the position? If the inspectorate does not have the necessary resources, as some of the inspectors in Bedford seem to imply, will he try to get them, even if he has to bully the Treasury about it? If he is satisfied that the inspectors have the resources, will he tell them to get on with the job or, if they cannot do it, get them out and get in someone who can do it properly?

The organisation Friends of the Earth, with which hon Members will be familiar, has also expressed concern to me. It has gone into the matter with a great deal of care and states:

"there is totally inadequate evidence to prove that emissions from cement kilns burning hazardous waste in the short or the long term will not have a deleterious impact on the health of local residents".

Equally, one could argue that there is totally inadequate evidence to prove that the emissions will have a deleterious impact on health in the long term, so that argument is as broad as it is long.

Friends of the Earth also complained that

"the frequency and sufficiency of monitoring by both the companies and HMIP is open to doubt."

Perhaps the Minister can reassure us about that. It also points out:

"the classification of such hazardous waste as 'fuel' brings the whole regulatory system into disrepute."

That is a very stern criticism, but it leads me to a matter that has been referred to me by another source. Companies such as Cleanaway Ltd., which is involved in waste disposal, have pointed out their concerns. Such companies are directly in conflict commercially with the cement industry and complain of unfair contrasts in the regulations because waste is treated differently from fuel. They also say that there is not a level playing field.

Rugby Cement says that Her Majesty's inspectorate applies the same stringent emission limits to cement works, regardless of the classification. Who is right? There is nothing wrong with commercial competition—I am entirely in favour of it—but human health and safety must come first, as I am sure the Minister will agree.

To sum up, one of my constituents, who is a science graduate, wrote to me saying that he had no objection to the activity, provided that there was stringent and exact testing, and long-term monitoring. It is important not to have just one test, and then go away and not monitor the problem. Will my hon. Friend the Minister give assurances on that? I have raised many technical questions, so I will understand if he says that he will have to write to me. But this is a continuing concern, and if he can set the anxieties of my constituents at rest, I shall be very grateful.

I am happy for my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton to make his point if he wishes.

10.15 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) for allowing me to be tail-end Charlie in a debate that he has initiated, and I congratulate him on the manner in which he has done it.

I wish to raise a simple point of principle. If our constituents have fears, they must be addressed. What my hon. Friend is seeing in his constituency at Barrington is what my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) and I both saw at Castle Cement in our constituencies about six months ago. If the burning of liquid fuels is safer for our constituents, it would be an act of ultimate political irresponsibility to join a bandwagon of demonstration that denied them that benefit. If, however, it is more harmful, it is absolutely right that our constituents' concerns be properly addressed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley and I persuaded HMIP to apply more stringent rules to how it permanently monitors the problem. I simply implore my hon. Friend the Minister to reconfirm that there will be continuous monitoring; that the information will be made public; that the information is scientifically valid; that the fears of our constituents can be allayed; and that our thanks can be passed to the Minister for the Environment and Countryside for the way in which so far he has handled that topic.

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Sir Paul Beresford): I congratulate all those who have participated in this debate. They have taken a sensible, careful and considered attitude towards the problem, rather than allowing themselves to succumb to alarmist points. I hope that I can provide some reassurance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) has provided me with an opportunity to underline that we have a continuing determination to protect the environment in this country and to explain how we are dealing with the issues that he and others have raised.

My hon. Friend will recall that the Environmental Protection Act 1990 singles out complex industrial processes with significant pollution potential by placing them under a particularly rigorous regime known as integrated pollution control. Part I of the Act requires that such processes, which include cement works, are regulated by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

When regulating these industries, HMIP's priorities are first to prevent and then to minimise and render harmless any releases from the process. The operator must use the best available techniques that do not entail excessive cost. The Act also requires that the inspectorate considers harm to the environment as a whole and has regard to the best practical environmental option when judging the techniques to be used.

The whole regulatory process is open to public scrutiny. Copies of the application, any authorisation or returns required by the authorisation and, where appropriate, notice of any formal enforcement action taken by HMIP are placed on public registers.

It is important to recognise where the responsibilities lie in delivering environmental protection. The onus is on the operator. It is up to the operator to conceive, design, build, and operate his cement plant in such a way as to meet the requirements of the law.

As my hon. Friend is probably aware, cement manufacture is an energy-intensive process in which energy costs represent approximately 65 to 75 per cent. of variable costs. The process uses a kiln heated to temperatures of over 1,400 deg C by burning a fuel, which, as he mentioned, is normally coal or petroleum coke.

The cement-making process incorporates several features that may make it suitable for burning substitute fuels. For example, it is a continuous process, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and has high thermal stability for destroying organic materials; it provides a high-temperature environment in which the materials are heated for a long time in the burning zone; and raw materials used for the process are alkaline, and therefore tend to react with any acid gases emitted.

Secondary liquid fuels are residues and various side streams from the recycling of industrial solvents. They are flammable, and, while containing some pollutants that require control, make excellent fuels.

Large companies commonly use the solvent residues as fuels in their own boilers and furnaces. Smaller companies sell their used solvents to companies that specialise in solvent recovery. The specialist companies separate out the various components of waste solvents for recycling and then dispose of the residues to landfill or to high-temperature incineration. There are disadvantages to the disposal of those residues in landfill, while high-temperature incineration of the residues, on the other hand, effectively destroys the solvent residues.

As was mentioned, companies in other European countries and the United States that distil solvents have been converting the residues into fuel for other processes—predominantly cement kilns. Recently, that practice has been adopted in this country. Companies now specialise in purchasing solvent residues and blending them into tightly specified fuels required by the cement industry. There are several substitute fuels on the market with different trade names. Although the actual composition may vary to some extent, the generic nature of the material remains the same.

[Sir Paul Beresford]

Because of the need to be sure about the possible consequences of burning solvent residues in cement kilns—which is the main issue in the debate—HMIP has decided that it will not authorise the use of those fuels, except for the purpose of carrying out trials. The trials are to be for a limited period, the fuels used are to be tightly specified and emissions from the plant are to be monitored during the period of the trials. Once the trials have ended, the cement company may no longer use the fuel until the results of the trials have been evaluated.

Government policy on the burning of substitute fuels in cement and lime kilns was detailed in the statement by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside on 23 June 1994. He made the following things clear. There will be no more such trials than are necessary to allow HMIP to determine best available techniques not entailing excessive costs. The operator must provide satisfactory data on baseline operations before trials commence, which must include emission data and kiln operating data. All trials must be to an agreed schedule. If any trial is adversely affecting the environment, it must stop. HMIP must agree the specification for substitute fuel in advance. The operator must provide continuous monitors for particulates, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and oxygen.

I can assure the House that that is still the case, and HMIP will not authorise the permanent use of substitute fuels until it has considered, and is satisfied by, the outcome of trials.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does the Minister agree, and will he tell the House, that the standard set for cement kilns is considerably less stringent than that for hazardous waste incinerators?

Sir Paul Beresford: I was coming to that, but the hon. Lady should recognise that the fuel that we are discussing, which is used as a fuel in cement kilns, is also used as a fuel in the incinerated waste incinerators. What is put into the waste incinerators is different from that which is put into the kilns. HMIP is anxious to ensure, and is ensuring, that what comes out as fumes is safe.

Mrs. Campbell: Surely, if a certain level of particulates, nitrogen oxide and sulphur dioxide is considered to be safe for the hazardous waste incinerators, we should be applying the same stringent levels to the cement kilns.

Sir Paul Beresford: They are in effect, as I understand it, applied. The hon. Lady appears to be missing the point: that a different exhaust results from what one puts in in the first place.

HMIP has imposed strict requirements on operators undertaking trials with substitute fuels. Apart from complying with those policy objectives, the operator must provide a wide range of information, including results of monitoring for dioxins and heavy metals and on-going progress reports, and install control systems to specified standards.

I understand that there is no sign of any additional harm to the environment from the burning of secondary fuels at Barrington or anywhere else where those trials have been taking place. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food recently undertook the monitoring of milk in the area around the cement works at Clitheroe, which has the longest history of burning substitute fuels, and found no sign of any increase in dioxins or heavy metals.

The other interesting fact of which I was informed is that more than 90 per cent. of the dioxins to which we are exposed come from food, and that living near a cement kiln, regardless of the fuel, will not alter that picture.

Of course, there are commercial, as well as environmental issues which might explain some of views that we have heard tonight. The UK has a significant specialised incineration industry, which historically has used rather similar materials as fuel. It has been argued that permanent burning of substitute fuels will commercially damage the United Kingdom's specialised incineration capacity.

On balance, it is thought that the short-term impact would be to impose higher costs on the merchant hazardous waste disposal industry. It is likely that the industry would have to purchase some additional support fuel rather than receive it as waste. That may raise prices for the disposal of the other wastes treated by that route, and it would affect the competitiveness of the disposal method. In the longer term, impacts may be less significant.

I now return to the burning of secondary liquid fuel at Rugby Cement, Barrington. The first phase of trials at Barrington took place from 1 September 1994 to 16 December 1994, when the works reverted to burning 100 per cent. conventional fuels. Rugby Cement submitted a request for a further phase of trials to HMIP on 21 December 1994. The request accompanied monitoring data on the trials to that date and a comparison of the environmental impact of emissions when burning 100 per cent. coal and petroleum coke and 25 per cent. secondary liquid fuel.

HMIP asked the operator to supply further information to justify the proposal for a further phase which related in particular to raw material and fuel analyses and to dioxin releases and the use of test data in the company's evaluation of the effects on the environment, as shown by the first phase of the trials. HMIP received that additional information on 18 January 1995 and evaluated it in conjunction with the initial submission.

HMIP noted that the results submitted indicated that, compared with conventional fuel burning, the use of secondary liquid fuel resulted in a decrease in the releases of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, particulate matter and hydrogen chloride. There was no significant difference between stack releases of dioxins and heavy metals, which were well within the limits set for incineration plants.

Based on that, the first phase of the trial has shown that there are no adverse environmental effects associated with the use of secondary liquid fuel and, as mentioned by the tail-end Charlie—as my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) called himself—there may even be the potential for environmental gains.

HMIP gave permission on 20 January 1995 for a further phase of trials to take place in four stages. Further conditions have been imposed—that the specification of secondary liquid fuel may be to even tighter limits than previously, that the full results of monitoring the first stage will be available and evaluated prior to progressing

to the second stage, and that the trials will be limited to four months, excluding evaluation time. The second phase of the trials commenced on 23 January 1995.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West referred to resources, and I raised that matter specifically with the head of HMIP, indicating the source of the concerns. To put it bluntly, he was astonished, and said that there were no resource difficulties.

Rugby Cement has now applied to HMIP for a variation to its cement process authorisation to allow the permanent use of secondary liquid fuels at up to 25 per cent. substitution. The application and the supporting documents have been placed on the public registers, and the operator is required to advertise in the local press within 42 days of the application being lodged. Following that advertisement, HMIP will allow 42 days for public and statutory consultation.

The overall period available for the determination of the application is four months. In determining the application, HMIP will consider whether the financial benefits to Rugby from the use of secondary liquid fuel justify further expenditure by the works to abate emissions from the process.

In all this, HMIP will ensure that the secondary liquid fuel will be used only in a way which does not jeopardise human health or the environment. In theory, a cement kiln offers ideal conditions for the destruction of these materials: temperatures are higher and residence times longer than in high-temperature incinerators—which may also answer the point about plume grounding. The presence of the clinker within the kiln also adds to its potential to destroy wastes. In any event, HMIP will not allow the process to continue if the results are not as good as those produced by incinerators.

In conclusion, HMIP has placed strict conditions on the trial use of substitute fuels in cement kilns and is monitoring developments closely. I can assure hon. Members that HMIP will not allow the permanent use of the fuels in cement kilns unless it is totally convinced that the environment, and therefore people's health, is fully protected.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 3 March 1995

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Petition

Animal Cruelty

9.34 am

Mr. Hugh Bayley (York): On the day when I hope that the House will put the interests of wild mammals in front of those of their tormentors, I rise on behalf of 23,000 people to remind the House of an horrific act of cruelty to a wild mammal in Yorkshire. The petition reads as follows:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble petition of Mrs. Pat Murgatroyd of the Hedgehog haven, 43 Foxwood lane, Acomb, Yorkshire sheweth that on 14 July 1992 a petition was presented to Parliament containing nearly 23,000 signatures drawing attention to four 15 and 16-year-old boys accused of causing unnecessary suffering to a hedgehog by dropping rocks on it, kicking and beating it with a fence post and thereby breaking almost every bone in its body, who walked free from a juvenile court in Pocklington, Humberside in April 1992 because the Protection of Animals Act 1911 covers only cruelty to captive creatures, and it was judged that this hedgehog had not been captive.

Wherefore your petitioner prays that your Honourable House brings about an Act of Parliament which will give hedgehogs and other wild animals legal protection against deliberate acts of cruelty.

And your petitioner, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

That is signed by my constituent, Mrs. Pat Murgatroyd.

To lie upon the Table.

Rutland

9.36 am

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): I am duty bound to present a petition to the House which has been signed by more than 1,500 of my constituents who live in the county of Rutland. I should be grateful, under the procedures of the House, if it could be read by the Clerk at the Table.

The Clerk of the House *read the petition, which was as follows:*

To the House of Commons.

The petition of residents, providers and receivers of services in Rutland declares that while welcoming the proposed return of Rutland's historic County status, they are dismayed at the increased costs and reduced services which would result from the formation of a so-called unitary authority for Rutland. It is their firm belief that the most efficient and cost-effective way to deliver services is as now, and there should be no other changes to the existing structure of local government.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons rejects the recommendations of the Local Government Commission that Rutland become a unitary authority.

And the petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Animal Cruelty

9.38 am

Mr. Colin Pickthall (Lancashire, West): I beg leave to present a petition collected by Renarta Jackson, a student at Greenbank high school among 300 of her fellow students at All Hallow high school, Range high school, Stanley high school and Meols Cop high school and Christ the King school in Southport. The petition sheweth:

We believe that the cruel and barbaric sport of hare coursing has no place in our civilised society.

Wherefore your petitioner prays that your Honourable House do legislate to stop the cruel sport of hare coursing, and as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

9.39 am

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): I have the honour of presenting to Parliament a petition from the RSPCA's 133 branches, and from 47 branches of the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which asks the House that wild mammals should be given the same protection in law as domestic and captive animals have had since 1912.

These petitioners are praying in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), who has secured the Second Reading of the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill. They wish his measure speedy passage.

To lie upon the Table.

BILL PRESENTED

COMMONWEALTH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Mr. Secretary Hurd, supported by Sir George Young, Mr. Richard Needham and Mr. Tony Baldry presented a Bill to alter the limits under sections 9A and 10 of the Commonwealth Development Corporation Act 1978; to make provision in relation to interest on advances to the Commonwealth Development Corporation; and to make provision in relation to the remuneration, pensions and compensation of members of the Corporation: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday next, and to be printed. [Bill 66.]

Orders of the Day

Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wish to raise a matter, of which I have given you and, indeed, the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), notice.

I am concerned that the rise of new lobbying practices now requires the House urgently to reconsider the rules that govern the improper influence of hon. Members of the House. In the past fortnight, hon. Members have received hundreds of computer-printed cards and there has appeared in the press nearly £1 million-worth of full-page newspaper advertising, mentioning the name of an hon. Member and his Bill. So extensive now has become the deployment of lobbying resources by interest groups, that it is now clear that whoever wins a private Member's ballot risks being likely to be bid for in a sort of auction by groups that can offer political dividends as the reward.

I seek your guidance, Madam Speaker, on whether that practice can be referred to the appropriate Committees of the House, to the Nolan committee or to both.

Madam Speaker: As the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) and the House will know, the Speaker of the House has no authority whatever about publicity that takes place outside, and anyone is free to write to hon. Members to put a particular point of view to them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Just a moment.

The hon. Gentleman must determine for himself whether the terms of reference of the Nolan Committee warrant a submission, and he is perfectly free as a Member of the House, if the procedures are there, to refer the matter to a particular committee. It is for individual Members to determine how they should proceed on that matter.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: There is no further point of order on that. We are going to proceed with the Bill. The House has been waiting, many hon. Members are here, we are now going to proceed with it.

9.41 am

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am most proud to stand here this morning to present my Bill. I should like first to thank a few people. Mention was made of the public. I have had 5,000 personal letters on the issue, and the latest estimate from the Post Office is that half a million postcards and letters have been sent to Members of Parliament, illustrating just how far up the political agenda the issue of animal welfare and needless cruelty is.

I congratulate the public on their insight and vigilance. I thank the League Against Cruel Sports and the RSPCA, which have been most helpful and have been at the forefront of campaigning on the issue. I thank my sponsors, and will single out several Conservative Members, who include the hon. Members for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), for Brighton, Kemptown (Sir A. Bowden) and for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale). This is an issue of principle and individual conscience, and I thank them most sincerely for their support.

I see that the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) is in his place. He is chairman of the British Field Sports Society, and is diametrically opposed to what I am doing this morning, but we have had the utmost respect for each other over the past few weeks; I hope that that will be maintained, so that we have an informed and civilised debate this morning.

The purpose of my Bill is to remove the illogical and ridiculous anomaly in law that makes it a criminal offence to inflict cruelty on a domestic mammal, but which, generally speaking, permits cruelty to be inflicted on wild mammals without penalty. For example, under the Protection of Animals Act 1911, and 1912 in Scotland, it is an offence to kick or beat, or set a snare, or to set a pack of dogs, on a cat, dog or any other domestic animal, but it is not an offence to inflict such pain and suffering on a fox, hare or most other wild mammals.

The RSPCA has been involved in investigating cases of hedgehogs being kicked, beaten, burnt and impaled on sticks, and of live fox cubs being set alight with petrol. Records exist of foxes and squirrels being nailed alive to trees, and the League Against Cruel Sports even has photographic evidence of a live fox being hanged by its ears. It may be argued that such cases are rare, but the fact remains that it is unacceptable that we have no law to penalise such sadistic acts.

Clause 1 seeks to deal with such cases by making it an offence if any person

"cruelly kicks, beats or tortures any wild mammal."

Those are all specific offences under the Protection of Animals Act 1911, which not only could be, but, as I have explained, have been, committed with impunity against wild mammals.

Hon. Members will recall that, three years ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) introduced a similar Bill—I congratulate him on his efforts at that time—but it was narrowly defeated on Second Reading. My Bill is similar, except that clause 1 of my hon. Friend's Bill would have made it an offence cruelly to ill-treat or intentionally inflict unnecessary suffering on any wild mammal.

During consultation on the wording of the Bill, it became clear that there were fears in the farming community that the creation of an offence of cruel ill-treatment might lead to frivolous attempts to prosecute farmers for carrying out normal pest-control operations.

It was thought that using shotguns or ferrets to control rabbits, or commonly used rodenticides to control rats of mice, might be considered by some animal rights groups to constitute cruel ill-treatment, and that such groups might be prepared to drag farmers

before the courts to make a point. Whether such fears are justified is not important: I have no wish to interfere with reasonable and widely acceptable methods of pest control. That is why clause 1 is closely drawn, to target deliberate and totally unnecessary acts of brutality.

It is significant that I have not received any representations objecting to clause 1.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the care that he has taken over clause 1, and the constructive way in which he has described it. Does he not recognise that there is such widespread support for that clause that he would get his Bill through if he confined it to that clause, and perhaps to a revised version of clause 3? If he persists in wanting to make established country sports illegal, he will meet a great deal more opposition.

Mr. McFall: I thank the right hon. Member for his support for clause 1, but as the RSPCA stated—it has called this a Bill of principle—there is a continuum of concern over animal welfare. Some people might not see any qualitative difference between kicking a hedgehog about and tearing a fox limb from limb. That is the issue at stake here.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. McFall: Yes, of course.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It is Liberal party policy, we might remind the Liberal party spokesman, to support my hon. Friend's Bill.

Mr. McFall: It looks as though the right hon. Gentleman is on his own on this issue.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way so early in his speech. I am at one with the point made by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), but will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that unspeakable things are also done by a small minority of hooligans at football matches, which we all want to see stopped, but that that does not justify the banning of football? That is the analogy that I draw with his intention, in clause 2, to ban field sports, when we all support what he proposes in clause 1.

Mr. McFall: I agree entirely with that. It is an issue of observing the law and of supporting law and order. We are behind the party of law and order and have been trying to get it to implement decent policies on law and order for 15 years.

I have allowed three interventions on my speech already, and I am not very far through. I will be happy to take half a dozen or so, but there is a limit, because I know that a number of hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport): I appreciate that my hon. Friend has said that there is some cross-party support for his Bill, but will he note that, in my party of the country—in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset—there has been an opportunity for local politicians to make a decision about banning hunting on their land, land which the council owns. It is significant that Labour motions to ban hunting have not had support from Conservatives, but, significantly, they have also not had support from Liberal Democrats, who have been split down the middle on the issue?

Mr. McFall: I thank my hon. Friend. I know from feedback that 80 per cent. of county councils— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Janet Fookes): Order. I am determined to ensure that the debate does not get out of hand. The House knows my views on seated interventions. I wish to hear the hon. Gentleman's arguments and those of other Members who catch my eye.

Mr. McFall: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As I was saying, 80 per cent. of county councils in England have banned hunting, and that is a step in the right direction. Clause 2 of the Bill seeks to outlaw the wilful use of dogs to

"kill, injure, pursue or attack"

wild mammals. It would outlaw the so-called sports of fox, hare and deer hunting, which involve hounding animals to exhaustion and death. It would also ban the use of terriers to attack foxes underground, an activity which has no close season, and which results annually in the deaths of tens of thousands of foxes and an unknown number of terriers which die underground battling with foxes.

The removal of this gruesome sport would dispose of the training ground for badger diggers. Every person convicted in the courts for badger digging has also been an enthusiast of digging for foxes with terriers. It is not widely appreciated that fox hunts also use terriers to attack or flush out foxes which defeat the hounds by going to ground. There was published this week a comprehensive report on fox hunting by Oxford university's wildlife conservation unit.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. I have no doubt that he will quote all sorts of experts and research. In drafting his Bill, which will dramatically alter the status quo in the countryside, what countryside organisations did he consult to try to find the opposite arguments? For example, has he been out hunting to discover the truth?

Mr. McFall: I have not gone badger baiting, that is for sure. We have consulted, and the latest opinion polls on the subject show that, while 93 per cent. of the public wish their Members of Parliament to support my Bill, 60 per cent. of those living in rural areas also wish their Members of Parliament to support it. Therefore, there is a majority right through.

I was dealing with Oxford university's wildlife conservation study. That study was conducted by Dr. David MacDonald and Paul Johnson, with the full co-operation of the Masters of Foxhounds Association and the National Farmers Union. It shows that a third of the 15,000 to 20,000 foxes that are killed by hunting are dug out or bolted from their earths with the aid of terriers, despite the fact that fox hunts employ earth stoppers whose job it is to block every fox earth, badger sett and drain they can find to keep the fox above ground, so as to provide a long chase for the hounds and riders.

[Mr. McFall]

Dr. MacDonald reports that, in some hunts, 75 per cent. of the foxes that are killed are dug out by terriers. It may be a measure of the cruelty that is suffered by both foxes and terriers that, under the codes of practice of the Masters of Foxhounds Association, hunt supporters and members of the public are forbidden to watch the dig-outs.

The facts about foxes and fox hunting are clear. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, the damage done by foxes to British farming is insignificant, despite the fact that the UK has a high and steadily growing fox population. For instance, 27 million lambs are born annually and 18 per cent., or 4.8 million, of them die. Of that appalling mortality, abortion and still births account for 40 per cent. Exposure and starvation account for 30 per cent. while infectious diseases account for 20 per cent.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): The hon. Gentleman quotes a whole range of statistics. The point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown) is valid. What first-hand experience has the hon. Gentleman had of fox hunting, terrier work or hare coursing?

Mr. McFall: The hon. Gentleman has occasionally spoken about unemployment and prisons. I dare say he has never been in prison and has never been unemployed. Conservative Members have no inhibitions about speaking on anything that they do not know about.

Dr. Robert Spink (Castle Point): The hon. Gentleman was asked about statistics. Is he aware that the National Federation of Badger Groups found that 178 incidents of illegal sett blocking and 148 incidents of sett digging had damaged the badger population? The hon. Gentleman is coming to clause 3, which will make illegal the setting of free-running snares which mutilate and kill badgers. I represent a constituency with one of the largest badger populations in the country, and my constituents are delighted that I am here to support the Bill.

Mr. McFall: The hon. Gentleman is sufficiently eloquent to need no addition by me. I have taken about half a dozen interventions, and I am aware that other hon. Members wish to speak. I should now like to get on with my speech, so as to be fair to everyone.

I was speaking about the 27 million lambs that are born annually, of which 4.8 million die, and I gave the statistics on that appalling mortality rate. The Ministry of Agriculture states that misadventure and all forms of predation, including lambs killed by foxes, predatory birds and dogs, account for only 5 per cent. of the total mortality. Therefore, it is clear that foxes have nothing whatever to do with 98 per cent. of lamb deaths.

Dr. MacDonald's new report included the results of a questionnaire sent to sheep farmers. Only 53.8 per cent. of those farmers claimed to have ever lost a lamb to foxes, and even they admitted that such losses did not exceed 1 per cent. of their lambs.

Of course fox hunters might claim that hunting keeps fox numbers down, thereby keeping lamb losses low, but Dr. MacDonald's Oxford university report reveals that the 15,000 to 20,000 foxes that are killed by hunts represent less than 10 per cent. of the number of foxes killed by man. We also know from scientific research that fox populations can withstand an annual mortality rate of up to 65 per cent. without reduction. That is because the survivors quickly make up the losses by increased reproduction. All that happens when foxes are killed is that the places are immediately taken by other foxes looking for various territories.

I have received letters of support from sheep farmers. One wrote to me from mid-Devon stating that he had never known a fox to take a living lamb, despite having many foxes living or travelling near his land. His letter states:

"The claim that foxes prey upon newly-born lambs is yet another spurious claim posted by the hunting lobby. We as farmers, horse owners and country-lovers fully support your Bill and wish you every success."

One of the reasons for such a high fox population is that fox hunters commonly provide cosy artificial breeding dens for foxes, and even provide them with food in the form of dead chickens and sheep.

I congratulate *Today* and the *Mail on Sunday* on their work in this issue. On Wednesday, *Today* gave details of how unnaturally high fox populations are encouraged in the Thurlow hunt country, even on the estate of Edmund Vestey, the chairman of the Masters of Foxhounds Association and master of the Thurlow hunt. A total of 20 artificial fox shelters were found in the area, and there were four sites on which dead chickens were piled up to provide food for the foxes.

Dr. MacDonald's report proves that point. In reply to his questionnaire, hunt masters were unanimous in the opinion that, without fox hunting, there would be fewer foxes.

On the one hand, hunters claim that hunting is necessary to keep foxes down, while on the other hand they are doing their best to create large numbers of foxes. Perhaps the people who complain about fox damage should now take their complaint to the local hunt master.

Clause 2 would also outlaw hare coursing.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, who is arguing his case extremely well. May I ask one question before he moves on to hares? Does he agree that there will have to be some form of control of foxes, which are classified as vermin?

Mr. McFall: I have nothing against shooting, and that is not included in the Bill. I know that the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) loves to go to Scotland for his holidays, and he will know of the Deer (Scotland) Act 1959, which allows for the culling of deer.

Clause 2 deals with hare coursing, which the House voted overwhelmingly to ban 20 years ago. Had it not been for the hunting lobby in another place—which diverted that measure into the backwaters of a Select Committee to await a general election—we would not have to consider hare coursing today.

According to the Government's Joint Nature Conservation Committee, the hare population has fallen by 80 per cent. since the beginning of the century. Ways must be found to reverse that trend. Hare coursers

and hunters are known not only to kill thousands of hares in the course of their sports, but to arrange for hares to be trapped in other parts of the country and transported to the killing fields to replace those which have been killed.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): May I assure the hon. Gentleman that many people will support his Bill, not least because of the provisions for hare coursing which it contains? Anyone who has followed what takes place at the Waterloo cup every year in the name of sport—it is just an act of barbarism—will be compelled to be in the Lobby supporting the hon. Gentleman today.

Mr. McFall: That is a true Liberal speaking.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham) *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made it clear that he is not taking any more interventions.

Mr. McFall: I have given way on nine occasions so far, and I know that the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) has an honourable tradition of talking out Bills.

The police and the National Farmers Union have both expressed alarm about gangs of men who are raiding farms and estates to course hares with greyhounds and lurchers. Farmers and gamekeepers who intervene risk violence from the gangs, which are intent on killing hares and gambling large amounts of money on the prowess of their dogs. The gangs seem undeterred by the fines meted out under archaic poaching laws, and my Bill would provide for those people to be prosecuted for cruelty, with heavy fines, custodial sentences and confiscation of equipment, vehicles and dogs as extra penalties.

On the grounds of cruelty, conservation and the protection of private property, it is time that hares were properly protected. It is true that the main reason for the decline in the number of hares from 4 million to 800,000 is the advent of modern farming methods and herbicides, but, with more enlightened practices and a ban on the hunting and coursing of hares, we shall perhaps see their numbers revive.

Clause 3 seeks to prohibit the use of snares, which, as hon. Members have said, are undoubtedly both cruel and indiscriminate. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has evidence that domestic animals, badgers and even livestock have been maimed and killed by wire snares which have been set for foxes. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 prohibits self-locking snares, but permits the use of free-running snares which—we are told by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and by the Game Conservancy—are supposed merely to restrain the target animal until it can be humanely killed.

A video entitled "The A to Z of Fox Control" is advertised in country sports magazines, such as *The Countryman's Weekly*, which is a trade member of the British Field Sports Society and is approved by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation. The video recommends that snares are set using what is described as a "killing stick", which is a post driven into the ground next to the snare so that, as the captured animal thrashes around in panic, it becomes entangled with the pole and is strangled to death. The device effectively turns a free-running snare into a lethal instrument, which operates in the same way as the illegal self-locking snare.

A great deal of double-speak is emerging from the British Field Sports Society. When defending fox hunting, it condemns snares as cruel. In the BFSS hunting video, there is an horrific clip of a fox in a terrible state that has been caught around its stomach by a snare. The BFSS admitted that the snare had been legally set by a gamekeeper.

In its booklet "The Case for Hunting", the BFSS says:

> "Indiscriminate snaring causes suffering to foxes and other mammals. Both snares and traps cause unavoidable stress for wild animals".

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation would have us believe that gamekeepers adhere to a code of conduct in the use of snares, but the League Against Cruel Sports has successfully prosecuted gamekeepers for using illegal self-locking snares. Badger protection groups all over Britain have frequently complained that badgers have been caught in snares.

I have received letters from pet owners and people with personal experience of this subject. An individual from Morpeth in Northumberland wrote to me to say:

> "My beautiful red setter, Sam, went missing. We searched, advertised, did everything we could think of to no avail. One week later . . . he arrived home. He was emaciated, a horror to behold. He had chewed off his own paw to free himself from one of the snares you are now trying to abolish."

That is graphic support, which comes from the heart.

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation, the British Field Sports Society and the Game Conservancy all oppose the abolition of snares, and have made it clear that they cannot accept the licensing scheme allowed for in clause 8. I have to say that the League Against Cruel Sports is also not all that happy with licensing, given the fact that Departments have already issued well over 1,500 licences for interference with badger setts under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation has a code of practice for the use of snares which, if universally adopted, would certainly reduce much of the suffering and unnecessary deaths caused by snares. I would be more than happy to consider an amendment in Committee which would allow the proper use of snares under a code of practice similar to that promoted by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation.

I also believe that snaring is such a potentially cruel way to capture an animal that it should be considered very much as a last resort. According to Doctor McDonald's Oxford university report, only around one quarter to one third of all foxes killed by gamekeepers are captured by snares. According to the report, nowadays most are shot with rifles using lamps at night.

I urge the game bird shooting lobby to become actively involved in attempts to move to less cruel and indiscriminate methods of wild mammal control. It would be wise to take note of the MORI poll published in *The Mail on Sunday* last week, which revealed that 53 per cent. of the British people would like to see the shooting of game birds banned by law.

[Mr. McFall]

My Bill does not include such a ban, but it will not help the case of those involved in shooting if they resist legislation to restrict the use of snares. After all, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has found that, in order to protect isolated colonies of their nesting birds on a couple of its reserves, some fox control is necessary. Where deterrents such as electric fencing are not practical, the control method is shooting, not snares or dogs. The Forestry Commission rangers who sometimes have to control foxes because of complaints from neighbours also use shooting, not dogs or snares.

The snaring of rabbits can be safely prohibited. The thin brass wire snares used for taking rabbits are lethal for domestic cats or any other hunting animal, which may itself be hunting for rabbits. There are other ways of dealing with rabbits which are far more efficient and humane, such as cyanide gas, ferreting or shooting.

Under clause 6 of the Bill, it would not be an offence to use dogs to kill rabbits or rodents, unless the people concerned were trespassing. The reason for this exemption is that, with 35 million rabbits in the countryside, it would be unreasonable to expect farmers to keep their dogs on leads to avoid the possibility of prosecution.

It is a fact that almost any dog which happens to catch a rabbit or a rodent, such as a rat, can usually kill it quickly and with the minimum suffering. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about fox hunting?"] The evidence for hare coursing shows that animals larger than rabbits suffer considerably when caught by dogs. Some hon. Members shouted, "Fox hunting." Just tell me what happens when terriers are put down a hole. Hares that have been mauled and wounded by powerful greyhounds have still been alive when they have been recovered.

Clause 5 would allow a farmer to use his dogs for the immediate protection of livestock—for example, to chase off or attack a wild mammal, such as a fox, which has gained access to a chicken run and is chasing hens around the yard. This and the other exemption clauses show, as I hope hon. Members will appreciate, that I have striven to produce a reasonable Bill that reaches a compromise between the two extremes.

Many people object to the killing of any wild creature on the ground of animal rights. There are those who could not care less what suffering they inflict on any wild creature that they find on their land or, indeed, on any land.

My Bill would provide long overdue protection for wild mammals against those who abuse them without just cause, while ensuring that reasonable methods of pest control remain available to those who need them. If a good case for amendments can be made in Committee, hon. Members will find that I have an open mind.

Cruelties such as fox hunting with hounds have nothing to do with fox control. Indeed, one reason why there is such a high fox population is an encouragement of artificially high numbers by fox hunters. On the one hand, they say that there are too many foxes and that they must be controlled by hunting; on the other, the same people create cosy breeding conditions and supply extra food to keep up the numbers.

It has been claimed that, if hunting with hounds is banned, some 25,000 hounds will have to be destroyed. That is nonsense. It reminds me of an intervention by a former Member, Sir John Farr, in a similar debate in February 1992, when he said that 1 million horses would have to be destroyed. He had to be told that there were only 600,000 horses in the country.

There is nothing to prevent existing hunts from switching to drag hunting, where the hounds and riders follow an artificial trail. Drag hunts and bloodhound packs have doubled in number over the past 20 years, while the number of fox hunts has declined. Drag hunts can operate in much smaller territories than can wild mammal hunts.

It has been predicted that a ban on fox hunting could lead to the setting up of many more drag hunts, thus ensuring more rural employment, with the retention of horses, hounds and tradition and an end to hunt saboteurs and hunt trespass—

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster) *rose—*

Mr. McFall: I have already given way nine times. I have been very fair. I am not giving way this time.

Every season, scores of hounds are killed on roads and railway lines in the pursuit of foxes. Hounds out of control, following a fox on its desperate flight, frequently invade private land, stampede livestock, kill sheep and poultry, attack and kill pet cats and dogs, invade gardens, damage crops and disrupt the lives of rural people. By contrast, in the entire history of drag hunting—which goes back to the 1800s—there has not been one recorded case of drag hounds being involved in any such incident while out hunting.

Drag hunting is the obvious acceptable replacement to fox hunting. The only thing that hunters would lose would be the kill—which, strangely, they tell us is the one thing that does not attract them.

According to an article on drag hunting in this January's "Kennel Gazette", drag hunts obtain their hounds from existing fox hunt packs, and the hounds start drag hunting after one season's fox hunting. That proves that fox hounds can easily be trained to switch from foxes to drag hunting, so let us hear no more nonsense about 25,000 hounds having to be destroyed or shipped out of the country if fox hunting is banned.

There is massive public support for the Bill. The MORI poll in the *Mail on Sunday* showed that 70 per cent. want a ban on fox hunting and hare coursing, and 82 per cent. want a ban on deer hunting. A national opinion poll conducted by the RSPCA shows that 75 per cent. favour a ban on fox hunting, 83 per cent. a ban on stag hunting and 80 per cent. a ban on hare coursing. That poll, and another commissioned by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, found that well over 90 per cent. of British people support the principle of the Bill.

Some 80 per cent. of county councils have voted against hunting with hounds. Again, 80 per cent. of county wildlife trusts have adopted anti-hunt policies, as has—and I am proud to say this—the Scottish National Trust. The National Federation of Badger Groups supports the Bill, not only because it will outlaw the terrier men who start on foxes and move on to badgers, but because it will end the illegal blocking of badger setts by hunts—some of whose servants and

officials have been convicted of such offences. The Bill would drastically cut the number of badgers that suffer horribly in snares.

I have received letters from many individuals on the issue, including from country folk and farmers. One individual, writing from Hampshire, said:

"I cannot deny that days spent in the countryside with friends were some of the happiest and most fulfilling of that time. But in the end it was impossible to justify my personal enjoyment when it depended on the infliction of pain and death on the defenceless fellow-creatures which I cherished so much and which I didn't even need to eat."

That letter comes from an ex-hunter.

It is clear that the country is crying out for wild animals to be protected. I have received honourable support from Conservative Members. I want to read out a couple of letters from Conservative councils. One comes from a Conservative councillor on Swanage town council, who writes:

"On behalf of our mayor, Cllr Julie Wheeldon (Conservative), our Deputy Mayor Cllr Keith Marlow (Conservative) and of course myself, I send you very best wishes for the success of this measure."

Hotfoot from Glasgow, by first-class post, comes a letter from Bailie John H. Young, OBE, JP, DL, saying:

"Just to let you know that you have the full support of myself and my family. If I had been elected an M.P. three years ago"—

sadly, not many Tories are elected in Scotland—

"I would have supported your Bill. I am against blood sports, bull fighting and all abuse of animals. I hold these views above all political dogma ... If you wish you can quote that you have some Tory support as outlined above."

I am delighted to quote that letter.

It is clear that the country is crying out for wild mammals to be treated with respect and compassion. In a memorable intervention during our last debate on these matters, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) mentioned the book "The Road to Ruin" by E. S. Turner, which catalogues the history of social reform and how hard it was to achieve in this country. He made an eloquent speech on that issue. He mentioned all the reforms that had been advocated in the House and listed the arguments against them. A book was issued in favour of torture and was dedicated to the Chief of the General Staff. We have moved on since then.

We are debating an issue of social reform. We can call ourselves a truly civilised nation only if we ban this outrageously anti-social activity that uses foxes and other innocent animals for a contrived sport and entertainment.

A letter published in the *Glasgow Herald* in December said:

"I am out for a good day's fox hunting. What happens to the fox is incidental."

It is not incidental to hon. Members on both sides of the House or to the mass of public support—

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): Or to the foxes.

Mr. McFall: That is true.

It is time for wild animals to be granted the same basic protection as that provided 84 years ago to their domestic kin. My Bill would provide such a law, and I commend it to the House.

10.18 am

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) on his speech. He has mastered his brief, and he clearly presented his arguments, which are well known to many of us. He finished his speech with a barrage of statistics. In quoting the letter from the lady from Glasgow, he rightly brought out the point, which appeared to be a surprise to him, that the views of all political parties are divided on this controversial issue. Although some fun was made of the Liberal Democrats, some fun could be made of the Labour party and of the Conservative party.

I respect something that the hon. Gentleman said. In some respects, he may be somewhat new to this subject, but he has understood one thing clearly: it is all too easy for passions to be inflamed and for sensible argument to be rapidly buried in the heat of discussion on the issue. I therefore appreciate his comment about the way in which he and my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), who hold entirely different positions on the argument, have approached it.

I have a duty to the House to declare an interest, not just because of my activities elsewhere, but because I am deeply sensitive to declaring an interest on all occasions and to setting an example to more errant hon. Members, who might occasionally omit such declarations.

For 25 years, I have been the Member of Parliament for one of the most wonderful parts of the country. I represent a part of Somerset, which is an urban as well as a rural area. The majority of people live either in towns or in dormitory villages, which are said to be in the countryside, but which are obviously under the influence of urban areas. In my constituency, we find farming, tourism, industry, wildlife and all the wonderful attractions of the country. There is also enormous pressure on what remains of the wonderful countryside of Exmoor, the Quantocks and the Somerset levels.

In my constituency, I have the Devon and Somerset staghounds, the Quantocks staghounds and three packs of fox hounds. It contains many deeply sincere Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat citizens, who deeply resent the hunting that takes place there. I have lived with that for 25 years. As some hon. Members will know, the League Against Cruel Sports is active in my constituency. Sanctuaries have been established for deer. That has led to pressures and problems for Exmoor in particular, and for the Quantocks.

I understand how easily this issue can sometimes be turned, as it has recently, into a party political football, yet members of all parties hold different views on the subject. I remind hon. Members that I took through the House the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which, after close consultation, outlawed self-locking snares, and in which we dealt with the use of snares. I was pleased that the letter from the National Farmers Union paid tribute to the consultation that took place, which sought to get the Act right before it was became law.

I hope that hon. Members will understand that I have lived with these issues all my parliamentary life and before. To declare another interest, I am a farmer. My

[Mr. Tom King]

family have a small farm, so at weekends I live with these issues directly. We have foxes and badgers, we conserve the countryside and we do not normally shoot any foxes. We try to maintain a balance with nature. That is right.

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. King: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I intend to be as brief as I can.

I have never spoken in a hunting debate, but I thought that I should explain the background. Last night, I saw the hon. Member for Dumbarton on "Newsnight". I took him to say, and I think he repeated again today, that he had never witnessed—I do not expect him to have taken part in—the hunting activities with which the Bill deals. This is the first occasion I can remember of a Bill being presented by a sponsor who takes pride in announcing to the House that he has never seen those activities that he is proposing to criminalise and to make illegal. As the issue involves a country sport in which perhaps as many as 500,000 people take part, I should have thought that that would have been the right approach.

I believe that I am right in thinking—the hon. Gentleman must intervene if I am incorrect, as I do not want to misrepresent him—that the Bill was originally prepared by someone else. I do not believe that he wrote it: I think that it was written by the League Against Cruel Sports, in conjunction perhaps with other organisations. He has said that he genuinely does not intend the Bill to deal with the banning of shooting and fishing.

I suspect that the hon. Gentleman is beginning to understand that many of the people who support the Bill have a different agenda from him. Some of them—I think he recognises this—have a much more comprehensive agenda, leading to an entirely different relationship between animal rights and human rights. Many people hold such views. I do not disrespect them—they are entitled to hold those views, but the House should know about that.

It is never easy to get a private Member's Bill through the House. Hon. Members know of the time limits and restraints that may be placed on them. As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) made clear, the hon. Member for Dumbarton has the opportunity to strike an important blow against cruelty to animals. I would guess that he could get the Bill through today if he were determined to tackle clause 1.

The hon. Gentleman made an interesting comment in his speech on snares. Having taken the Wildlife and Countryside Act through the House, I am sympathetic to some of his comments about clause 3. If genuine causes for concern exist, and if there is a need to alter the Bill, I should be ready to consider that. He has an opportunity today to tackle cruelty to animals and snaring, which is of great concern to many people.

Of course, we know that that issue is not the whole Bill. By moving into the much more vexed ground of country sports and hunting, the Bill takes on a much more controversial issue. I consider first the attitude of farmers.

I did not quite get the answer about how much consultation there had been with outside bodies. The Government undertook such consultation during passage of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, to which the National Farmers Union pays tribute. However, in this case, the hon. Gentleman will know that the NFU feels that his Bill

"severely restricts the choice of pest control measures available to farmers. It is imperative that a range of lawful options are retained".

The Farmers Union of Wales also supports

"the right of farmers and landowners to hunt and kill foxes in order to control the fox population and reduce the risk of predation on livestock especially lambs".

The Devon farmer that the hon. Gentleman quoted is the luckiest farmer I have ever heard of. With my wife, I tend a flock of sheep. That farmer has been remarkably lucky to avoid damage and loss of life because of foxes. Good luck to him, but he is not representative.

The hon. Gentleman took some pride in quoting Scottish sources, but, as he knows, the National Farmers Union for Scotland believes that the measures would

"seriously compromise the ability of farmers to control pests, and foxes in particular, in the interest of the welfare of their livestock".

I recognise the sincerity in which these issues are debated by people on both sides. People who hunt and who support country sports are not evil. Some of the most admirable people in my constituency, those on whom one would rely most in times of need and distress and those who care for animals, are the very people involved in the hunting world. I am also aware of the sincerity of many—some, I am proud to say, vote for me—who hold an entirely different view and are unable to accept the concept of hunting.

I try to understand the views of people who are really involved with the countryside—I do not mean those who simply think they are—and I accept that they perhaps have different standards and experiences. They live much closer to the life and death cycle.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): They should see Stratford.

Mr. King: The debate would not be complete without a crack from the hon. Gentleman.

We are suddenly experiencing a very sharp spell of weather. How many farmers in my constituency were out on the hills last night, finding stillborn or twinned lambs, or even triplets, which they brought back to the farm to feed with a bottle and tried to warm in the oven? They will nurture those lambs and treat them with love and care, but in the knowledge that, within six months, they will be taking them to market to be slaughtered. That is often very difficult for people to understand if they do not accept the concepts of death and slaughter.

Dr. Spink: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the 1984 Hewson and Leitch study entitled "Scavenging and Predation upon Sheep and Lambs in West Scotland"? It found that, between 1976 and 1979, foxes killed a minimum of 1.3 per cent., 1.8 per cent., 0.8 per cent. and 0.6 per cent. of lambs estimated to have been born

in each of those years respectively. That is not a large number of lambs, especially when one considers that eagles and other predators take lambs, too.

Mr. King: Like the hon. Member for Dumbarton, my hon. Friend has a barrage of statistics. I could show him what could happen on certain farms in certain circumstances. One can take all the averages one likes, but such figures can mean the difference between viability and disaster for a farmer, and can affect his very ability to survive.

Anyone who has the relevant experience, and some who take an interest in agriculture, will know of the problems caused by the weather last year. Some farmers lost 40 per cent. or more of their lambs on the hills, which was a tragedy. It might be said to have been an act of God, but nevertheless it means that farmers often have to struggle even to make a living, and no losses are easily accepted.

I said that I have lived with these arguments for 25 years. In the main, there was tolerance and understanding of the different points of view, but now things have changed. Undoubtedly, there have been outside influences at work, and undoubtedly some very nasty elements have crept in. It is no secret that farmers are now not happy to appear on television, and will not give their address. Some hon. Members know that that is because of fear and the threats that they have received. I know that no hon. Member regards such threats as acceptable.

There are now enormous sums of money available to fund huge campaigns. I do not know where the money goes, and it is not entirely clear how well it is accounted for, but there is no question but that huge sums are involved.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose—*

Mr. King: If the hon. Gentleman will excuse me, I must continue.

Tolerance is an essential ingredient, and I shall cite a classic example to illustrate that fact. I mentioned the Quantock hills. This morning, I made a quick list of all the people and groups who have an interest in that especially beautiful part of the country over which one pack of stag hounds and a pack of fox hounds hunt.

They include the county council, which owns some of the land, as do various landowners such as the National Trust; they also include farmers, commoners, a very active and successful wildlife trust, two hunts, wardens who offer guided tours for the study of geology and the flora and fauna, riders, walkers, school expeditions that study the hills, bird watchers, botanists, a 4x4 motor club, mountain bikers and those involved in orienteering, cross-country runners, sponsored walkers, children working for their Duke of Edinburgh awards, and, I am glad to say, the whortleberry pickers.

Anyone who is familiar with Wordsworth and Coleridge will know that even poets take pleasure in those hills. All those I have mentioned value and love the hills, and formed the Quantock joint committee. All its members try to co-exist to protect the deer and ensure that they thrive—and they do.

However, something happened last year. Despite the very sensitive situation, the county council decided suddenly to ban hunting on a particularly small piece of land that runs like a neck across one part of the Quantocks. The most enraged comment that I received was from a non-Conservative voter, an anti-hunt conservationist, who said that this act of aggressive vandalism—as he saw it—would undermine the whole balance and spirit of co-operation in the hills.

People are not either members of a hunt or farmers; some farmers hunt, and some commoners who do not own the land also hunt. People of varying occupations saw the need for co-existence. I think that the hon. Member for Dumbarton might be beginning to understand that, by jumping in with jackboots, he may achieve exactly the opposite of the desired effect. [HON. MEMBERS: "Jackboots?"] Hon. Members may laugh, but— *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have warned the House already about seated interventions.

Mr. King: There used to be deer in many constituencies, but why are there now deer only in two parts of my constituency? One of the groups that cares most about them is the hunts. It is interesting to recall that someone who was very interested in nature—Henry Williamson who wrote "Tarka the Otter"—wrote:

"The world being as it is, the deer will vanish with the end of hunting and those who care for the deer know this to be true."

I was a Member of Parliament when, in 1977, the Labour Government were concerned about Exmoor being ploughed up and the habitat destroyed. They set up an inquiry headed by Baron Porchester, now Lord Carnarvon, to examine the Exmoor habitat and decide how its ecology could be preserved.

The report said:

"It is undeniable that stag hunting on Exmoor operates as a force for conservation. In the normal run of things the deer do considerable damage to crops, and without the active participation of the farmers in the Hunts, their days would be numbered."

A number of farmers have come to my surgeries complain about the damage done by 30, 40 or 50 deer destroying their crops, but that would not be tolerated unless it was seen as part of the deers' way of life, a way of life in which the hunt plays a part.

I suppose that the strongest argument has been made by Richard Course, a man with whose activities I was familiar for many years. He was very active in my constituency. He was the executive director of the League against Cruel Sports and he played a part in establishing sanctuaries in the area. He said:

"The simple prohibition of stag hunting would destroy the survival prospects of wild Red Deer in the West Country."

Why is it that Exmoor has deer, whereas Dartmoor has not? Hon. Members may like to reflect on that. Could the reason be that Dartmoor has no hunting? In Exmoor, there is organisation, and the people of the moor are actively concerned to see the maintenance of the deer, which have never been in better shape.

I have looked at the issues. I have talked especially about stag hunting, because it takes place in my constituency. I know that it worries many people, and that is why I wanted to address that point. I do not tolerate some of the incidents that have happened in stag hunting, which are well recorded. Everyone can remember them, as I do.

I remember the stag on the roof of the shed in Porlock. One can remember the stag at bay in the sea off Porlock. One can remember the recent incident,

[Mr. King]

which was absolutely unacceptable, with the stag at bay and the shambles of the final kill. The kill was handled in a completely improper way, and prompt action was taken by the Masters of Deerhounds Association. I will not tolerate cruelty or any failure to observe the correct rules. I hope that the House sees, therefore, that I approach the matter in a balanced way. I am concerned that the arguments on the other side are often not considered.

I care about tolerance in this country; I now see an intolerant strain. It exists in other parts of our life, and I see it coming to play in this area as well. This strain of intolerance will do great damage to our country. I am under no illusions. The people for whom I advance the case today are a minority, because the majority of our country is urban or suburban. However, we are discussing the way of life of people in the countryside, which is dear to them. Hunting is part of the structure of the countryside in which those people live.

My next point is not a party point. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) is one of the few here who has personal memory of one of the great sons of Exmoor. I refer to Ernest Bevin, from Winsford on Exmoor. Was it because he came from Exmoor that he voted as he did when hunting was discussed in the House?

One of the great Agriculture Ministers, certainly in the memories of farmers, was Tom Williams, who was a Labour Member. He said that he did not believe that one could justify banning hunting, because to do so would interfere with the liberties of the rural population and would criminalise a whole community. Hon. Members may say that standards have changed, and that those people lived long ago. I believe that they had stronger roots in the countryside, that they had a closer understanding, and that they were, in some senses, more tolerant.

I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Member for Dumbarton will realise that there is a challenge. He can take a significant step forward in tackling the problems of cruelty to animals. In that, I would fully support him. If he seeks to widen the issue, he will not, I fear, succeed.

10.43 am

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): This is an interesting debate for reasons rather wider than might appear at first sight. I participated in a similar debate three years ago. One of the points that I find interesting about debates on animal welfare is that all the speeches from those who support the other side of the argument reinforce our argument. The more speeches we hear like the speech by the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), the stronger becomes the case in favour of the Bill.

I declare an interest; I am a vegetarian. Like many people of my age, I was persuaded by my children to become a vegetarian. As a child, when I went for a walk every Sunday, I passed a little shop that was put up by the National Anti-Vivisection Society. As a child, I saw a display in which a stuffed animal was being tortured. All my life, I have been committed to the cause of anti-vivisection.

The arguments put by those on the other side are interesting. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) is accused of not having been on a hunt; secondly, he is accused of not having consulted people; and, thirdly, it is said that he did not draft the Bill. None of those arguments is credible.

This is not, strictly speaking, a party matter. There are members of the Labour party, such as Lady Mallalieu, who support hunting. There are Conservative Members who will vote with us in the Lobby. There are Liberal Democrats who support hunting. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who is not now in the Chamber, is in favour of hunting. We must not make this into a strict party matter. The debate takes place against a background of changed public opinion.

Mr. Peter Griffiths: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is not a town versus country argument? It is a debate freely entered into by all the people of this country.

Mr. Benn: I am trying to do credit to the argument. There is a real argument. There are those who get pleasure from hunting and those who think that it is wrong. What makes this debate different from the one in 1992—I understand that the British Field Sports Society does not seek to divide the House—is that public opinion has changed. In every generation, the House is a reflection of public opinion, although we are a bit slow to pick it up. I sometimes think of the House as a rusty weathercock that does not shift until the wind is very strong.

As anyone who visits primary schools today will know, young people are passionately interested in the environment and the planet. I enjoy my visits to primary schools more than any other visits; the same may be true of other hon. Members. Children in primary schools in my constituency are cheeky, intelligent and questioning. They always ask about badgers, elephants, the rain forest and the other environmental questions that may be not so interesting to the older generation. I know that we are not debating the export of live animals, but the recent campaign has helped substantially to change the tide of opinion.

It is not only young people who are interested in such issues. I have never forgotten a woman who came to my surgery when I represented Bristol, South-East many years ago. She was a very short lady with a bun and horn-rimmed spectacles. She had worked all her life in a wool shop. I had a talk about her problems and I then asked her what she did. She said, "My uncle left me a little money." I said, "How lovely! What did you do?" She said, "I left the wool shop and I joined the hunt saboteurs." That story is absolutely true; I have never forgotten it.

The House must face the fact that it is not a matter of people wanting to prevent the right hon. Member for Bridgwater from enjoying himself. He could take part in drag hunting. I have not seen that either so I hardly dare to mention it. It must be just as much fun. The reality is that cruelty for fun is no longer acceptable to an overwhelming majority of people in this country.

In the previous debate, the late Nicholas Ridley made a powerful speech in which he accused those who favoured the banning of hunting of being kill-joys. It was as if we were looking round for country pleasures

and then trying to ban them. He simply did not understand. There are many people, of whom I am one, who think that to inflict cruelty for fun is wrong.

It is so long since moral questions were allowed to penetrate into political debate that it must be a bit of a puzzle for people who believe that enjoying oneself, at whatever cost to animals, is fine and who believe that making money out of cruelty to animals is also fine. When people say that it is wrong, it is a bit of a shock. Some people say, "What do you mean by saying that it is wrong? If it is fun, it must be right. If it is profitable, it must be right." That is the argument in our debate today.

The same point applies to the export of live animals. People believe that it is wrong that animals should be treated in that way for the profit of farmers. It is no good the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food telling us that we must allow the export of live animals because the European regulations require it. What does he think will happen? Will the German army be sent here to insist that we continue with the export of live animals? The whole thing is absolutely ridiculous. When the Minister, who is also a farmer, says that we cannot do anything about the export of live animals because we have to build a new Europe, he is not credible at all. That is why the party in favour of hunting—I do not mean the Conservative party in any way—simply does not understand what it is up against and I want to help to explain.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman allowed me to proceed because I am trying to develop a very serious argument.

I was very surprised that the Bill in 1992 was defeated by 19 votes on the eve of an election. [HON. MEMBERS: "12 votes."] Yes, 12 votes. The whole situation is now different and we should ask what has happened meanwhile. People have done something about it. All change in this country has been brought about by people doing something, not by writing to *The Guardian* or to *The Independent* or by trying to get half a minute with the media. The media is much more interested in other matters. Jim Naughtie has to interview Jeremy Paxman about what Hugo Young said about what Alan Watkins thinks about the next reshuffle. That is much more interesting than anything else. They interview each other. They are not interested in politics at all—they are interested in politicians. There is more interest in the future of the former Chancellor of the Exchequer than there is in, for example, cruelty to animals or unemployment or anything else.

One does not make much progress with the media until very late in the game, when the battle is all over, and the same media get an award at Cannes for an insight programme into how hunting was banned in Britain. In the first instance, however, the media do not take much notice.

Hunt saboteurs are presented as if they were hooligans, yet they protect animal life. They are presented as if they were members of a new, creeping intolerance, led by passion. I listened to the right hon. Member for Bridgwater. His speech was incredible. The passion is felt by those who dress up in red coats and get on horses and kill. The feeling—

Mr. Colvin: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Benn: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman because he will help my case.

Mr. Colvin: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman as one ex-Bristol Member to another. Was it pure coincidence that on the day the poll tax rioters were burning Trafalgar square, not one hunt in this country was sabotaged?

Mr. Benn: I may go on to speak about the poll tax in a way that the hon. Gentleman will not really like. I know that the Deputy Speaker will not automatically, with the help of "Erskine May", link the poll tax to hunting, but there may be a connection if I am skilful enough.

We make progress by doing something. If something is done, some attention has to be given to the matter. As a result of what was done at Shoreham and Brightlingsea and Coventry, many things happened. The media noticed the issue. Previously, hunt saboteurs were presented along with gangsters, thugs and football hooligans, but the media had to realise, because something was done, that they had to be reported. One hon. Member raised with Madam Speaker his objection that people had written to him—the lobbying of Members of Parliament—which he found outrageous. I have heard of electors trying to change Government, but I have never heard of Government trying to change the electorate. A new principle is emerging as we return to a Victorian society.

There will not be a vote today because hon. Members who oppose the Bill would not win it. Those who favour hunting have decided to retreat into two more secure areas. One area is the recesses of the Committee, where all sorts of devices can be used to delay the progress of the Bill. There may be a long, long debate about the Bill in front of it in the queue, which is completely non-controversial, to prevent this Bill from being discussed. Then, in the end, there is always the Lords. Proceedings will be dragged out by some of those old country peers, who, when they have discovered where London is, will get the train here and vote against the Bill. I was talking to one of the officials of the House the other day who said that a peer came into the Member's Entrance and asked "Could you tell me where the House of Lords is?" I thought that that was a very interesting example. I have been informed by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) that there will be a vote today.

I have referred in the past and I would like to refer again—I know that it is very painful to the House of Commons to be told and reminded yet again—to how social progress is made. We like to think that it is made by an amendment from a Back Bencher, and accepted by the Government. It is not like that at all. Social progress is made when public pressure builds up. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton, who moved the Bill brilliantly, quoted "Roads to Ruin" by E.S. Turner, in which he described someone who wrote a book in favour of torture and dedicated it, with permission, to the chief of the imperial general staff.

[Mr. Benn]

There was, of course, a big campaign against the abolition of chimney boys on the grounds that it would endanger country houses. I have no doubt that the right hon. Member for Bridgwater would have given very powerful arguments for the love of country houses and the absolute necessity to send little boys up chimneys. Samuel Plimsoll, who introduced the Plimsoll line, which dealt with the coffin ships, was described in *The Shipping Gazette* as a terrorist. All that is in the lovely book by E.S. Turner.

My experience is that when people come along with some good idea, in the beginning it is completely ignored; nobody mentions it at all. If people go on, they are mad, and if they continue, they are very dangerous. After that, there is a pause and then nobody can be found who does not claim to have thought of it in the first place. That is how social progress is made.

If we consider the history of this country, we see that none of the great advances came from initiations made in the Houses of Parliament. How does the House think that the trade unions were legalised after the Tolpuddle martyrs? Do people think that there was a debate in the House of Lords one day when one duke said to another "My Lords, I think we've been a bit unfair to the working class, let us repeal"—it was not like that at all. They could not keep trade unions down.

How do people think that the Chartists got the vote? How did the suffragettes get the vote? Does the House think that men woke up one day and said "By the way, we've been a bit unfair to the wife, let's give her the vote"? Women chained themselves to the railings, they were arrested, they went on hunger strike, they were forcibly fed and women got the vote.

How does the House think that apartheid ended? Was it because Nelson Mandela got a new suit or because he amended clause IV of the African National Congress constitution? It was because the Africans simply would not accept exclusion from the political process. That is how change occurs and it is much resented by hon. Members.

I believe that we are on the eve of a victory here today. I am told that there will be a vote and I am sure that the Bill will be passed. The campaigners deserve the credit for it, together with those who have advocated such a Bill for a long time in the House. Then, we shall take the next stage. The one thing about which I am absolutely certain is that when all the arguments put forward in favour of hunting today are studied and analysed, they will turn out to be in support of the Bill. I am grateful for those who argue the case for hunting, because the more they are read the less credible they are.

10.57 am

Sir John Cope (Northavon): I support the general cruelty provisions in clause 1. I thought that the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) explained that clause extremely clearly and put the issues very fairly. If he had confined his Bill to that clause and the necessary issues and enforcement clauses behind it, or if he were to do so subsequently in Committee, he would improve the statute book and have my support in so doing.

The Bill, of course, mixes the unnatural torture of animals in clause 1, to which the hon. Member for Dumbarton referred, and hunting in clause 2, which I do not believe in the least comes in the same category. I do not support a ban on hunting. My constituency is not quite as well provided for as that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), but we have two packs of fox hounds and one beagle pack in the constituency.

Many of my constituents support hunting, including, but not entirely consisting of, those who go hunting and many, too, who earn their living from it. It is for many of them a whole way of life, which is under attack in clause 2.

Of course, I have constituents, particularly in the more urban parts of my constituency, who dislike fox hunting and I respect their views. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater, I have lived, although not for quite so long, with the issue as a Member of Parliament for more than 20 years. Clearly, one cannot please all one's constituents in respect of a matter of this kind whatever one does.

I am clear, however, that the control of foxes is necessary, particularly from an agriculture point of view. Foxes kill lambs and chickens, often in much larger numbers than they need to eat. Farmers in my constituency have given me plenty of examples of that and I gather that English Nature, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and gamekeepers control foxes in their areas by different means. The argument is not whether foxes should be killed but how they should be killed. There is a great deal of acceptance about that point, even among those who do not agree with us.

The Bill does not provide for the conservation or protection of foxes or of any other species. The hon. Member for Dumbarton argued that hunting is irrelevant to controlling foxes. If we turn that argument around, the anti-hunting part of the Bill is irrelevant to the preservation of foxes and I believe that is true. It will not do foxes any good at all if the Bill is passed in its present form. Indeed, I believe that it would lead to more foxes being killed and to the erosion of their habitat. Large parts of England, including sections of my constituency, have areas deliberately conserved because of fox hunting and that has helped to form the landscape as we know it.

Patently, hunting does not eliminate species: far from it. Obviously, if it did, there would have been no foxes for hundreds of years. Foxes have flourished here and Frederick Forsyth made that point particularly well yesterday in his article in *The Times*. The only real argument relates to the different methods to kill foxes.

I believe that properly conducted hunting is, by comparison with other methods, a humane way of killing foxes. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater, I emphasise "properly conducted hunting" by which I mean under the rules of the Masters' of Foxhounds Association. Those rules cover the relevant points.

Hunting is a humane way of killing foxes because there are no wounded foxes and death is quick. It is the most natural way of killing foxes in the literal sense of the word: it is like nature itself. After all, it is the way in which the fox kills.

In some areas, hunting is essential to control foxes. However, even in areas where it provides only a small part of the control—reference has already been made to this point—it would be wrong to ban hunting in favour of more difficult and less humane methods of control. It is significant and persuasive that supporters of hunting, who I know include many of the most knowledgeable people on the countryside and wildlife and its ways. Those people include vets and farmers who spend their whole lives, often from childhood, working with animals. Clearly, without the support of farmers, hunting would quickly end. Fox hunting people are perfectly aware of that because many of them are farmers and vets.

Other people, of whom the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has obviously been one for a long time, dislike hunting. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield's speech raised a point that I have observed before. It often seems that the core of their dislike is that people follow hounds, particularly on horseback. There has long been a problem with people on horseback looking down on people on foot. The cavalry and the infantry have always had their disputes and that has partly to do with the fact that if one is sitting on a horse, one is bound to look down on someone standing on the ground. However, people like the right hon. Member for Chesterfield dislike the idea that hunting is sport or "fun" as he eloquently, as usual, put it.

It would be interesting to speculate whether we would have the same trouble or the Bill before the House in this form if only the hunt servants went out and no one followed in a pink coat, and particularly if no one appeared to enjoy seeing hounds work out a line. That is only part of the reason why some people oppose hunting. There is a small minority for whom it is part of a much wider agenda altogether. I do not think that that is true of the hon. Member for Dumbarton. However, some people are now deliberately confusing animal welfare and animal rights. I have no doubt that if the ban on hunting was passed, the whole expensive animal rights caravan would move straight on to fishing, shooting, livestock farming and on beyond that.

The central engine of the animal rights campaign seems to be morally flawed. It argues for the so-called rights of the fox, but not for the rights of the lambs or chickens they kill over and above those they need to eat. It also argues in ways that will not help foxes, as I have already described, and there seems to be no morality in that.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield told us that we should consider opinion polls, which claim that many people are against hunting, but the percentages in different polls vary very widely indeed. That is not surprising when the same polls tell us that hunting is very low on the list of things that people are bothered about. The results are also not surprising when so much money and effort is being devoted by animal rights activists into misleading the public, 90 per cent. of whom have never seen a hunt.

That money and effort is directed at hunting at the moment because of its symbolism for the animal rights movement. It is fairly interesting that, in its efforts to persuade the public and to work up public alarm about the matter, the Bill concentrates on mammals. The public can be drawn into that net, but there does not seem to be a moral difference between mammals and spiders, flies and wasps, which the public happily want to stop interfering with their lives. It is also interesting that rabbits and rats are excluded from the protection of clause 2.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield implied that someone was bound to say that the animal rights movement is thought to be dangerous. I agree with him. He said that people would say that it was dangerous and I believe that it is. It is the only single-issue campaign that has spawned a violent terrorist wing. In taking to violence, those people are, as other terrorists do, attacking the basis of law. There is no morality in that. Apart from the reported attacks, which have been referred to, these people desecrate graves. There was an example of that in my constituency not so long ago.

In some respects, the animal rights movement is sinister because there seems to be a considerable overlap at the top of the movement that stretches from the animal liberation front and hunt saboteurs to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Militant animal rights activists have infiltrated the RSPCA, which has a respectable and respected history of animal welfare. After all, militants infiltrated the Labour party to use its decent members as a front for much more sinister underlying objectives. The Labour party has fought that for some years and it continues to do so, so it should understand that point very well.

Mr. Benn: In his list of criminals, where would St. Francis of Assisi fit into the right hon. Gentleman's view of those who are injecting dangerous ideas of animal welfare into the human mind?

Sir John Cope: I have no objection to people putting forward ideas, as I have already made clear. I respect those who have a different view from mine on this or other matters. St. Francis of Assisi may be included in that. I do not know precisely what his views on hunting were, but he was not, after all, a terrorist. I am referring to those who use unsatisfactory and unacceptable measures to pursue their points of view. That is against the tolerance that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater successfully supported. It is also against our way of life and the rule of law.

The RSPCA has great resources given to it for animal welfare—the work that it does so well. It is very sad that it should use a large part of its money on campaign advertisements which, incidentally, are also dubious from a legal point of view. The International Fund for Animal Welfare itself has had a very chequered history in a number of countries. It is not a charity but a limited company and it does not have the same restrictions on what it can do. It also makes a profit.

I have no doubt that, if it were successful, this attack on hunting would lead—perhaps not by the hon. Member for Dumbarton but by others in the so-called animal rights movement—to further attacks on shooting and fishing and to attacks on equestrian sports. I note that prominent members of the League Against Cruel Sports have attacked the Olympic games because of their equestrian events. Attacks on farming would increase. We have seen militant activity in respect of farming. Attacks would extend to the keeping of pets. Once again, prominent members of the League Against Cruel Sports have argued about that matter. The process would not stop here.

[Sir John Cope]

We should not go down the animal rights road. The Bill is the start of that road. The anti-hunting clauses are anti-conservation. Ultimately, they are inhumane and illogical. The hon. Member for Dumbarton should settle for clause 1 and the consequential enforcement clauses, and do as the excellent Labour leaflet says and "leave country sports alone".

11.13 am

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) on his skill and initiative in introducing the Bill. As one who piloted a private Member's Bill through the House many years ago, I know how much extra work and how much public pressure is involved in such a controversial issue. I commend the hon. Gentleman on the manner in which he presented the Bill to the House.

In particular—I do not want to argue this matter in detail—the hon. Gentleman was wise, when dealing with the sections of the Bill concerning snaring, to say that he is open to further consultation and amendments in Committee. Although hon. Members listened with concern to what he had to say and shared his objectives, we are certainly not sure that he has that section of the Bill right. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's broad approach in introducing the legislation.

I fully support clause 1. Everybody wants legal protection to be extended to wild mammals. Of course, without beating about the bush, the controversial part of the Bill and the one on which right hon. and hon. Members have been lobbied assiduously is clause 2, which would ban hunting.

I live in a beautiful part of the Scottish countryside. I have two organised hunts in my constituency. For 10 years or so, I owned a horse and enjoyed riding. I have never hunted, but I have watched hunting on occasions. If I were confronted with an opinion poll and asked to tick a box to approve or disapprove hunting, I would have to say that I disapprove, but that is not the point. The point is whether I use my vote in the House of Commons to ban an activity in which I personally do not wish to take part when others might use their votes to ban activities in which I do wish to take part. As a Liberal, I believe very firmly that that is a matter for individual conscience and that it is for individuals to make up their minds. It is not a matter for the law to intervene in.

I say that because I admit to fishing—I enjoy fishing. I am an honourary member of the Selkirk and District angling club, and I fish on the Ettrick and Yarrow. I owe it money for my annual salmon permit. I am also in a syndicate that fishes a nearby loch. On occasions, when I have been photographed or televised in that pursuit, I have received letters from members of the public and, indeed, from members of my own party asking why I engage in such a barbaric pursuit as fishing.

People are entitled to their views on that matter, but the only safe recourse is the one that was put forward by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). He is at least logical in his arguments; he is a vegetarian. I have been to abattoirs in this country and overseas, and I have no doubt that abattoirs overseas are less well regulated than they often are in this country. I have no doubt that cruelty to animals is involved, unhappily, in a meat-eating society. Therefore, the right hon. Gentleman is perfectly right to seek refuge in being a vegetarian and to enunciate as a fundamental principle that any activity that involves cruelty to animals should be banned by law.

That, of course, takes us down the very road that I do not wish to travel. I do not wish to ban fishing or shooting. I shoot occasionally, usually when people want to preserve their stock, as I am not a particularly good shot. I have a trained flat-coat retriever with which I enjoy working in the countryside.

The promoter of the Bill mentioned a recent opinion poll that showed a narrow majority, but still a majority, of people against shooting. I regard clause 2 as the thin end of a wedge that will threaten the pursuit of country sports as we know them today. I shall tell the House what the implications of that would be for the rural environment and the rural economy.

I am told that one of the hunts in my constituency is just about to move into new premises. There will be direct employment implications in that, but of course indirect employment in the saddlery shops, vets' surgeries, smithies and so on associated with organised hunting would be put at risk. Much more important, because I do not speak with any great knowledge of hunting, is that the growing practice of proper wildlife management in this country would be put at risk if the economic benefits of country sports were removed. I will give a specific example.

In some parts of Scotland, vast sums of money are charged to visitors for a day's fishing or shooting. That does not happen so much in my part of Scotland. However, I shall give a breakdown from an estate near where I live, showing the expenditure of one visiting sportsman over either a long weekend or a short mid-week break. Such people tend to be from Germany or Italy, who come to shoot deer or pheasant. If one sportsman spends £650, £350 goes directly into the wildlife department of the forestry estates in order to maintain the gamekeepers and the other resources which enable wildlife to be managed; £100 goes into a local farmhouse for bed-and-breakfast accommodation; £50 goes into the local hotel for meals or drinks; and about £150 on average, it is reckoned, is spent in the local woollen mills by those welcome visitors buying some of our splendid wool or cashmere products to take home to their nearest and dearest. That is part of the fabric of the rural economy in the south of Scotland. If we take away the injection of income that country sports bring there would be some destruction of that economy as we know it today.

Of course one could say that in an ideal world man should not interfere with animals. But we grow sheep and cattle on the hills, and we plant more and more trees to help with the balance of payments. Man has interfered with the balance of nature, so the only way in which wildlife can be sustained and protected is through further interference by mankind.

To read some of the letters that we receive one would think that the animal kingdom was a world of tranquillity, peace and order, and that cuddly foxes leapt straight out of the pages of Beatrix Potter and were never destructive themselves.

I remember, in my early days as a Member of the House, having to make speeches critical of the forestry organisations, both the Forestry Commission and the private forestry interests, because they ignored the long-term interests of the environment. I am happy to say that over the 30 years that I have been a Member of Parliament there has been a complete revolution in the thinking of both the Forestry Commission and the private forestry interests about the long-term development of the rural environment.

Now in my constituency we find with pleasure places where the forestry has been opened up to the public, where deciduous trees have been planted, wildlife has been protected and ponds have been created for bird life. The result has been a complete revival of wildlife—deer, foxes, badgers, eagles, osprey and red squirrels. All that can be enjoyed not only by those who, like me, are fortunate enough to live in rural areas but by the urban population, who can come out to the lungs of the country and enjoy the pleasures of wildlife.

I believe that the Bill strikes at the heart of the progress that has been made. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield is correct to say that if we accept clause 2 it will not be long before other Bills come before the House seeking to ban other country sports too. The line has to be drawn somewhere, and I think that it should be drawn by deleting clause 2.

11.21 am

Sir Cranley Onslow (Woking): I agree strongly with what the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) said about the long-term implications of clause 2. I shall dwell on those later, but I also endorse what the right hon. Gentleman said about clause 1. I am sorry to see that the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) is not in his place now, but there is no doubt that if he had the good sense to say that he would proceed with clause 1 only, the House could get on with that without any difficulty and we could get on to the following business, which is equally important to many of us. We want to see that proceed too, and I hope that that can happen without any unnecessary procedural time-wasting by the supporters of this Bill.

The presence on the Opposition Front Bench of the hon. Members for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) and for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), who have recently been taking an interest in angling, is welcome, and I draw attention to it. I think that they are mistaken if they believe that angling is not threatened by the anti movement. I do not know whether other hon. Members have seen a remarkable pamphlet entitled "Angling—the Neglected Bloodsport" published by the Campaign for the Abolition of Angling. For hon. Members who have not yet seen it, that document will repay some study.

The pamphlet declares:

"Sparrows, swans, moorhens, coots, gulls, dogs, bats, fish . . . anglers kill them all".

That is illustrated with a photograph of a sparrow found on the river Medway in Kent, with the comment:

"It is but one of thousands of animals killed and injured every year by anglers' lost and discarded fishing tackle."

I should declare my interest here. I am chairman of the fisheries committee of the British Field Sports Society and I fish myself. I do not hunt, but I shoot. I see the threat to hunting presented by the Bill as extending across the board, and I believe that those seeking to advance it—not the promoter himself, but those who lie behind him, such as the League Against Cruel Sports—have a wider agenda, as my right hon. Friends the Members for Bridgwater (Sir T. King) and for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) have already said—

Mr. Bellingham: My right hon. Friend is talking about fishermen; is he aware that in my constituency there are several angling clubs, and that in one of those clubs a disabled angler had his tyres slashed and all his kit thrown into the river by hunt saboteurs? Is he aware that the agenda of the League Against Cruel Sports is, of course, to outlaw fishing too?

Sir Cranley Onslow: Indeed, I was moving towards that point, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. But first I want to spend a little longer on the activities of the Campaign for the Abolition of Angling.

The pamphlet that I have already quoted goes on to define what it calls:

"The Extent of the Cruelty",

by saying:

"Of all types of angling, coarse fishing is the most popular. It is also the cruellest. Millions of seemingly 'harmless' anglers seek to stick hooks into the mouths of largely inedible fish purely for the fun of it! . . .

Not content with abusing fish, anglers are also responsible for the maiming and killing of countless thousands of waterfowl and other animals which ingest and become entangled in lost/discarded fishing tackle."

I do not defend any angler who litters the bank of a river or a canal or a still water with discarded tackle. I know that that practice can cause harm, and I also know how strongly the angling governing bodies feel against it. However, I ask the House and, in his absence, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, to understand that that sort of propaganda is put about to influence impressionable children and others, and that we should recognise that.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde) *rose—*

Sir Cranley Onslow: No, I am sorry. The hon. Gentleman is a great intervener but I wish that he would stay tethered for the moment. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but there are moments when the hon. Gentleman reminds me of a hot-air balloon.

I want to draw attention to the connection between the Campaign for the Abolition of Angling and the hunt saboteurs. The Campaign for the Abolition of Angling advertises in the hunt saboteurs' publication, and the hunt saboteurs' spokesman has said:

"Next we would move onto the fringe blood sports: shooting and fishing."

In 1992 the newsletter of the Campaign for the Abolition of Angling said:

"Last year was the first that the hunt saboteurs joined in the fight against angling, using non-violent direct action to save the lives of fish. Many sab groups have continued to target anglers throughout the season."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) has pointed out, such intervention is by no means always non-violent. I could cite other cases with which the House should be familiar in which violence has been used to intimidate individual anglers,

[Sir Cranley Onslow]

and to drive them from the river or canal. I have little doubt that if the hunt saboteurs and those who drive them on were successful in their campaign against hunting there would be only a short spell before they moved on to activities aimed at other sports—activities of the same kind and degree.

I deplore, as I hope the whole House deplores, the intrusion of violent action into perfectly legal legitimate activities and recreations. There is little doubt about that, and if any hon. Member wishes to challenge the proposition, I hope that he will intervene now, because I should be glad to hear from him. I notice that no one has sought to intervene, so the point can be taken as conceded. This is the thin end of a dangerous wedge. The antis have a wide agenda and broader objectives than are embodied in the Bill. To encourage them by supporting clause 2 would simply threaten all field sports. Hunting, shooting and fishing all stand threatened in the same way and by the same people.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I shall respond to the right hon. Gentleman's challenge. It is disingenuous ever to argue on any legislation that a particular proposal implies that later there may be support for further measures—[HON. MEMBERS: "It is true."] Of course it is not true. The issue must be judged on its merits, and the right hon. Gentleman will persuade people only if he argues about the merits of hunting, whereby people and dogs go out and kill foxes for pleasure as an alternative way of killing them. Only on that argument can he adduce support for his proposition. Anything else is irrelevant.

Sir Cranley Onslow: The hon. Gentleman might do best to talk to one or two of his Liberal colleagues. They have said that they agree with me and not with him. The hon. Gentleman is a master of disingenuousness, and he has demonstrated that to the House.

Mr. King: Did I misunderstand the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), or was he saying, "Don't worry about newspaper editors and the normal conduct of politics, direct action is needed"? The right hon. Gentleman seemed to be supporting the call for direct action, and not just in hunting, since he seem to regard that approach as a seamless robe to other country sports as well. He appears to be saying that he has the route to a more acceptable society.

Sir Cranley Onslow: Unfortunately, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield is not in his place. I have no doubt, however, that my right hon. Friend's interpretation is entirely right. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman meant what he said. I am surprised that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) does not understand that. It is clear that his Liberal colleagues do.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Perhaps I might redress the balance. I am a Liberal Democrat Member for a rural area, unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the conservation of the countryside, which so many urban people are determined to secure, is conservation of something that has been created by those who farm the countryside? Surely the best judges of whether fox control is needed by the means that we are discussing are those very people, the farmers. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree also that one of the most misleading arguments in the debate is that we are talking about toffs in red coats? Most people who hunt—this is certainly the position in rural Wales—are ordinary farmers, many of them earning very little. They pay a small subscription each year and manage to keep a fair balance between farmer and fox.

Sir Cranley Onslow: I entirely agree. My Welsh farming friends share the view that the hon. and learned Gentleman has expressed. I do not want to rub salt into the wound, but it is conceivable that there might now be a Liberal Member representing Brecon and Radnor if the Liberal candidate at the last election had expressed the view that the hon. and learned Gentleman has put before the House. I am glad to have his support.

I do not wish to detain the House for much longer. I merely put on record the fact that the National Federation of Anglers, the National Federation of Sea Anglers and the Salmon and Trout Association all object to legislative interference in any legitimate country sport. They all reiterate the fundamental right of every individual to choose his or her country sport. These are not matters for legislation and clause 2 does not deserve the support of the House.

11.32 am

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), in his absence, on the Bill that he has produced and on the eloquent way in which he presented it.

It is not my intention to take a great deal of the time of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton covered all the points that had to be made, and did so eloquently. I wish to make only one or two observations.

In pursuing these issues—hare coursing or whatever—for nearly 30 years in the House, I have become conscious of increasing support for action to stop cruelty to animals and for the need to legislate against it. That support has come about over the passage of time. That is due in large part to the great campaigning work of the League Against Cruel Sports. I am proud to have been associated with the league over nearly 30 years. I am a vice-president.

The purpose of clause 1 is to extend the protection that is given to animals in captivity to wild animals. Over the past few months, there has been an argument about the way in which we look after calves that are transferred to the continent. There has been a great deal of hypocrisy. Ministers have thrown up their hands in shock, horror and disgust at the crating of calves on the continent. They seem surprised when they do not get their own way. At the same time, their friends, or members of their families, dress up in red coats and pursue other animals to have them pulled to death by dogs. There must be some consistency of argument. Unfortunately, Ministers have been failing in that regard and in their attitude towards the care of veal calves.

I listened with interest to the former leader of the Liberal party, the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). Much of his speech had nothing to do with the Bill. It should be understood that the Bill would not ban shooting, or angling. The right hon. Gentleman did not mention that. Similarly, he did not mention that hunting deer by dogs in Scotland has been outlawed for nearly 40 years.

I welcome, with the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, all the improvements that have been made in forestry. We have seen the provision of ponds, the planting of deciduous trees and the introduction of opportunities for bird life, for example. All those developments have had the support of many people, who take the view that such things have nothing to do with the contents of the Bill. If the right hon. Gentleman were to urge the Government to spend more money on such developments, many of us would support him.

Needless cruelty is demeaning to humankind. At the same time, no exaggerated value should be placed upon the deer, the fox or the hare in relationship to human beings. If we were spending our time today debating homelessness in London or in the rest of the country and urging the Government to spend more money to tackle the problem, I would feel that that was a better use of our time than discussing our attitude towards animals, but that is not the position. We are discussing animals and the way that we treat them, and the way that that affects our dignity as human beings. As I have said, to allow needless cruelty to be inflicted on animals is demeaning to human dignity.

Animals were placed upon the earth to be used by man, not to be abused. To hunt them purely and simply for the purpose of personal satisfaction and fun is immoral. It is denying animals their dignity and, more important than that, debasing ours.

Clause 1 is important because it would end the present legislative anomaly. On Radio Humberside this morning I heard people from the Hull Hedgehog hospital talking about their work. They have received about 4,000 hedgehogs over the past few years, many of which have been mutilated by people or animals. When they are in their cages in the hospital it is a criminal offence to poke them with sticks, to beat them or to abuse them in any way. When they are set in a field after receiving care, people can kick them, throw stones at them and burn them. We have heard about the young schoolboys from Pocklington. That sort of action is permissible in those circumstances.

Conservative Members say that they are against kicking, thumping and torture. They say that it is needless cruelty. They are happy for such behaviour to be banned. If my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton, in his wisdom, was content only for clause 1 to be enacted, along with some legislation on snaring, it seems that there would be no objection from Conservative Members. What difference is there in principle between kicking a hare and deliberately setting dogs on it to use it as a tug of war? What difference is there in the pain that is suffered in those circumstances?

Conservative Members ask, "Have you seen those things?", as though to appreciate the difficulties that are associated with a deadly disease we must suffer it before making a speech about it. They seem to be suggesting that it is necessary to have had smallpox, leprosy or cholera before we can legislate to try to get rid of such diseases.

Yes, I have been to see hare coursing; I went with my former colleague, the late Arnold Shaw, to see it at the east of England meet. On that occasion, they did not know that Members of Parliament were present. They released the hares far closer to the dogs than they did, for example, at the Waterloo cup, when it was known that lots of people would be there. On those occasions, I saw—photographic evidence of it appeared in the *Daily Mirror* and, if it had been allowable in the debate, I would have produced them—a hare with its hind legs in the mouth of one hound and the head in the mouth of another, being pulled around, screaming. That is what hon. Members who speak in favour of hunting today are defending.

Mr. Colvin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McNamara: Yes, but let me make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that that is what he is defending.

Mr. Colvin: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because I know that he feels strongly about this, but I could not condone the sort of things that he has just described, and he knows perfectly well that all field sports are governed by strict codes of conduct, and if anyone participating in a field sport breaks those codes of conduct, there are sanctions that the governing bodies can take against them. If field sports cannot regulate and control themselves, they are just asking for Parliament to come in and do it for them.

Mr. McNamara: That is precisely what we are doing. We are trying to stop them, because they are not even enforcing their own rules. The masters of fox hunts are not enforcing the rules, as we have seen in recent cases.

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Is my hon. Friend aware that when I had the dubious privilege of visiting the Waterloo cup on one of the occasions to which he referred, by some strange coincidence all the hares got away, because it was known that a deputation of Members of Parliament was present? What was interesting to me was the baying of frustrated blood lust on the bank opposite.

Mr. McNamara: I understand what my hon. Friend says.

Sir David Steel: The hon. Gentleman said a few moments ago that he held office in the League Against Cruel Sports. I think it was that organisation—he will correct me if I am wrong—that sent hon. Members an anti-hunting video. I took the trouble to watch it and it had nothing whatever to do with organised hunting. It was in fact the repeated release and capture of a fox, being torn to bits by dogs. I wholly oppose that and believe that it should be outlawed under clause 1.

Mr. McNamara: It showed organised huntsmen digging out foxes and putting terriers in and it showed the way in which foxes were treated. I must tell the right hon. Gentleman that the arguments that have been advanced here this morning—about the use of dogs and so on—in favour of hunting are precisely the same

[Mr. McNamara]

arguments that should be used about badger baiting. Why should badger baiting be illegal? It is only people going down, getting out a little animal and putting other animals in to tear it to pieces. What is wrong with that, for goodness sake? Hon. Members should be up in arms and demanding the end of the ban on badger baiting, on bear baiting, on bull baiting. We should be building bigger and bigger plazas in the centre of London so that we can have bull fighting.

That is the sort of logic of the argument that people in favour of hunting use, and that is what they are not prepared to accept, so they hide behind fancy little phrases like "country sports", as though they sanitise the nastiness that is contained within them. Or they say, "If it was really done properly according to our rules, none of this would be allowed." But we all know that those rules are there to put up a facade to preserve something. If there are serious breaches, they fail to act properly in any way against the miscreants, as one can see in what has happened recently to the masters of many distinguished hunts.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I refer to the point that was made by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel). I, too, have seen the video that was sent out, in which a number of long dogs were seen tearing apart a hare.

Mr. Tony Banks: It was a fox.

Mr. Garnier: It is not a very good video, perhaps. The point, surely, is whether the appalling conduct that was seen on the video would be allowable under clause 4, which would allow gangs of men, each with their own dog, to go out and do precisely what the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North is complaining about?

Mr. McNamara: That is not true at all. It would not be allowed. Look at the data contained in that clause.

We have had no real defence of what has been going on. The right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King)—the right hon. Member for two stag hunts—said how deplorable it was at Porlock that the stags jumped on to the roof to escape the dog, how deplorable that they had to go into the sea, how deplorable that they jumped off the cliff. It is very deplorable, but he is not going to do anything about it, because it is one of the nice things about country life that we do not really understand.

Mr. O'Hara: It is colourful.

Mr. McNamara: It is very colourful, but I am sure that that opinion was not shared by the deer in question.

Then we come to what is supposed to be the real reason for fox hunting—to put down pests. Nobody here has attempted to defend hare coursing. Deer hunting has been defended, but no one has explained why it is not necessary to use hounds to control deer in Scotland, where they have the biggest deer herds, or in other places where there are deer—Epping Forest, Richmond, the midlands, coming down from the north into Yorkshire and so on.

Mr. O'Hara: Magdalen college, Oxford.

Mr. McNamara: Magdalen college, Oxford, is a little separate. I understand that the deer are reared specifically for consumption. It is not necessary to control wild deer in any way.

We go to enormous expense to control foxes as pests. Yet we choose the most inefficient way of doing it, even doing it with dogs. The dogs are bred not for their ability to get hold of a fox's neck and twist it quickly and kill it but for their stamina. They do not want the fox to be caught. They want the enjoyment of the chase. If one wants the enjoyment of the chase, there is the drag hunt. To argue that hunting is an efficient form of pest control is really putting logic on its head. The real reason is the pleasure of the chase and the kill. We have seen what has been done by terrier men associated with hunts.

We have seen the evils that many people have been engaged in, despite the passing of legislation: in badger baiting, in the blocking up of holes. We have seen dog fighting continue, as it has done in the East Riding of Yorkshire. All those evils are there and the basis of those evils is that further along the social line there is the attitude that fox hunting is permissible. Because of that, all those other evil, illegal things go on.

If hon. Members say that the Bill is the thin end of the wedge, they are arguing in favour of the return of each and every one of the sports that I mentioned earlier. They would be saying that we could have a good society for badger baiting with elaborate rules to prevent cruelty, and we could do the same for bull baiting and cock fighting, that we could go along with all those things and have a perfectly civilised, organised society. There would be no thin of the wedge, which is the fear of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, the former leader of the Liberal party. There would be a nice, happy sort of society and we could go out of our way to breed tiny, thin, little boys who would be able to go round cleaning central heating pipes.

11.49 am

Mr. John Patten (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on his speech. He is passionate about these matters, and he delivered a passionate speech. I share his slight surprise that the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) has been missing from the Chamber for a great number of speeches. Doubtless he is out being addressed by those luvvies to whom the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) referred, so that they can later talk to each other about their response to him.

Mr. McNamara: The right hon. Gentleman is being unfair to my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). As a former Minister, the right hon. Gentleman knows that, when he used to grace the Front Bench and make speeches, he sometimes disappeared

to do his bit on television and radio. He will probably be far less successful in his career than my hon. Friend will be in his.

Mr. Patten: I do not want to take up much time on this matter.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton spoke well, passionately and clearly, although he got into a frightful muddle when he set himself a trap by speaking about the way in which dogs fall roundly on a rat or a rabbit and dispatch it fairly quickly. He used that argument as though that practice were acceptable, but that is exactly what happens at the end of a fox hunt. I would like the hon. Gentleman to be here to listen to the arguments. It is his Bill, and perhaps his one chance to put a measure into law. He is wrong to prefer the media to the House: he should be listening to the debate.

Having made that entirely bipartisan comment, I shall make four points. They are on my interest, on terminology, on important constitutional implications of the Bill, and on the problem of balance which it poses for our society. I make it clear that I respect the deeply held convictions of hon. Members who support the Bill. I especially appreciate the way in which the hon. Member for Dumbarton made his points.

I shall deal first with my personal interest. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) enjoined us to declare our interest in these matters. I have no interest at all to declare. Neither I nor anyone in my family hunts, shoots or fishes. It must be 25 years since I last concerned myself with anything remotely connected with field sports.

I suppose I should also declare that, as I represent a largely urban and suburban constituency, it is unlikely to be in my political interests to oppose the Bill. However, I am told that, in some politically correct parts of north Oxford, the journal *Country Life* is cling-wrapped and put on top shelves, and it is possible to get *Horse and Hound* from under the counter of newsagents' shops only on the payment of particularly large sums.

Secondly, I shall deal with terminology. I say to hon. Members in all parts of the House who care about animals that, irrespective of whether they are in favour of the Bill, the use of the term "animal rights" is inappropriate. Rights are the mirror images of duties, and there can be no such things as animal rights, since there can be no animal duties. Of course, there can and should be animal welfare, but it is important that we do not drag the correct use of the word "rights" in the human context into the area and arena of animals.

Thirdly, I shall deal with the constitutional issue. The House must face the implications of using this or any other private Member's Bill to criminalise activities in which a substantial number of our fellow citizens regularly and innocently engage, and have done so historically under part of our constitutional arrangements. Such a change should always be covered by the authority of the electorate. In other words, such legislation should be Government or Government-backed, and the Government of the day should take responsibility for it before Parliament and the public.

There are, of course, precedents in this place for all sorts of private Member's Bills which have later effected changes in the criminal law, but that has always been with Government backing. That is an extremely important constitutional point. Many hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens could find themselves involved, prima facie, in criminal activities should the Bill become law.

The Minister and I were new entrants to this place in 1979. If he is lucky enough to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, and speaks in the debate, I ask him to reflect on the substantial constitutional point. He knows me well enough to know that, when I say that I would be very upset if he did not do that in his remarks, I mean it.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend reflect on what might happen if 250,000 people going about their regular daily life were to be regarded as criminals although they did not think they were? Many of their friends would not be prepared to give evidence against them, and that would result in an important law being completely unenforceable.

Mr. Patten: That is why I advise the House to tread extremely carefully on this issue. It should do that not only because of the Bill's substance but because of the wider implications that my hon. Friend mentions.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Patten: Perhaps I may complete the point that I was making to the Minister.

Of course, in his winding-up speech I do not expect my hon. Friend to commit the Government to support or oppose the measure in any way. I am trying to be brief, as I know that many hon. Members want to take part in the debate.

My fourth point is that I advise the House to think carefully about two other matters. First, on the one hand is its duty to protect a plurality of interests and minorities. Secondly, and on the other hand, I advise it to pursue strict logic in looking at issues of animal welfare. As I hope to demonstrate, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North did not follow strict logic. On the first point that I have just made, any country should accept different points of view and should tolerate different values among its citizens, as the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) said so clearly in his liberal speech.

John Stuart Mill warned us against Parliament framing laws which forbid people from pursuing long-established customs, or from destroying natural forms in our society. He felt that the business of Parliament was to protect such spontaneous associations that stemmed from our constitutional freedoms, based on our traditions, and thought that every act should be permitted unless it was forbidden by law. Such ways of life form the stuff of our national life. Equally, my distinguished constituent Sir Isiah Berlin tells us today, a couple of centuries later, that civil society should have a plurality of values.

We should struggle to avoid narrow-minded intolerance, and should resist the temptation to insist that everyone must conform to what a majority opinion poll says, simply because the majority in an opinion poll express a certain point of view on a particular day.

[Mr. Patten]

Of equal importance to the constitutional and philosophical points is the need for logic. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North said that anyone who opposed the Bill must automatically be in favour of the reintroduction of all forms of animal cruelty that were abolished in the past. The hon. Gentleman is right. There is a settlement about how animals may be killed in this country, one part of which the Bill seeks to disturb and then to criminalise.

I welcome the hon. Member for Dumbarton back to the Chamber. Hon. Members must recognise that all killing of animals involves some degree of pain and cruelty, except in the case of sick animals being put down in a vet's surgery. As the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North said, some forms of killing are proscribed by law because, in the view of this place, they involve cruelty.

The Bill picks out hunting with hounds as being peculiarly cruel, and therefore deserving of a criminal penalty. If those who support the Bill think that line through, their arguments must lead them to pursue the logic that all animal killing which involves cruelty should be banned, because all animal killing involves some cruelty and fear.

Fearful birds which are driven over guns and badly shot doubtless feel great pain as they eventually die from their wounds, or are picked up by a dog. Fish on the end of a line doubtless feel the same, and the logic of the Bill demands that the hundreds of thousands of people who shoot and the millions who fish in this country should be similarly strictly treated.

Mr. Duncan: One could not even keep a cat.

Mr. Patten: I speak not of cats today.

Hon. Members should go down to their local abattoir, and they will see animals in the queue with an odd look in their eyes. The animals are conscious that something unusual is probably about to happen to them. It is something unusual—they are about to be killed. They do feel fear, discomfort and pain. The killing of animals always involves shock and pain.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Patten: Many people in this country disapprove of ritual slaughter.

Mr. Banks: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman has made it clear that he is not giving way. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat.

Mr. Patten: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your protection from the terrifying vision opposite. I would certainly never give way to an hon. Member who is dressed in a cinema usherette's jacket.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. In a debate of this nature, it is better for all personal references to be strictly suppressed.

Mr. Patten: I entirely agree, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am deeply ashamed of myself, and I hope that the whole House will accept my apology about the remarks I made about the hon. Gentleman's disgusting jacket.

Many people disapprove of ritual slaughter on account of the alleged suffering involved. I understand and appreciate that feeling, and I believe that more pain is caused to animals who are ritually slaughtered than to animals killed in domestic slaughterhouses. But I do not feel that practices which are central to the lives of our Jewish and Muslim minorities should be banned by this place.

Some who dislike hunting talk of the fear and mental cruelty which may be caused to animals by their being chased. I personally intensely disapprove of the cruel habit of keeping large dogs pent up in city flats, but I do not think that this place has any right at all to seek to outlaw a custom on which many people—often lonely people—depend for companionship or for peace of mind.

The waters represented by the Bill, which has been put forward by its promoters for the best of reasons, are very dangerous. Activities should never be banned because the majority happen to be opposed to them on moral grounds. It must be a principle that the state must not intervene on moral disagreements between different groups of citizens of different sizes.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Patten: Despite the charming jacket which my hon. Friend is wearing, I shall not give way to her, as I did not give way to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). I am just about to complete my speech.

Minorities in the country feel threatened and misunderstood by the overwhelming urban majority. People in the country who hunt, shoot and fish pose no threat to civil society. People in the countryside who pursue country sports pose no threat to their fellow human beings. They receive no state subsidies, and ask for nothing. They pose no danger to the environment, or to the welfare of others. They do not threaten nature in any way. Their lawful activities should be protected by a House of Commons which is properly tolerant of a minority with historic rights in our constitutional settlement.

12.4 pm

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): I wish to relate some personal—and rather horrifying—experiences which occurred when I, as a young boy, had to deal with animals, including some of those mentioned in the debate today.

I remind the House that fox hunting was originally an entertainment for the wealthy of the nation, and it is only in recent times that those involved have been forced to provide justification for the unnecessary cruelty involved in the sport. Despite what people may say, hunting is big business, but it is the relentless persecution, maiming and death of a living creature for money and enjoyment.

With some emotion, I shall relate to the House some of the horrifying acts which I was forced to undertake as a young boy. At the age of eight, I had been left with my grandfather who had been injured in a mining tragedy in a colliery owned by the Duke of Bridgwater and the Earl of Ellesmere. He had been given the job of estate ranger in a tied cottage, where I was domiciled at that age.

Arising out of the household duties—as they were called in those days—I was given the job of looking after and grooming the fox hunters' horses. I was taught how to set snares and traps, and I became aware of the unimaginable cruelty which was imposed on various species at that time. It was commonplace 50 years ago to wring the neck of a pheasant or a pigeon, or to skin a rabbit. Unfortunately, that was the practice of the times. I must say regretfully that we have not made tremendous progress over the years.

I well remember the worst experience I ever had. I was forced to take a spade and bludgeon to death some baby weasels in their nests. I never forget those indescribable screams which rose from the weasels, and after all these years I still imagine that I can hear the haunting echoes of those penetrating shrills.

That dreadful experience was one of the reasons why I joined the Labour party, as I always considered the Labour party to be the natural political home for the welfare of animals. I ran away 48 hours after the weasel incident. I was not arrested, but I was found by the local constabulary just beyond Preston. I was apprehended in a very nice way and placed in what was called Worsley court house, which belonged to my grandfather's employer, the duke. I was chastised and scolded by the local sergeant, and was put on so-called "lighter duties".

I was taught to shoot at the age of 12. In that great area of Worsley woods, I shot foxes, hares, rabbits and birds and anything else that I believed was detrimental to the terms of my grandfather's contract of employment. I remember the first fox I shot, for which I received the reward of a silver threepenny bit.

That was the stage when I began to wonder about blood-letting money. I was a religious young boy and I was disturbed about it. I remember going to confession and telling the priest how I felt. I did not get a very prudent answer; I was told, "Just remember the good that you have done and the evil that you have borne," and to say 10 Hail Marys.

Although I do not always agree with the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), I support his comment that 60 per cent. of all foxes that are shot die a very slow death. We used to dispose of some down disused mine shafts on the colliery estate.

On one occasion, one of the gamekeepers was wounded by a bullet that had ricocheted off a tree. I have to tell the shooting fraternity—

Mr. Colvin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cunliffe: No; this is only the fourth speech since the debate started at 9.30 am. I might give way later.

I say clearly and distinctly to the marksmen that, when thinking about and judging or acting on these matters, if the bullet or arrow were first dipped in the blood of the marksmen it would never reach its target because it would never have left the gun or the bow—because they would then understand the excruciating pain and torment that is inflicted on animals. There should be a greater realisation that it is impossible to minimise the amount of pain, even with the best techniques available.

Mr. Colvin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way; I acknowledge that he speaks with first-hand experience of living in the countryside and being involved with the matters that we are debating this morning.

I want to endorse what the hon. Gentleman said about shooting. He may be interested to know that, a couple of years ago, it was reported by the Cambridgeshire hunt that half the foxes it killed during that season were suffering from gangrene wounds. That underlines how unsatisfactory shooting is as a method of fox control. It shows that hunting can provide a useful way of putting those foxes out of their misery—otherwise, they would suffer a long and lingering death.

Mr. Cunliffe: I am grateful for the first part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, but I fundamentally disagree with his final comments.

Having spoken to animal rights activists and having looked back on some of the things that I did when I was young, I am passionately convinced that all acts of animal cruelty, no matter what the purpose, are despicable, detestable and indefensible in a so-called Christian civilised society, especially if those acts are, as is unfortunately so often the case, carried out in the pursuit of pleasure.

12.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Nicholas Baker): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) on his good fortune in securing the debate today, and on the excellent way in which he introduced the Bill. We have had a wide-ranging consideration of an important issue, with some excellent speeches—to which it is now my duty to respond.

The matter was last debated almost precisely three years ago. The hon. Gentleman is a doughty warrior, and has the stamina one would expect of a long-distance runner. I pay him tribute for the fact that, in drawing up the Bill, he has taken note of some of the concerns which my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Dame A. Rumbold), on behalf of the Government, expressed on that earlier occasion.

The Bill's title describes it as a measure to provide protection for all wild mammals. Specifically, it seeks to protect any such animals from being cruelly kicked, beaten or tortured. The Government have already given considerable priority to that aspect of the law. Our record on the protection of our animal species and the conservation of their natural habitats is very positive, and one that I happily present to the House.

Britain has 48 species of mammal. Those species which are endangered, or which would become so unless conservation measures were taken, are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The mammals covered by the Act include the red squirrel, otter and dormouse, together with all species of bats, whales, dolphins and porpoises which may be living in our territorial waters or migrating through them.

The Act fulfils the United Kingdom's international obligations under the convention on the conservation of European wildlife and natural habitats. The Act has now been supplemented by the European Union's habitats directive. That directive sets out protective measures for wildlife habitats and a wide range of European species

[Mr. Nicholas Baker]

of animals and plants. It has been implemented in the United Kingdom since last year by regulations made under the European Communities Act 1972.

Dr. Spink: Does my hon. Friend accept that the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 does not give adequate protection to badgers because their setts can be blocked? Are the Government intending to resolve that difficulty?

Mr. Baker: The Government have introduced measures on badgers, and I hope that my hon. Friend will acknowledge what has been done. If he has any suggestions for improvements, we would certainly consider them.

The 1981 Act contains provisions for a review of the species covered by the Act and the addition of species where that is necessary in the interests of conservation. Since the Act came into force, there have been two reviews of the animals and plants covered by its provisions. Those resulted in the addition of species as diverse as the sturgeon, the wild cat, six species of beetle and 22 species of butterfly. The next review is due to be completed by the end of 1996.

The Act also specifically prohibits the use of the self-locking snare on any wild animal, and protects a number of particular species, such as badgers, otters and red squirrels, from trapping and snaring in general, as my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Dr. Spink) acknowledged. The maximum fine for anyone found guilty of using an illegal snare is £5,000 for each animal harmed.

The United Kingdom has also acted against cruel trapping methods abroad. We were at the forefront in pressing for the EC regulation covering the use of leg-hold traps. That regulation was adopted in November 1991, and it prohibits the use of leg-hold traps within the Union from 1 January 1996—a prohibition that has already been in force in this country for more than 30 years.

Legislation also exists to control the use of spring traps, which must be submitted for approval and are tested for humaneness and efficacy. Traps must be approved by order in this House. Strict conditions of use are specified, covering the manner of use and the species against which the trap may be used, thus minimising the risks to non-target species. Use of an illegal spring trap is punishable on summary conviction by a fine of up to £1,000.

Similarly, there is legislation governing the use of chemical products to control pests. Before they can be approved for use, products classified as pesticides undergo a thorough evaluation, including an assessment of whether the product is humane in its action. That area of legislation is supported by the Government's campaign against illegal poisoning of wildlife. That campaign publicises the consequences of the illegal use of pesticides and aims to encourage the adoption of legal methods of pest control.

In addition to that strong legislative framework for the protection of mammals, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food continually seeks to develop alternative, more humane methods of controlling pests. Current projects include the development of electric fencing, repellents and conditioned taste aversion, the latter involving tricking an animal pest into associating food with illness. The use of a fertility control agent is also being investigated to control wild rabbits. If successful, the Ministry will consider whether fertility control can be used against other pest species.

The United Kingdom is also a party to the convention on biological diversity, signed by more than 150 countries at the 1992 earth summit conference in Rio de Janeiro. The UK's response, "Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan", published in January 1994, sets the goals of conserving and enhancing biological diversity in the UK, and contributing to the conservation of global diversity. A range of costed targets for key habitats and species, including many mammals, will be published by the end of this year.

That shows that considerable protection already exists for wild animals. Hare coursing was raised earlier. I remind hon. Members that Parliament has only recently taken action to discourage illicit hare coursing, which we all agree is a great nuisance. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 has increased the applicable penalties under the Game Act 1831. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the argument will welcome that.

Of course, many circumstances remain in which wild mammals are not subject to any form of legal protection. Some of those concern animals that are regarded as pests in some rural settings, but even so-called pests are not altogether unprotected—the prohibition of the use of gin traps and self-locking snares applies, no matter what the species of animal. It is testimony to our enviable concern for animals that that should be so. It is clear, both from the speeches in this debate and from the postbags that Members of Parliament receive, that a substantial body of opinion is in favour of extending more widely the protection afforded to wild mammals of all types.

The Bill seeks to provide protection for any wild mammal from certain specified forms of ill-treatment—being cruelly kicked, beaten or tortured—but there is one particular circumstance for which it is claimed above all others. As the hon. Member for Dumbarton said, one of the principal aims of the Bill is the prevention of fox hunting and other field sports. That is the issue of principle at the heart of the debate. It is the aspect that really interests members of the public.

As the hon. Gentleman will be well aware, strong views are held by people on both sides of the hunting debate. Some people regard it as unspeakable barbarity; others argue that field sports are a proper and necessary part of maintaining the balance of nature. We have heard that argument in the debate today. There are two separate issues: the ethical question whether hunting should be allowed, and the utilitarian question whether other provisions in the Bill would have a harmful effect on pest control. On the latter point, I have to tell the hon. Member for Dumbarton that the Government have considerable reservations about the effect of that aspect of the Bill both on farmers and on rural communities.

The Bill would impose an onerous obligation on everyone in rural communities, making it extremely difficult to control agricultural pests effectively. As I said earlier, I recognise that the hon. Gentleman has taken note of some of the reservations on that score expressed by the Government in relation to an earlier Bill moved by the hon. Member for Kingston upon

Hull, North (Mr. McNamara). The licensing system in the Bill remains a problem. The licensing arrangements envisaged for controlling the use of snares would impose onerous obligations on farmers and gamekeepers, and would make it difficult to control agricultural pests.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton quoted statistics about lamb mortality and the need to control foxes. I should like to stress that the known number of lamb deaths attributed to foxes should be set against a background of widespread fox control by farmers. Foxes can cause serious local problems for farmers. The Ministry of Agriculture takes the view, therefore, that foxes need to be controlled to minimise lamb losses.

I hope that I may be permitted a personal observation. Having been brought up on a farm, I am well aware of the damage that predator foxes can do in taking piglets, lambs or fowl on cold winter nights. Farmers must be permitted to deal effectively with agricultural pests. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will consider that aspect if his Bill proceeds to Committee.

Snares are needed where other methods of pest control are ineffective or impracticable. They are needed, in particular, for the control of foxes at night, where night shooting is considered unsafe, or for the control of rabbits above ground. There is also the risk that, if the use of snares requires a licence, that could encourage the use of more dangerous and illegal alternatives, such as poisoning or unapproved spring traps.

At a time when the Government are trying to reduce bureaucracy, the Bill seeks in some respects to increase the burdens on farmers, many of whom, as I know well, feel that they are already burdened enough with rules and regulations to follow and forms to fill in.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Am I right in thinking that, if the Bill goes ahead as it stands, every gardener who has a mole in his garden will have to apply to my hon. Friend's Department for a licence to snare it?

Mr. Baker: That accords with my reading of the Bill, but the hon. Member for Dumbarton will have heard the criticism.

Such a system would also have resource implications for the Ministry of Agriculture. That would need to be funded. I am sure that, if individuals were asked to pay for licences, it could lead to a general increase in unlicensed and illegal control activity.

As I said earlier, much of the debate today has centred on the question of hunting. There are strongly held views on each side of the debate, and the Government respect the sincerity with which they are held. Moral debate on a subject like this is right and good. What is not acceptable is any attempt to influence the outcome by force and intimidation.

There have been protests and demonstrations that have been far from peaceful. That is one of the reasons why the Government introduced measures in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to deal with trespass, which were aimed at preventing other people from going about a lawful activity.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose—*

Mr. Baker: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not give way, as I am just about to conclude my observations and I do not wish to hold up the debate any further.

Mr. Colvin *rose—*

Mr. Baker: I shall not give way to my hon. Friend, for the same reasons.

The implications for law and order mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) will have to be considered by the Standing Committee, if the Bill gets that far, and certainly by the Government as part of that process. I welcome the important, and in many ways philosophical, contribution that my right hon. Friend made to our debate.

As hon. Members are aware—

Mr. Colvin *rose—*

Mr. Baker: I apologise again to my hon. Friend for not giving way, as I wish to conclude.

The Government have consistently adopted a position of neutrality towards all matters affecting field sports. We take the view that participation in field sports is a matter of individual conscience. The Government will maintain that tradition of neutrality today. All hon. Members who wish to express a view one way or another on Second Reading—that includes members of the Government—will be perfectly free to do so, but the licensing provisions and the implications for the control of pests have little to do with the Bill's central issue. If the Bill proceeds to Committee and beyond, I must tell the House that the Government will have to oppose that particular aspect.

I am pleased to have been able to inject a neutral note into this passionate debate.

12.29 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) on using the opportunity to allow the House to debate this subject and on the excellent way in which he made his speech and outlined his arguments.

Every hon. Member is aware of the public's widespread concern about cruelty to animals and hunting. Yesterday, I and a few other hon. Members of all parties were present when a petition signed by more than 1 million people was presented to No. 10 Downing street, calling for an end to hunting. It had been organised by the campaign against hunting.

I shall take this opportunity to spell out where the Labour party stands on the issue. First, the Labour party supports the protection of wild animals from the infliction of deliberate cruelty and, in that sense, we fully endorse clause 1. I very much hope that it will receive support from a majority in the House.

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

As for hunting, I can do no better than read out a letter sent by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) to people who have inquired about the Labour party's position. He stated clearly:

"The position of the Labour Party on this issue is firm. A Labour Government will make Parliamentary time available for a free vote on the abolition of fox hunting, deer hunting and hare coursing with dogs."

Of course, if the House voted for abolition, the necessary legislation would be introduced. We recognise that there is a moral element to the issue and that hon. Members of all parties would want to make their position clear in a free vote. I must make it clear that the Labour party is not opposed to responsible shooting or angling and we have never proposed to ban them.

There are issues other than the banning of hunting that a Labour Government would want to consider—for example, the appropriateness or otherwise of activities such as hunting with hounds through public lands such as Forestry Commission land in the New Forest and the impact that it might have on nature conservation and leisure activities.

We would also want to be absolutely sure that Ministry of Defence resources—public money—were not being spent on hunting with hounds and that people in the armed services who wished to hunt with hounds did so at their own expense, not at the taxpayer's expense.

We recognise the need for pest control and wildlife management in the countryside, but hunting with hounds is the least appropriate means of achieving that. There are many reasons why people go hunting—socialising, the enjoyment of the chase and a love of horses but predator control certainly is not one of them.

There is so much independent academic evidence on how ineffective fox and stag hunting is as a method of control that I do not believe even the blood sports lobby believe that argument any more. We should put into perspective the impact on livestock of foxes in particular. I can think of at least one Conservative Member who is a bigger danger to sheep than all the foxes in Lincolnshire, and I think hon. Members know to whom I am referring.

As some hon. Members have said, more sheep are lost from hypothermia than from fox predation. Research by Aberdeen university showed that in areas of Scotland where there are no foxes, such as the island of Mull, sheep mortality is generally the same as in other areas. Dr. David McDonald recently issued a report—with the full co-operation, incidentally, of the British Field Sports Society and hunts—that showed the ineffectiveness of controlling foxes with hunts. Professor Stephen Harris of Bristol university has done a great deal of work on the subject.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: The point I put to the hon. Gentleman, as I did when the House previously discussed the issue, is that the proper control of foxes means not the abolition of foxes but keeping a proper balance of foxes in the countryside. Hunting contributes greatly towards that.

Mr. Morley: There is not the slightest bit of scientific evidence to back that assertion. The fox population is self-regulating and the impact of hunting on it is negligible. There are far more sophisticated methods of fox control. I am glad that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has given a great deal of considered thought, as the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department said, to non-lethal methods, such as conditioned taste aversion. I understand that the Game Conservancy Trust is also carrying out research on that. To assume that chasing animals around with dogs is the only way to control pests is an outdated attitude with no basis in scientific fact.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): What has not been stated in the House this morning is that hunting folk place great emphasis on keeping nature in balance. The hon. Gentleman says that there is no evidence that fox populations are kept in balance by hunting folk. Why, therefore, are there more foxes in areas where there is more fox hunting?

Mr. Morley: The reason for that has nothing to do with hunting. It has to do with food availability and the distribution of fox populations. Hunting has had no bearing on that.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend knows all about the Bill. In answer to the point made by the hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Clifton-Brown), there are probably more foxes in London than there are in any of the areas that we are discussing. Foxes run around getting food from fast-food restaurants and scavenging in bins. There are no hunts in London of which I am aware; I certainly have not seen any in round recently.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I have seen more foxes in Southwark than I have seen in Lincolnshire.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morley: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman. Recently, he took the opportunity to wreck the Protection of Calves (Export) Bill, promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), which dealt with the export of veal calves. He therefore does not deserve the courtesy of being allowed to intervene; he need not bother to ask again.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morley: I will give way in a moment.

Most people hunt for the enjoyment, as we must recognise. The vast majority of people who hunt are indifferent to the fate of the fox. A minority go because they like killing animals and they like to do things such as pitting terriers against foxes. They do not care much about cruelty or suffering. That is the dark side of hunting, which the Bill rightly seeks to address. That is why the National Federation of Badger Groups supports the Bill. It is aware of a catalogue of incidents in which fox hunts have gone beyond night stopping and have stopped up setts in a way that is both illegal and detrimental to the badger population. As has been mentioned, it is no surprise that the majority of badger baiters who have been convicted are supporters of or are connected with fox hunts.

There are no moral or intellectual arguments to defend hunting. As the arguments in favour have been demolished, the blood sports lobby has been forced into rural apartheid. It says that people who do not live in rural areas do not understand the situation and that the opposition to blood sports comes from people living in urban areas. That is not true. The majority of the rural population are opposed to hunting. NOP found that 60 per cent. of people who were asked whether they favoured fox hunting were opposed to it. That figure applies to purely rural areas. A huge referendum organised by the Worcester Referendum Society involving 25,449 people, of whom 10,500 lived in rural areas, showed that 71.8 per cent. wanted hunting with hounds to be banned.

Mr. Garnier: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of the recent survey conducted by the *Leicester Mercury*, which covers my constituency? It found that 70 per cent. of respondents favoured the retention of hunting and that only 29 per cent. favoured banning it.

Mr. Morley: Many surveys have been conducted by recognised, independent and professional pollsters, showing the opposite opinion among people in rural areas. It is clear that the vast majority of people do not support blood sports, even those who live in villages.

Hon. Members and others argue that people are opposed to blood sports because they do not understand the issue—the same arguments were put in the poll tax debates to justify a policy that was wrong, illogical and cruel. The same people—some the same Conservative Members—argued that people opposed the poll tax because they did not understand the argument. The truth is that people understood the argument all too well, as indeed, they understand the argument against hunting all too well.

Let us consider some of the people who live in rural areas, support fox hunting and use the argument that they have some special knowledge. Hon. Members may have received a very interesting circular, as I did in 1992 and again today, called "Let's Learn About Fox Hunting and Stag Hunting" from a Mr. Barton from Somerset. I am always willing to learn, listen to people's arguments and read the facts. Indeed, I was very interested in some of the arguments put in favour of stag hunting by Mr. Barton.

One of Mr. Barton's arguments is that herbivores, including red deer, need predators to keep them wide awake and watchful. There we are: if it were not for packs of dogs, these deer would fall asleep and slump over. He argues that hounds are needed to stop deer overgrazing the same piece of land. These must be really dozy deer who have to be moved on by dogs, otherwise they graze circles of land and starve to death in them.

Mr Barton argues that dogs are needed to disperse the deer and thereby act as a safeguard against inbreeding. If the deer cannot move on when they have eaten all the grass, too much inbreeding is probably already going on.

We recognise, of course, the need for proper deer management and for deer management committees, but even the most sympathetic study of deer hunting, which was carried out recently by the National Trust, described deer hunts as "not vital" in controlling deer.

In the last debate on the Bill dealing with wildlife protection, Sir John Farr, former Member of Parliament for Harborough, told us that if hunting were banned 1 million horses would have to be put down, when there are only 600,000 horses in the country. I presume that he was planning to import a few and to put them down in sympathy with the issue.

Mr. Garnier: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morley: I will in a moment.

In the last debate, the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) told us of a constituent who saw seven foxes surrounding one lamb. Fox gangs are now going around; packs of foxes. That goes against all known biological studies and evidence. In addition, an unnamed farmer in a press report has been accusing people from towns of rounding up urban foxes and releasing packs of them in the countryside. I am sure that those foxes would be somewhat confused. Indeed, the good side to that is that the only chicken at risk is Kentucky Fried Chicken since the foxes come from an urban area.

My favourite quote is recent. Mr. Jonathan Young, editor of *The Field*, wrote in *The Times* that a Mr. Davies of Lampeter, in Dyfed, lost 18 lambs in 1993 and seven years ago witnessed an attack. Mr. Davies said:

"The lambs were prancing in the spring sunlight when a Macnab—that's our name for the fox—leapt over the fence, jumped on a lamb's neck and started sucking its blood."

This is new—a vampire fox. The Welsh have to go one extra. Mr. Davies continued:

"I shouted and Macnab disappeared."

I do not know whether it turned into a bat and flew away. If that is the strength of rural arguments and an example of their expertise, I really think that they need to be better.

Mr. Garnier: I am the first to admit that the hon. Gentleman is making a very witty little speech, but I would be grateful if he would be a little less unkind to my predecessor, Sir John Farr. We all know that that was a wrong figure and to seek to build an argument based on a slip of the tongue such as that, against a man who is not here to defend himself and who knew more about the countryside than, I dare say, the hon. Gentleman, is really not on.

Mr. Morley: I certainly do not wish to disparage Sir John Farr, who I know quite well. I sat on the all-party conservation group with him. I am quite prepared to match my credibility on countryside conservation and naturalist matters against that of Sir John Farr or anyone else in the House.

Dr. Robert Spink: While the hon. Gentleman is quoting to the House, is he aware of this one:

"Whilst it undoubtedly accounts for a number of foxes,"—

we, the Ministry, do

"not consider fox hunting to be a major controlling factor in the fox population."

That quote comes from a letter sent by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 17 February 1994.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman has made a very good point and he puts the whole issue of fox predation

[Mr. Morley]

into perspective. I do not dispute that there are localised problems with foxes, but, overall, I do not think that foxes are a real problem.

It is clear that chasing animals around for a hobby does not make the person who does that an expert on biology, ecology or population dynamics. Many of the articles by hunt supporters that I have read are just depressing for their lack of knowledge. The real reason for hunting is revealed by what we might call the intellectual wing of the blood sports lobby—although perhaps I am being a little generous—in an article by Mr. Roger Scruton. He recently wrote:

"Hunting, like football or music or poetry, is a good in itself, a fulfilment of the human spirit, a heightened experience of life which needs no justification."

I believe that it does need justification. However, I am grateful to Mr. Scruton because he is absolutely honest: people go hunting because they like it and for no other reason.

Mr. Colvin: The hon. Gentleman has produced some splendid stories and I hope we can hear a few more because they are grist to the mill of the debate. Earlier, he referred to my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and his reference in an earlier speech to a lamb surrounded by seven foxes. I saw a similar thing this year.

As the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) will be aware, a vixen will take her litter out and teach them how to kill. It just so happens that earlier this year I lost all my chickens. Admittedly, I did not have very many—I only had 12—but I lost them all because the vixen had come in with a litter of five cubs and she taught them how to kill my chickens and they made a very good job of it.

Mr. Morley: Perhaps the vixen should have taught the hon. Gentleman how to lock his chicken house before he goes out. That might have been more useful. At the time of year to which the hon. Member for Devizes referred, the foxes would have been breeding and would not have had their cubs out.

I want to return to the issues in defence of hunting. In some ways, I am sorry to spend so much time on the issue of hunting, but as hon. Members have recognised, that is the most controversial part of the Bill and it requires some attention and arguments.

We hear the argument about predator control, which I believe I have dealt with in some detail. There is also an argument about landscape protection, which we have heard before, and the role that hunts play in that regard. Such arguments may have been relevant in the past, but that still did not stop the loss of 150,000 miles of hedgerows, 50 per cent. of our ancient woodlands and 97 per cent. of our hay meadows. Given the changes in agriculture and agricultural support, there are now enough mechanisms to protect our landscape and to enhance it without the role of the hunts.

We have also heard a quite contradictory argument today. On the one hand, it is argued that hunts must control foxes while, on the other, we hear that hunts protect foxes and maintain the population. I do not believe that that argument stands up to examination. There is also the issue of deer management. We need effective deer management, but hunting deer with hounds is not one of those management techniques.

The argument about jobs has not been raised at length today. I do not deny that jobs are involved in hunting, but I believe the number is somewhat exaggerated. I also believe that those jobs could be protected by a switch to drag hunting.

In 1983, the Cobham report estimated that the total number of people employed in hunting was 3,333, which presumably included indirect employment. In 1992, the people who produced that report increased the figure to 9,500. That was a somewhat startling increase and I could see no real basis for it. In 1994, Penny Mortimer, writing in *The Guardian*, claimed that hunting supported 30,000 jobs. That report appeared on 1 March and it shows a tremendous increase between 1992 and 1995. On 2 March, in *The Times*, Frederick Forsyth claimed that 35,000 jobs were supported by hunting. It is the most amazing growth sector. I wonder whether the Secretary of State for Employment is aware of such increases. In fact, I wonder whether such people are using the same calculations as the Secretary of State is using.

There is also the humane argument. I just do not accept that hunting animals with hounds is humane. It is banned in respect of domestic animals and pet animals. The argument is made in that respect. Hunting is deliberately excluded because it was recognised in the past that those who wanted to keep it going had to make sure that it is excluded from the law. Most foxes are run to ground and are killed by terriermen. No one will convince me that putting terriers down fox setts to fight the animal—the fight may continue for a considerable time—and then dig it out, is a humane way of dispatching a fox.

Hunts cause considerable damage and destruction—roads are blocked, gardens invaded, stock scattered and killed, pets savaged and killed, railways blocked, and great inconvenience is caused to people who live in rural areas, as I have read in many letters to rural magazines and rural newspapers.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Morley: I should like to make progress.

Some people who have dared to complain, incidentally, have been threatened. Mr. Chris Eley, a sheep farmer in Wales, with whom I have had correspondence, has had dead foxes hung in his trees for having the cheek to complain about the hunt constantly trespassing on his land.

The Government's response was to protect hunts with the aggravated trespass legislation and, with it, all the associated threats to civil liberties. I find it depressing that a Government who thought it important to pass legislation that currently protects members of the Holduness hunt, who recently waved the severed head of a fox on a stick at peaceful protesters, also refused to introduce legislation to deal with racially motivated attacks. It is a matter of wrong priorities.

We have heard about choice and minorities. Some Conservative Members who have used such arguments have not been known for defending minorities. How far do we take the argument of choice? Does it apply to

pornography or taking drugs? One could certainly apply it to defend sports such as dog fighting and badger baiting.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: If the hon. Gentleman really is concerned about the harassment of racial and other minorities, will he accept that the new offence that the Government have introduced will protect not only racial ethnic minorities but minorities of all kinds? Therefore, the offence that we have introduced goes very much wider than the hon. Gentleman would have wanted.

Mr. Morley: I accept that the Government have moved on the issue of racial attacks, following criticism from the Opposition and following criticism during the passage of the Criminal Justice Act 1993.

Let us not try to pretend that there is any other reason for hunting other than the inflicting of prolonged pain and stress on animals as part of entertainment for their human tormentors. I do not believe that most hunts see it that way at all. I know that, for many people, hunts provide a social function. I live in a rural area and I represent a rural constituency. I have constituents who go hunting with the local hunt. Like the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), I have had representations from people on both sides of the argument.

I have had discussions with constituents who are pro-hunters, in a very civilised, thoughtful and polite manner. They know my views and I know theirs. I recognise and understand the social function that hunts play, particularly in areas in which there is little opportunity for social interchange. But there is no reason whatever why the social side—the traditional side—cannot be maintained by existing hunts simply switching to drag hunting. It may even attract more participants and boost rural employment.

All hon. Members know of the strength of public feeling on the matter in all parts of the country. We will shortly vote on the Bill. It is an opportunity for the whole House to show whether it supports an end to all forms of cruelty. I note the letter of the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) in *The Times* today, in which he says that he does not intend to vote against the Bill. What has changed from 1992, when my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) introduced an almost identical Bill, which was voted down by the hon. Member for Wimbledon and other hon. Members? Attitudes have changed, and the pro-blood sports lobby no longer has the majority to defeat such a measure, and it does not want to demonstrate its weakness. I find it a little strange that they now say that they will accept clause 1, when they could have accepted a similar measure in 1992.

If the Bill secures a Second Reading it will be the first time that the House has approved such a measure to ban hunting. That will be a clear and unequivocal signal that the House wants to see the end of hunting and other acts of cruelty to wild mammals. Whatever the Bill's progress in Committee, people will have noted the decision, and the Labour party will certainly call on the Government to recognise and to honour that decision taken in a free vote of all Members of the House.

Whatever our differences may be, we all know that the days of hunting and of inflicting deliberate cruelty on wild animals are numbered. In the not-too-distant future people will look back in amazement at the fact that in the latter part of the 20th century the House allowed people to inflict deliberate cruelty and stress on wild animals in the name of entertainment.

12.55 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (City of London and Westminster, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on making a good speech in his own cause, and I thank him for making the Labour party's position clear—although the principle of ostensible neutrality appeared clothed in committed raiment.

If I may say so, I rather resented the hon. Gentleman's attitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), because a Labour Government Whip approached me in 1978 to encourage me to make as long a speech as I wished to prevent progress on a Labour private Member's Bill on live animal exports, and I seem to hear the grinding of a double standard.

I shall seek to emulate the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir David Steel) in the brevity of my remarks. This is an important debate, and one for which we should thank the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall). It addresses the relations between animals and man, in continuance of a dialogue that has gone on for centuries.

I speak as an urban Member, and there is no doubt that urban areas and rural areas see such issues differently. I remind the House of the lines by Seamus Heaney:

> "'Prevention of cruelty' talk cuts ice in town
> Where they consider death unnatural,
> But on well-run farms pests have to be kept down".

Community is the vogue word of the 1990s. Both major parties have entries on the charge sheet against them for what they have done to urban communities since the war. The Bill is addressed primarily towards rural communities, and that places a special responsibility on urban Members to use their powers sensitively, because it is not the lives of their communities that they are dealing with. I still recall a constituent of my father's in Hampstead, when there was a Ministry of Agriculture bounty on squirrel tails, writing to seek reassurance that the squirrel suffered no pain when its tail was removed.

I have no personal direct experience of fox hunting, but I do not come to the debate as an entire novice, because I served as Government Whip on the Committee on the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 when it was a Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) referred to that Act, and I regard its Committee stage as a model of intelligent and frequently bipartisan commitment, with more than 100 hours of unguillotined debate of a high and expert standard.

I do not seek to make a political point when I say that the previous Labour Government and the Lib-Lab pact had not been prepared to grasp the nettle of that legislation. I simply say that it is possible for a Government of any party to take such matters forward after widespread consultation with rural interests.

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

Much is made by the lobbyists of the weight of opinion polls on such matters, and those have been cited today. But, to refer to another series of great House of Commons setpiece occasions, similar opinion polls on capital punishment do not seem to interfere in Members' minds with the dictum of Burke, that a Member's first duty towards his constituents is that of his own judgment.

However, in my view, the opinion polls threaten the judgment of the lobbyists who produce such Bills. I mean no discredit to the hon. Member for Dumbarton when I say that I do not regard him as the Bill's principal architect. Those who know the House know that, with private Members' legislation, the simpler the Bill, the more likely it is to get through. By contrast, this is a Christmas tree of a Bill, with something for everybody.

As this greatly reduces its chances of passing through the House, one must return to the judgment of the architects. I am left with the uneasy suspicion that the Bill has been laden with material to maximise public support from those who are perhaps unfamiliar with our ways in this place.

Like sin and motherhood, we know where we are when it comes to cruelty. We are all against it. Some might regard the motivation of the Christmas-tree strategy as akin to speciousness, and believe that the heart of the Bill remains fox hunting.

I shall let my hon. Friends and hon. Members from rural constituencies address the problem of the use of hounds in upland farming areas. The Bill's proponents must face that highly technical issue, which the Bill seems entirely to ignore. It is a pivotal point of the proposed legislation. It hangs on the issue of the fox being a pest. Anyone who has gone back with the debate over the centuries knows that it is a central factor.

It is crucial for those who argue that fox hunting has a key role in the sense of community in rural areas to demonstrate that that sense of community is not being secured at the price of unnecessary and unwarranted cruelty to the fox.

I pass to those more informed than myself the conservationist question, which is whether the demise of fox hunting would lead to more violent deaths and lingering deaths of foxes than is the case now. I have a sense in the ecology of the countryside that there is an unspoken concordat, of a kind familiar to the nation in other matters as well, that, if fox hunting is available as a vehicle of pest control, farmers will leave foxes to the hunt and not take matters into their own hands with the gun.

Considerable strides are being made in the rigorous philosophical argument about animals' rights, if such they be. The predecessor of the present dean of Westminster, in my constituency, chaired a working party that produced a most thoughtful pamphlet. The university of Oxford has appointed a professor of theology with responsibilities concerning animals. Professor Peter Singer has given the subject a new philosophical prominence. I doubt, however, whether any of those parties would say that the intellectual debate is yet concluded and resolved. That is important, because reason as well as emotion must be satisfied in the debate.

Anthropomorphism has played its part in this century. My grandfather's work as an artist, which was highly anthropomorphic, was praised by fellow artists for the way in which he introduced human features into his animals. He was personally responsible for persuading Frederick Warne and Company that it should publish Beatrix Potter when her work had been rejected by eight other publishers. I remark in passing that neither in the "Tale of Mr. Todd" nor in "Jemima Puddleduck" does the gentleman with foxy whiskers emerge as a hero. Nor is it chance, perhaps, that he was omitted from a central role in "The Wind in the Willows".

It is a strain that goes back further. The most distinguished historian that the relationship of man and the natural world has ever attracted says of Darwin's "Descent of Man" in 1871 that some of his arguments in defence of the proposition that the mental difference between humans and the existing higher animals was one only of degree seem naively anthropomorphic.

The defenders of rural communities must make their point in the context of the fox, but those who seek to interfere with the countryside's ecology have a duty similarly to prove their point rigorously.

Of all the nation's sports, hunting has enjoyed the greatest literature after cricket, in Fielding, Scott, Surtees, Trollope, Somerville and Ross, Conan Doyle, Kipling, Saki, Sassoon and Masefield. I mention that because one of the more thoughtful postcards that I recieved prior to the debate was from a constituent who referred specifically to Sassoon, that most sensitive of war poets. He was critical of the war condition, yet he wrote "Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man". My constituent quoted him to make the point that hunting practices have changed since his day.

The opportunity to explore such issues is one of the reasons why we must be grateful to the hon. Member for Dumbarton for bringing forward the Bill. I reiterate my recognition of the importance of the debate. His Bill should be considered in Committee.

Our countryside is one of the country's most important national and natural glories. Those who live in it have been its custodians and trustees for centuries. I do not seek to put on the mantle of Dr. Pangloss in saying that those of us who enjoy and admire the countryside are immensely grateful to them, for I realise that we live in an imperfect world, but the centuries-long achievement is substantial. Urban colleagues present today might feel that we would rest less easily if our custody and trusteeship of urban areas were compared with that which the countryside has enjoyed.

1.14 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): The right hon. Member for City of London and Westminster, South (Mr. Brooke) made a speech rich in literary references, which is unusual in this place but befitting of a former Secretary of State for National Heritage.

The way in which anthropomorphism is projected in our literature, in paintings, and the way in which we treat animals is quite objectionable. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would agree. It seems absurd that

beautiful creatures in the wild, such as bears, can be exterminated and their bile tapped and used for medicine purposes in the far east, yet we cuddle bears; we look on the fluffy bear as being a wonderful soft toy. Many of the magnificent creatures of the wild will soon perhaps be represented only in the form of fluffy toys that people can cuddle and admire. We need to admire the real thing and not its pale and fake imitation.

There was much in the right hon. Gentleman's speech with which I could go along, but it seemed that the essence of his speech was, "Oh Lord, make me virtuous, but not yet." I must take issue with him on the matter of attacking animal welfare organisations—the RSPCA, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the League Against Cruel Sports, and many others—for the way in which they have focused and channelled public opinion. They have not fabricated it. They have not invented it. They have just been the conduits whereby the real passion that exists in favour of animal welfare and in concern for animals can be directed towards us.

In the end, all the compassion, the feelings, the determination to see change, can end up only here, with legislation. That is precisely what the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) is trying to do. I congratulate him, as have other hon. Members, and am proud to be a sponsor of it, with hon. Members of all parties. That needs to be emphasised time and again. It is not a party political issue. On this occasion there may be more Opposition than Conservative Members supporting the Bill, but it is only a matter of progress. As Conservative Members diminish in number, we expect our support to grow. Indeed, in many ways there has been a change in the nature of the Conservative party. Conservative Members have taken different attitudes in recent years to fox hunting, hare coursing and deer hunting, and we welcome that. It is pleasing to see that we have a good cross-party coalition on important issues such as this.

It is natural that the Bill centres on something as controversial as fox hunting, but it is not just about fox hunting. It is also about hare coursing, deer hunting and a whole range of other activities, which, clearly, Opposition Members or abolitionists would consider totally unacceptable.

Mr. Bellingham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Banks: Not at the moment.

The important part of the Bill, of course, is clause 1, which has much support, It seems quite unbelievable to hon. Members and people outside that sadistic perverts are free to abuse animals such as hedgehogs, squirrels and foxes, and are able to walk free when they are taken to court. That outrages public opinion and we must address it. I am glad that the Bill will do that.

Mr. Bellingham: The hon. Gentleman says that the Tory party is changing. I suggest that the Labour party is changing as well. He has obviously seen the leaflet "Leave country sports alone" which contains the names of Baroness Mallalieu, Penny Mortimer, Lord Donoughue, Denis Forman, Jeremy Isaacs, Anne McCluskie, John Mortimer, David Puttnam and Richard Course. They are all prominent socialists who support hunting. Surely the Labour party is changing as well.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman has certainly changed his line. He comes from a family that boasts a distinguished assassin, although we must exonerate the hon. Gentleman's predecessor because his action was jolly useful in that he assassinated a Tory Prime Minister in the House of Commons. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) reminds me that the hon. Gentleman has just read out the complete list of supporters of "Leave country sports alone". The House will notice that the list did not contain one elected Member of Parliament.

I do not take easily to lectures from Baroness Mallalieu who failed to get elected in successive elections and got herself into the other place only by an act of patronage. I do not need her to lecture me about democracy and on winning votes. I say to a successor of a famous assassin that we have ways of dealing with the enemies within, although I hasten to add not in the way that his predecessor did.

Dr. Spink: The hon. Gentleman speaks eloquently, as he always does, about cruelty and torture perpetrated on animals by hooligans and nasty elements in society. Does he agree that when such cruelty or torture is perpetrated by an educated so-called elite in the name of entertainment and for self-gratification, it falls short of the standards that society should expect?

Mr. Banks: I certainly agree, although cruelty knows no class barriers. It is not confined to ill-educated people but can be seen at all levels in our society, which is tragic. One cannot condemn just one area of activity and not admit to others. The hon. Gentleman is a good supporter of the Bill and I am proud to call him a friend in the debate. He knows the case very well.

I have always felt that, in the matter of animal welfare, people who can be cruel to animals can in the end be cruel to human beings as well. It lowers one's resistance to cruelty. I do not say that a person who goes hunting will necessarily turn into a serial killer but he is more likely to become one than if he followed lepidoptery, for example, although I would not want to push that one too far. I suspect that I am getting into dangerous areas.

It is possible to be concerned about animal rights and human rights. I am always dealing with the problems of the east end. I admit that I do not have a large amount of mail from people in the Stratford area or Forest Gate saying, "Let's ban fox hunting." I get many letters, but most of them are about housing, unemployment, social security and so on. I am obviously concerned about those issues, far more than I am about fox hunting, but there is enough in my background and in that of hon. Members who are on the abolition side of the argument to enable us easily to encompass human rights and animal rights. Perhaps being protective of animal rights makes us more protective of human rights.

I do not want to speak for too long because I want to hear other contributions. I have spoken many times on the issue and I doubt that this will be the last time. However, I should like to address one or two of the points that have been made. There are no great

[Mr. Banks]

arguments to be won in the debate. They have been entered over the years and they have been won. The only thing missing has been victory in the House, and I hope that we shall do something about that today.

I say to hon. Members who are in favour of fox hunting and blood sports that we who are opposed will never go away. Our determination is absolute and I feel that, in the final analysis, our determination will be stronger than that of the supporters of the sport. I feel that their support is waning all the time and, that being so, they should know that they are facing implacable opponents who will simply never concede. Public opinion is moving in our favour all the time. I shall not go over the figures, as we have heard them, but public opinion is clearly and massively on the side of the abolition of blood sports. There can be no argument about that.

Some of the arguments which have been adduced today in favour of fox hunting—such as that it is a traditional sport—have been used by every reactionary in history as justification for some abhorrent activity or another which has been under attack. No doubt similar arguments were used to support slavery, and they were certainly used in the argument about electoral rights for women.

The abolition of "traditional activities" such as bear baiting, dog fighting, badger baiting and cock fighting could, according to that argument, have undermined civilisation as we know it. But this House decided that those activities should be declared illegal, and I suspect that this House will do the same for fox hunting, deer hunting and hare coursing in due course. We laugh at the arguments used in support of the activities which have been described today, and I suspect that we will be laughing at the arguments put forward by the supporters of blood sports in the years to come.

On the matter of pest control, it is nonsense to argue that fox hunting is effective as a control of the fox, even if one accepts the definition of the fox as a pest. Only 10 per cent. of foxes are killed by fox hunting. It is true that hunts introduce foxes into areas where they hunt, and there are examples of the bagging of foxes and the providing of artificial earths. I believe that there were no foxes on the Isle of Wight until they were introduced for people to hunt.

The right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King)—who may have gone with his right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) to find a suitable tailor to purchase a jacket as splendid as the one that I am wearing—said that there were no red deer on Dartmoor, where there is no hunting, but that there are red deer on Exmoor, where there is hunting. Ergo, hunting means that deer exist. What the right hon. Gentleman did not know—I have since had a chance to check this—is that all of the herds of red deer were exterminated by the Duke of Bedford when he brought his stag hounds there in the late 18th century. In other words, there are no deer on Dartmoor because they were killed off by the hunters. That is the answer to the silly point made by the right hon. Gentleman.

Another argument put forward is that hunting is not cruel. Tell that to the fox, I say. When one has seen foxes being dug out by the terrier men after they have introduced the terriers into the place where the fox might have bolted, one will know that cruelty is involved. It is also ridiculous to say that there is a quick kill by the hounds. Those hounds are not natural killers, and if one really wanted to kill foxes, a pack of rottweilers would probably be far more effective than fox hounds. There is a mass of evidence to show that the fox does suffer.

The last absurdity of all is to say that fox hunting is not as cruel as other forms of control. That argument is intellectually bankrupt. It is like the argument that if we do not supply arms to Saddam Hussein, somebody else will. No one can seriously argue that fox hunting is kind to foxes. To say that there are crueller ways of killing a fox is rather like saying that it is better to beat an old lady with a brick in a sock than to hit her with a straight brick. It is absurd to say that fox hunting is not cruel. If any of the supporters of fox hunting had been chased across a field and ripped to pieces, their arguments might be totally different.

The right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon—who is now diligently looking for such a splendid jacket as mine—gave us a tuppeny-ha'penny lecture on John Stuart Mill. To say, as he did, that if we believe in animal welfare we should move against all forms of cruelty and suffering is absurd. First of all, if we proposed a Bill which said that, the right hon. Gentleman would be the last to vote in favour of it. Secondly, it suggests that if we cannot do everything, we should do nothing. This Bill is about a range of cruelties. It neither heralds nor precludes further legislation. Any other proposals on any other country sports will be subject to parliamentary scrutiny and consent. It is not the thin end of the wedge.

The Bill stands on its own merits and it should be judged accordingly this afternoon. I believe that it will be because, in the end, anyone who can actually take pleasure in seeing an animal tortured and killed is not a person who has a place in a so-called civilised society.

1.20 pm

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) on introducing a Bill that many people, especially in rural England, would be surprised to find is not already on the statute book. I thank him for his tribute. It is a pleasure to be a sponsor of the Bill.

I join the hon. Gentleman in the tribute that he paid to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), who has acted as Whip on the Bill. I endorse the comments about the courteous way that he has handled such a contentious and sensitive matter.

I intend to be as brief as possible for two reasons. First, a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House are still waiting to make their contributions. It is important that as many observations as possible, from both sides of the argument, are placed on the record. Secondly, we are all conscious of the fact that following this debate will be one on the Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill. People outside the House would be quite astonished if that Bill were not also given a hearing today.

We are debating the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill, not a fox hunting Bill. It deals with stag hunting, hare coursing and the protection that many people are

astonished to discover is not already afforded to hedgehogs, squirrels and other mammals. As has been said, it is not a party political issue. I am saddened that an answer given in the House yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was construed as prime ministerial opposition to the Bill. That is a mischief by the media. People outside the House will not be aware of our conventions, so we should state very clearly that it is not the convention for the Prime Minister, or, indeed, the Leader of the Opposition, to be expected to be in the Chamber on a morning like this.

The Bill undoubtedly has all-party support both inside and outside the House. Equally, it has all-party opposition both inside and outside the House. That fact needs to be recognised. I want to place my pedigree on the record, simply because there appears to be a slightly arrogant assumption in some quarters that those of us who support the Bill are townies who know nothing and care nothing about the countryside.

My upbringing was in rural Dorset. I do not pretend to be a huntsman, but I have followed the hunt on foot and I have been to meets. I represent a largely rural constituency. My farmers in north Thanet do not hunt. When there is a pest control problem, they shoot—and they shoot cleanly. I want to deal with that aspect of the control of foxes, which I recognise must be controlled. Before Christmas, my right hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) was faced with a distressed member of an ecclesiastical community. The nuns of Minster in Thanet lost their entire chicken coop in one night as a result of predations by a fox, which clearly was not just hunting chickens to eat but was killing for pleasure.

There is a need to control, but even the British Field Sports Society claims that only 3.6 per cent. of all foxes are killed by the hunts. It is a vastly inefficient way of controlling where control is necessary. I cannot accept the argument that it is a humane method. My farming community lamp and shoot. The gamekeepers in most of rural England are highly professional and can shoot straight. It is slightly perverse that those who promote shooting when it comes to pheasants and grouse, and claim—with some justification—that the majority of shots kill cleanly, should then claim that the same highly qualified, highly professional people cannot lamp and shoot foxes equally cleanly. Clearly, there are poor shots, but there are poor shots that wing pheasants and pigeons. Equally clearly, on occasions people shoot foxes badly.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Gale: I shall not give way. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) has intervened about five times. He has virtually taken more time in interventions than I shall take in my speech.

Mr. Leigh: I have intervened once.

Mr. Gale: I shall not give way because I am conscious of the time. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to make his speech.

We are told that one third of foxes that are chased by the hunt go to earth. That much-vaunted clean kill from one bite to the back of the neck does not occur. There is a long tortuous process of digging out. Hunt terriers are used. They often grab the frightened animal underground by the muzzle and drag it out. We know that that animal is then swung around, hung up by the tail and killed with a spade. That is not a clean kill. It is not a nice way to exercise necessary control. I cannot accept that such a practice is viable in this day and supposedly civilised age.

Stag hunting is no way to control the stag population. I accept that that population needs culling. We are told that that is done anyway at the end of a hunt by a rifle shot. We also know that that is not always the case and that hounds maul stags. The pro-hunting argument is that a huntsman comes and shoots a stag when it is at bay. Surely the way to cull a stag is with the rifle. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) referred to the loss of the stag and of the red deer populations on Dartmoor. The British Association for Shooting and Conservation says:

"The increase in numbers of deer has brought about the responsibility of managing their populations. Deer stalking has played a particularly important role in such management programmes and has contributed to the fact that Britain has a very healthy population . . . whereas 30 years ago deer were considered to be relatively scarce throughout most of lowland England".

As the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, deer on Dartmoor were not lost as a result of the absence of a hunt; they were taken out through bad management and bad hunting. Scotland's deer population is controlled not by the hunt, but by stalking and by the gun. I have no objection to that.

A number of my hon. Friends have said that the Bill is the thin end of the wedge. I do not think that that has happened hitherto, but I agree with the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who said that this issue should be taken on its merits and as it stands on the face of the Bill.

I do not accept that, somehow, hunt saboteurs who employ violent action, which I abhor, will transfer all their allegiance to fishing or to shooting. Even if they were to do so, I and many people like me who are opposed to hunting animals with dogs would not support legislation to outlaw fishing or shooting. How can I stand here and say that I believe that the way to control foxes and deer is with the rifle if I were then to say that I would try to outlaw shooting?

The vast majority of people believe that the time has come to end the hunt for the kill. Perhaps surprisingly, the rural economy has only been referred to peripherally. That argument has been used consistently, but I am slightly surprised that hon. Members who support the hunt have not played it harder today.

Mr. Leigh: May I intervene now?

Mr. Gale: I am sorry, but I have said that I shall not give way.

I do not accept that the rural economy, which is vital to the country, would suffer in the way that some people have described. As has been said, there are alternatives to hunting to kill. Drag hunting is a viable alternative. It already happens in several places, it has a growing allegiance and it has a number of distinct advantages in addition to the obvious animal welfare advantage. In a drag hunt, a trail laid by man starts from a given point, traverses pre-planned land over pre-determined obstacles that can be designed and suited to the riding ability of those chasing; and it can end at

[Mr. Gale]

a given point. It removes the many complaints received by Members of Parliament to the effect that hunts trespass undesired on people's land without their permission.

If drag hunting takes over, I believe that the jobs of the farriers, saddlers and smiths, which are much more at risk as a result of the various proposals to alter the training procedures for those crafts, and the jobs of grooms, stablelads and kennel men and maids will be safe. If such hunts continue and increase in number, another problem that has not yet been referred to—that of the fallen cattle and sheep which are currently disposed of by the hunt—will be taken care of.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside, in one of his many interventions, rather gave the game away. I paraphrase but he basically said that there would be problems if rural sports could not self-regulate. I suggest that, in a number of very well-publicised instances, rural sports have failed to self-regulate, but some of my hon. Friends have chosen to gloss over the mistakes—I put it no more strongly than that—made by those practising hunting in particular. As a result, many of us believe that the Bill is vital. It is a measure whose time has come. It is wanted by the overwhelming majority of people in the country.

Mr. Bellingham: But not in the countryside.

Mr. Gale: I hear what my hon. Friend says and I hesitate to quote yet more polls, but that does not seem to be the case. The farming community in my constituency does not hunt. The farmers do not wish to do so and I do not believe that they wish to have the hunt on their land. I believe that that is true for vast areas of rural England.

As I said, this is a measure whose time has come. It is a measure that is wanted. If it does not reach the statute book as a result of parliamentary procedures, today's vote will give a clear indication of the mood. I believe that hunting animals and tearing them to pieces with hounds will go the same way as bear baiting, badger baiting and cock fighting—into the dustbin of history.

Mr. Garnier: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) has research assistance provided by the political animal lobby. I do not criticise him for that but I wonder whether he should have mentioned it in his speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): If the hon. Gentleman has declared such an interest in the Register of Members' Interests, it should have been declared this morning if it was relevant to the debate which, on the surface, it would seem to be.

Mr. Morley: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am a little surprised at your ruling. The research assistance is of no financial advantage to me and is not necessarily of relevance to this debate. It involves general research support. I have declared it quite properly in the Register of Members' Interests and, had I thought that it was relevant to today's debate, I should most certainly have declared it today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The judgment of relevance lies entirely with the hon. Gentleman.

1.33 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) on producing this important Bill, and on his excellent presentation of the arguments earlier in the debate. I am proud to be a sponsor of the Bill, which covers a subject dear to my heart.

I shall address the issue by means of the only two pieces of correspondence I have had from supporters of fox hunting—fox hunting is the aspect of the Bill that I shall address—amid the hundreds of communications in support of the Bill I have had from constituents. The first letter was from a lady from the farming community—her address contained the name of a farm—in the west country. It was a courteous letter, and I now regret the fact that my response was perhaps not as courteous as her first approach.

The lady approached the issue in terms of the benefits of fox hunting for her children, and she made a number of points. She first pointed out that her children had learnt discipline and responsibility from handling and caring for horses. My father kept cart horses in the docklands of Liverpool so I spent all my young life on what was, in effect, an urban farm. I assure hon. Members that close proximity to two dozen magnificent cart horses—I still think that cart horses are among the most magnificent animals in this country—taught me much about respect for horses and about discipline. Fox hunting was not necessary for me as a means to that end.

Secondly, the lady pointed out the social benefits for her children from fox hunting. She said that, together with three generations for her family, her children met a wide variety of people in the scattered rural community through fox hunting. That may well be the case. The only response I could make was that it was rather sad if fox hunting was the only social outlet she could find.

Thirdly, the lady argued that, through fox hunting and riding with the hounds, her children had access to parts of the countryside that would otherwise have been inaccessible. That surprised me. I do not see why it is necessary to hunt a fox when riding a horse to have that experience. I should have thought that concentration on the chase might detract from that otherwise worthy aspect of horse riding.

Fourthly, the lady argued that riding with the hounds and the chase taught her children familiarity with the fact of death in animals. I have always felt that that was important. I have always pointed out that fact out to my own children when they have had pets who have died. It is important that children realise that death is a fact just as much as life is a fact. It is important that they realise that pets will die and that they will have new pets.

Fifthly, the lady said that her children learned about the natural phenomenon of the violence of animal against animal through riding with hounds. I learned

much about that from my urban farm childhood, as I have described. Surely fox hunting is different; the difference has been referred to by a number of contributors to the debate this morning. The difference with fox hunting is the involvement of humans in the phenomenon—humans hunting animals for pleasure and exploiting that natural phenomenon for their own pleasure. Even if the foxes were eaten, I would still condemn hunting, as I pointed out to this worthy lady.

The lady's final argument was that hunting was not as cruel as people made out, because the death of the fox was instantaneous. That point bemused me. The only response I could make was that it was either a truism or nonsense. When a living creature dies, it is alive one moment and dead the next instant. What matters in fox hunting is the prelude to death for the hunted fox, which is long, exhausting and terrifying.

The good lady wrote back to me and, again courteously, acknowledged the points that I had made in my letter and added one further point, because I did not convince her. She added that, from her experience of observing hounds in the chase, the foxes regularly did not seem especially bothered. In fact, she said that, many a time, she had seen a fox—a dog fox, presumably—stop and cock a leg in the middle of the chase. I can think of one very good reason why a dog fox might do that in the midst of being chased by a pack of hounds.

The other letter from a participant in country sports was more peremptory and more hostile, and made a number of different points. I shall cite several. I was criticised for objecting to fox hunting but not objecting to shooting for sport. I have strong reservations about shooting for sport as well, but my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton adequately covered that point. As long as shooting for sport is properly controlled and licensed, it can certainly play an important role in culling, and keeping wild animal populations under control.

The correspondent said that snares, shooting and the laying of poison are more painful to foxes than being hunted and torn to pieces by hounds. I must acknowledge that certain forms of snaring, shooting and poisoning can cause intended and unintended pain and death to intended and unintended victims, but the only response I can make is that perhaps there should be more control of such activities or more search for more humane methods of entrapping and disposing of pray and pests.

In the view of this correspondent, a Government do not have the right to regulate and control the freedom of individuals. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) would agree that this is the constitutional point; the tuppence-ha'penny lecture—I would not have given tuppence for it—given by the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) on John Stuart Mill. My hon. Friend covered that point reasonably well.

I simply add that I certainly believe that it is an important duty of Government to regulate the freedom of individuals in so far as it may be damaging to the freedom and welfare of others and to the welfare of the environment—flora and fauna. I would certainly include in that duty the duty of regulating the ability and freedom of others to cause distress, suffering and, in many cases, mutilation of a noble animal, all in the cause of sport.

The correspondent finally suggested that I should be concerning myself with the extinction of thousands of other species on the planet, rather than concerning myself with foxes, which, she assured me, were multiplying and do very well without my help. That is a non sequitur.

Talking of non sequiturs, I have sat through this debate since 9.30 am being more bemused than amused by the number of non sequiturs which I have heard from Conservative Members. I shall start with the right hon. Member for Bridgwater, who is no longer in his place, who said that anybody from an urban environment, such as myself, who does not have experience of country life, does not have the right to participate in a such a debate.

That interested me—*[Interruption.]* That was said by the right hon. Member for Bridgwater and by many others. The logical development of that argument is that practically all Conservative Members would be precluded from participating in any debate or legislative procedure in respect of unemployment or state education. However, they do take part in such debates.

Mr. Garnier: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Hara: No, I am aware of the time, and there may be time for another hon. Member to speak.

The right hon. Member for Bridgwater also said that deer herds survive in certain parts of his constituency precisely because hunters keep them there. That was like saying that muggers are responsible for keeping little old ladies with handbags on the streets. I could not see much difference between the two arguments. However, perhaps the Tory party and that most famous of all ladies with a handbag might fit that analogy.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. O'Hara: No, I will not give way, because I am conscious of the time.

Various Conservative Members have referred to the thin end of the wedge argument. That argument was dealt with adequately by several of the Bill's supporters, and most admirably by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara)—as hon. Members would be aware if they had been fortunate enough to be present for that part of his contribution.

The right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) made a number of philosophical points in his little lecture. One which interested me was that we should not talk about the rights of foxes, as animals do not have rights because they do not have duties. If one is going to be philosophical, do not babies and mentally handicapped adults have rights? Indeed, do former Secretaries of State who no longer have duties have no rights?

The right hon. Member for Northavon (Sir J. Cope) seemed to have no problem with rights. He said, "Why should we concern ourselves with the rights of the fox, but not the rights of the lamb?" That is another non sequitur. If the right hon. Member for Northaven were in his place, I would tell him that I found his speech

[Mr. O'Hara]

a regrettably unworthy concatenation of non sequitur, logical elision, sophistry, fudge and slur upon animal welfare movements.

Several hon. Members have made the point that the time has come for this Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) mentioned the history of reform and how it starts. There are many instances in history of how reforms which we now take for granted occurred in rather the way in which this reform—which has its time, and will come—is going to come about.

I can do no more than refer to the editorial in today's *Guardian*, which put the point so eloquently. It said that perhaps society is now at last ready for this reform. Just as we now recognise that there is no place in society for slavery, bear baiting and female circumcision, perhaps it is time that we recognised that there is also no place in our society for fox hunting.

1.48 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I am grateful for catching your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall make what I hope will prove to be by far the shortest speech in the debate. I wish to clarify my position on the issue, for the benefit, at any rate, of my constituents, a large number of whom have written to me about it in recent weeks. I speak as an urban resident with a suburban constituency, who holds absolutely no brief for cruelty to animals or, indeed, to people. We need to recall that our first responsibility is to our fellow citizens here and around the world.

The Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill flies under somewhat misleading colours. For example, the title is a bit misleading. The real intentions of the people who provide the driving force behind the Bill outside the House go much wider and deeper than the Bill.

If the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and others had wished only to protect wild mammals, as the title suggests, they could have urged on Parliament, in the available legislative time, ways of making the protection of foxes, stags, hares and other animals legally more entrenched as protected species. That route might have been more worthy of consideration. In fact, I suspect that the real objective of many proponents of the legislation outside the House is, first, to outlaw hunting, as has been said, and, secondly, after a decent interval, probably to have a go at shooting and fishing. As a layman, I wonder where it will end.

The emotive expression that is used in such debates is "bloodsports". It will be within hon. Members' recent memory that there have been some very tragic events, which go under the heading of "bloodsports", in the boxing ring in the east end of London. I regard what happens to human beings as, in many ways, much more consequential than what happens to animals. Indeed, I refer to other national institutions such as the grand national. From following that sport, I know that horses fall at enormous fences and have to be shot and put down. Very often, before that happens, they break their legs or even their backs. They can suffer enormous pain.

Mr. Graham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Forman: No, I shall not give way because I am trying to make a brief speech.

However much expert evidence is adduced on both sides of the argument, it boils down to a clash of cultures, a clash of sentiment and a clash of emotions. It will be difficult, therefore, for the House, if the Bill is given a Second Reading and if it is considered in Committee, to deal with those issues as rationally as they should be dealt with. The cause of rationality has not been helped in any way by the extravagant and almost dishonest aspects of some of the propaganda that I have seen in the national press recently by the proponents of the Bill. They seek to use the old technique of guilt by association to frighten people into writing to Members of Parliament about the issue.

I am very wary of the way in which the matter has been approached, which is why I want the Bill to be considered more closely in Committee, clause by clause. Therefore, if there is to be a vote, I intend to vote for the Second Reading. There are elements in the Bill, such as clause 1, with which hon. Members can comfortably agree, but the House should be aware of the implications of the Bill. Some subsequent clauses would create a number of new criminal offences and impose extra burdens on the police. I should like to know from the proponents of the Bill—perhaps later—the extent to which they have consulted chief police officers and others about those aspects.

We bring the law of the country into disrepute if we extend the criminal law into matters in which it does not properly belong or if the invasion of the law is too detailed and too specific. We must take account of the fact that we remain—

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forman: No, I am sorry.

We remain a law-abiding community, largely because people agree freely to abide by the law. It is not evident that the Bill would help that process. For that reason, there are aspects in clauses 10, 11 and 12 which could bring the law into serious disrepute.

I agree with my right hon. and hon. Friends who have drawn attention to the great anthropomorphism in the Bill, which is out of place in legislation. I was much struck by the article by Frederick Forsyth in *The Times* yesterday, which other hon. Members will also have seen, and I shall quote a paragraph from it, because it hits the nail on the head:

> "The mainspring behind the conversion of millions to hostility towards foxhunting is anthropomorphism—which means two things: the assumption by humans that wild animals share the same standards, criteria, attitudes and fears as we do, and a presumption that we can judge the worth of a wild animal by whether we think it is pretty or not".

Those are cautionary words, and I hope that if the House gives the Bill a Second Reading it will bear in mind the serious risks and consequences of such a measure being passed in an anthropomorphic frame of mind. The House should be cautious about introducing

legislative bans that would extend the criminal law into areas where it is unlikely to be accepted by a large and significant minority of the population.

1.55 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I think that I can make a speech even shorter than that of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), but as I am a sponsor of the Bill and greatly welcome the initiative of the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) it is important that, like the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), I make clear the view of my party, as opposed to the view of some of my right hon. and hon. Friends. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] We have a difference of view, and it is encouraging for those of us who support the banning of hunting that in the parliamentary party the number who share that view is growing all the time, and that the party as a whole has consistently voted to support a ban on hunting with hounds and to extend the Protection of Animals Act 1911 to cover wild mammals. Like other parties, we recognise that individual Members will be free to vote as a matter of conscience, unwhipped on the party line.

As an urban Member I also warn the House that people should not presume that urban Members either do not have rural backgrounds, do not understand such matters—or do not represent many constituents who understand them—or that there is not the same coincidence of interests on both sides. I spent my whole life in villages until I was an adult. Hunts met in front of my home, and I went beagling when I was a teenager. I have as much authority to speak on such matters as Members representing rural parts of Britain.

Opinion polls are not determinative, but they are relevant and helpful in informing us of the mood of the public. Support for the Bill and all its contents is certainly growing. As someone who trained as a lawyer, I think that the Bill is well drafted, and deals with exemptions carefully and well. I do not think that it can be criticised as a wide measure that will be difficult to enforce.

The key question appears to be: is it appropriate that we as a Parliament should legislate to ban something that a minority think an appropriate form of activity?

Mr. Duncan: Exactly.

Mr. Hughes: That is the issue, and we must always be careful about imposing the views of a majority. I understand that entirely.

The minority views, such as those of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir David Steel) are honestly held. [HON. MEMBERS: "Liberalism."] The question is: what does that liberalism mean? Where does it stop? What activities are unacceptable?

When we try to answer those questions in connection with the Bill we must first ask ourselves what our responsibility is as human beings, and as stewards of all that has been created for our enjoyment. We are the most intelligent mammals; we are given the responsibility as stewards of creation, and we therefore have to decide how to apply the principle of stewardship to wild animals.

If we ask the same questions we may get different answers if we apply them to shooting and fishing—and I shall explain why. Three questions flow from that definition. First, do we need to kill foxes for food? That is one of the reasons why people have killed animals in the past. They have done so to provide food for human beings. It would seem that the answer is no. There is no direct case for killing foxes with hounds for food.

Secondly, do we need as a matter of stewardship to intervene to ensure that foxes are not predatory and to curb their predatory characteristics where they are harmful? It is a more debatable question but it is more easily answered because there are various ways of dealing with the predator fox.

Mr. Duncan: Ways that are worse.

Mr. Simon Hughes: No. The argument is, of course, whether the other ways of dealing with the fox are better or worse.

If we assume that we do not allow or encourage animals to set on other animals, arguably the less dangerous, less problematical and less harmful course is to shoot and not to allow hounds to chase to kill.

I move on to the third question. We are stewards, and is it appropriate for stewards to take a course that is justified on the basis of recreation?

I take the view, Mr. Deputy Steward—you are a slightly more senior steward than the rest of us, Mr. Deputy Speaker—that the answer to the third question is no; there is no recreational justification for countenancing such activity. It is justified only if it is the only, or by far the better way, of dealing with the predator fox. The arguments seem overwhelmingly in favour of outlawing fox hunting with hounds rather than supporting it. I appreciate, of course, that others take a different view. We shall, no doubt, debate the issue.

The Bill is not the thin end of the wedge because there will be other debates about shooting and fishing. They are activities that are primarily entered into for food and not for dealing with predators or for recreation.

Over the passage of time, what is acceptable as an activity changes. Rural activities have changed as all human activities have changed. Boxing used to be bare knuckle; it now takes place with gloves and helmets. It may be even more constrained in future. We must judge whether we have reached the stage in our development when it is compatible with the civilisation to which we aspire to go hunting with hounds. I and those who sponsor the Bill believe that it is no longer compatible with our level of civilisation and development to countenance fox hunting. The stewardship that we exercise should lead us to say that fox hunting is not an activity that should continue. It should be outlawed, and the Bill, with all its clauses, should be given a Second Reading and placed on the statute book.

2.2 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): I suppose that I should declare an interest immediately. I have fox hunted all my life—50 years. I am an occasional contributor to the principal magazine on hunting, "Horse and Hound".

[Mr. Nicholas Budgen]

I represent a constituency which is urban and suburban. It has no farmland. I have no doubt that a majority of my constituents are at least vaguely disapproving of the continuance of hunting, although there are significant minorities. For example, one of my constituents is the master of a local pack of beagles. A quite significant minority of my constituents engage in rural sports of all sorts.

Our discussion has been mainly about hunting. The debate is about the role of a minority in our society, which the House should be concentrating upon. We are fortunate in that the view of the Labour party was made extremely clear by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley). It is no longer in a position of neutrality. The Labour party, no doubt with a few minority interests, is significantly and overwhelmingly against the continuing of hunting. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that everybody agrees, because I am sure that that view will be widely noted. I deal with plenty of people who come to me and say, "There is only one reason why I am going to vote Conservative at the next election—because you are more likely to retain our rural sports." Let me say, as a good party member, that I know that that attitude will change nearer the general election.

Mr. Terry Dicks (Hayes and Harlington): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a good idea to have all the huntsmen with their glasses of sherry sprayed and given a 10 yd start on the foxes, on foot? Let us then see who enjoys the sport.

Mr. Budgen: The important point—it was properly raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten)—is: what should be the attitude of the House and the nation towards a significant minority? I contend that, most of all, the House should ensure that legislation, particularly criminal legislation, enjoys the consent of the nation. The quarter of a million people who now hunt do not feel themselves to be doing anything morally reprehensible. They do not believe themselves to be criminals, and it is difficult to see an important distinction between them and those who shoot—some half a million people a year. It is also rather difficult to see an important philosophical difference between them and the 3 million or 4 million people who fish.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Budgen: May I finish?

The only way in which the rights of minorities in our society can be protected is by the procedures of the House. We have no written constitution. We have no Bill of Rights. The supervisory role of the European Union does not yet extend to telling us how minorities in our country are to be dealt with. It is only by the proper adherence to the procedures of the House that we protect the rights of minorities. The worst legislation—for example, the Dangerous Dogs Act 1989—that ever goes through the House is legislation that ignores the proper procedures of the House and that is said to be popular or is supported, for example, by the *Daily Mail* or *The Guardian*.

Let us not have legislation by the *Daily Mail* or *The Guardian*. If the majority of the people of this country can persuade the one quarter of a million people who go hunting that they are doing something that is morally reprehensible, that is one thing, but I say to my hon. Friends, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) and for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), that, whatever else we do, let us keep to the procedure for private Member's legislation. Let us not have the talk that arose from the House yesterday about "We was robbed."

The procedure for dealing with private Member's Bills is designed to protect minorities. It is a proper and important constitutional safeguard, and until the majority can persuade the 5 milljon or 6 million people who engage in field sports that they are doing something morally wrong, which should be made a crime, they should be allowed to continue to carry out field sports.

Mr. Garnier: My hon. Friend will realise from his own experience that many of the people to whom he referred hunt in my constituency, and, indeed, in Leicestershire. Does he agree that they should be protected against legislation by post card?

Mr. Budgen: We want legislation neither by postcard nor by referendum if we can avoid it; nor do we want legislation by any form of public opinion poll. We represent people through the procedures of the House, which are the distilled wisdom of our forebears. Let us stick to that.

2.9 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I think all hon. Members would agree that our attitude towards wildlife should be to respect its habitat and preserve species. I represent the rural area of north Lincolnshire where there are three hunts: the Brocklesby, the Burton and the South Wold. Those hunts not only employ large numbers of people and are vital to the rural economy, but their very existence ensures that the fox as a wild species is preserved. Farmers view the fox as a predator. If it were not for hunting there is no doubt that the fox population would be severely depleted and might eventually be wiped out in rural areas. If the House is united, as it is—

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow) *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House proceeded to a Division:—

Mr. Alex Carlile (*seated and covered*): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that Tellers are to be assumed to support the side for which they tell? Is it in order for a Division to be called for entirely tactical reasons by those who are opposed to the cause for which they are telling? Nobody who shouted "No" has expressed any opposition to the Bill. The cries of "No" were by those who support the Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As far as the Chair was concerned, the Noes were shouted and accepted.

The House having divided: Ayes 253, Noes Nil.

Division No. 94] **[2.10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Amess, David
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Ms Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mouth E)*
Austin-Walker, John
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Boateng, Paul
Bowden, Sir Andrew
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bright, Sir Graham
Brown, N *(N'c'tle upon Tyne E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, D N
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(South Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coffey, Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Covy SE)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Bryan *(Oldham C'tral)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham, H'dge Hl)*
Day, Stephen
Denham, John
Deva, Nirj Joseph
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dykes, Hugh
Eagle, Ms Angela
Enright, Derek
Etherington, Bill
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Forman, Nigel
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Garrett, John
George, Bruce
Gerrard, Neil
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Peter [Portsmouth,N]
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike
Hanson, David
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hayes, Jerry
Heppell, John
Higgins, Rt Hon Sir Terence
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Horam, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley North)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Robert G *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Glenda *(H'stead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Sheff'd, H)*
Jamieson, David
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn and D'side)*
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Lynne *(B'ham S O)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd, SW)*
Jowell, Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross,C&S)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Lpool Bdgn)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfedder, Sir James
Knight, Greg *(Derby N)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
Lynne, Ms Liz
McAllion, John
McCrea, The Reverend William
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maddock, Diana
Mahon, Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Merchant, Piers
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Alfred *(Wy'nshawe)*
Morris, Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Norris, Steve
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, Mike *(N W'kshire)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Oppenheim, Phillip
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L
Pope, Greg
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prentice, Bridget *(Lew'm E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Co'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Chris *(Is'ton S & F'sbury)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Spellar, John
Spink, Dr Robert
Squire, Rachel *(Dunfermline W)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Dr. Gavin
Sumberg, David
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy *(Southend, E)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Townsend, Cyril D *(Bexl'yh'th)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, Rt Hon Sir Harold
Walley, Joan
Ward, John
Wareing, Robert N
Welsh, Andrew
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Sw'n W)*
Williams, Alan W *(Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Wright, Dr Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin McNamara and
Mr. Edward O'Hara.

NOES

Nil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Colin Pickthall and
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.20 pm

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North-West): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

As time is limited, I want to be sure that I give the Minister time to respond. The Bill is supported by the Carers National Association and by many prominent charities and voluntary organisations. I believe that it has and deserves the support of the House.

The aims of the Bill are, first, to give carers—many caring around the clock for people with Alzheimer's disease and other serious conditions—the right to have their own needs assessed by local authorities. Secondly, it will enable those local authorities to have the power to provide support and services. I am sure that all hon. Members who have met carers know that many of them are in desperate need of that support.

I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Health for the way in which we have been able to engage in positive discussions with both him and with civil servants. None of us wishes to play politics with carers; this is an opportunity for the House as a whole to show its support, regard and recognition for carers.

Politicians often call for greater responsibility among families and citizens. I believe that the carers of Britain, who number 6.8 million, are among the most responsible citizens in this country. If politicians condemn irresponsibility from time to time, they must also recognise responsibility. I have been to Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England—including Croydon—and I have met many carers. I have a high regard for them. I am struck by the modesty of their demands, given the immense burden of care that they shoulder on behalf of all of us. They are responsible citizens, who have conducted a highly responsible campaign about their needs.

We need one more act of responsibility, and that is for a united House of Commons to make a responsible decision to support the Bill.

2.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Bowis): I congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Wicks) on his good fortune in securing a place in the ballot. That has enabled him to introduce this measure. I thank him for his kind comments in opening the debate. I thank everyone who sped through the Division Lobby to enable us to have time for at least a few words on the Bill.

This occasion takes me back to a date in 1990, when, as a Back Bencher, I first had the opportunity of moving a Private Member's motion after success in the ballot. On that occasion, I chose to raise the issue of disability. Central to my speech on 29 June, which I have re-read, was the issue of carers and their needs, so I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has chosen that subject.

I think back to a date in February 1991, when I introduced my own private Member's Bill, supported by a researcher by the name of Pitkeathley, who is not unrelated to Jill Pitkeathley, whose organisation, the Carers National Association, received a tribute from the hon. Gentleman. I share in the tribute to that organisation and to Jill Pitkeathley. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he has worked at the measure.

I believe that the Carers National Association has done well by the carers of this country. I am pleased and proud that the Government have been able to support it and other caring organisations. They provide advice and support for carers. In considering this issue, we should first pay tribute, as the hon. Gentleman did, to the carers. There are an estimated 7 million informal carers, as he describes them. Without their support for people in need and who are vulnerable, frail and disabled, this country would not be such a good place in which to live.

Those people in need would have a life that was not as full or rich as that provided for them. Of course, carers take on burdens willingly. Society should support them so that they can do what they want to do: to go on caring. When I meet carers around the country, time and again they say, as I am sure they have said to the hon. Gentleman in recent weeks, "Don't take away this responsibility for caring. I don't want to lose it. I just want a bit of help to make it possible. In particular, I want a break."

That is why I am pleased to welcome the principles behind the Bill. They seek to put into statute what the Department for Health has been trying, through guidance, to bring about as best practice. I welcome that.

Textually, the Bill needs amendments—I know that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that.

Mr. Wicks *indicated assent.*

Mr. Bowis: I am pleased to have his acknowledgment now. The Bill needs textual amendments to achieve what he is seeking and what the Government support. For example, the issue of young carers is important. I have personally taken up that issue. I have seen young carers struggling to go on caring, and to have a full and fair education and other opportunities as children. We must, however, consider the way in which the Children Act 1989 can support them, as well as the way in which the Community Care (Residential Accommodation) Act 1992 can support their parents.

The definitions of a spouse and of an informal carer perhaps need to be widened. I pay tribute to the people we are seeking to support, who give their love, time and care to someone they love. They do not always receive thanks in return. Sometimes they suffer irritation. Sometimes it is worse—they can come to the end of their tether and end up in tears in the middle of the night.

A carer may be looking after someone after a long and happy marriage, which is ending with the husband or wife no longer recognising the carer because of mental frailty. It is the "give me a break" message that we are trying to respond to today. That is why the Government introduced the Community Care (Residential Accommodation) Act, with its special place for carers' needs. That is why we support voluntary organisations that give support and advice to carers, why we have announced a further £30 million for

respite care in the coming year and why I am pleased to support the principle of the Bill. I look forward to discussing it with the hon. Gentleman in Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you could advise me how to get a Home Office Minister to explain to the House the treatment of an asylum seeker—Sita Kamara—whose case has already been raised this week.

Why was it necessary to send such large numbers of police into Campsfield house last night to take an 18-year-old who has been on hunger strike to Heathrow airport to try to deport her against the strong advice that has been received? I believe that her welfare and safety must be considered, and the Home Office should be made to explain to the House why it is treating her in this way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman knows what tactics to use. He has used one, but it is not one on which the Chair can rule.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

PROTECTION OF ANIMALS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 17 March.

COMMUNITY CARE (RIGHTS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Morris): Second Reading what day? No day named.

MEDIA (DIVERSITY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 30 June.

WATER CHARGES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 17 March.

WELFARE OF CALVES (EXPORT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 30 June.

PROTECTION OF CALVES (EXPORT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 21 April.

TOBACCO PRODUCTS LABELLING BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [17 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate to be resumed what day? No day named.

TOBACCO SMOKING (PUBLIC PLACES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 July.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (REAFFIRMATION OF SOVEREIGNTY OF UNITED KINGDOM PARLIAMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 14 July.

[Hon. Members]

PRISONERS (RETURN TO CUSTODY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 17 March.

NATURAL DISASTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 17 March.

INSURANCE COMPANIES (RESERVES) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Heald.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee; reported, without amendment.

Motion made, and Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 75 (Third Reading), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, without amendment.

LAND REGISTERS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 17 March.

SOUTH AFRICA BILL *[Lords]*

Ordered,

That, in respect of the South Africa Bill *[Lords]*, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That the Speaker shall—

(1) at the sitting on Wednesday 8th March—

(i) put the Question on the Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Howard relating to the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1995 not later than Seven o'clock; and

(ii) put the Question on the Motion in the name of Secretary Sir Patrick Mayhew relating to the draft Appropriation (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 not later than Ten o'clock; and

(2) at the sitting on Thursday 9th March put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Tony Newton relating to Broadcasting not later than one and a half hours after their commencement.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Two Bills have been given a Second Reading today, and one has been given its Third Reading. The two Bills are now due to go into Committee. The Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill has the Government's support. It would be hypocritical of the Government, therefore, not to assist in terms of ensuring that the Bill goes into Committee.

There is a queue of Bills waiting for their Committee stage at the moment. Is there anything that you can do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to assist hon. Members so that Bills such as the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, the Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill and the Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill make progress?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I understand the hon. Gentleman's feelings, but the answer is no.

Parliamentary Questions

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dr. Liam Fox.]*

2.35 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I am grateful for this opportunity to highlight the increasing inconsistency in the way in which Ministers choose to answer questions put to them by hon. Members.

My concerns about the subject were raised initially when, in January this year, I tabled a series of questions to the Department of Transport concerning safety on the London underground. They were simple questions, asking for information on the number of broken escalators on the Northern line and how many lighted cigarettes had been discarded at Baker Street. Most importantly, they were questions that the Department of Transport had answered in some detail on two occasions the year before.

On this occasion, however, I received the somewhat curt response that these were now operational matters for London Underground. I received no explanation for this answer, and I was not told when these matters had ceased to be the responsibility of the Department of Transport, or why. Ministers had made no statement to the House and had given no warning, yet suddenly, someone had made the decision that safety on the London underground was no longer a matter of ministerial responsibility.

The London underground carries more than 700 million passengers annually. In the forthcoming financial year, London Transport will receive almost £900 million of taxpayers' money, the bulk of which will be spent on the underground network. Yet Ministers apparently feel free, on a whim, to wash their hands of responsibility for such a major part of our capital's transport infrastructure.

It is no wonder that Ministers in this Government so desperately cling to office, come what may. Who would want to give up a job that allows one to turn up at work, unilaterally to change one's job description and to take less managerial responsibility, yet still to earn the same salary, and then to receive a pay rise at the end of the year? Increasingly, that is the avenue being pursued by Ministers faced by questions that they perceive to be awkward or tiresome. What is left is a gaping hole where responsible and accountable government once stood.

Over the next three years, the Department of Transport is set to cut the London Transport budget by more than £250 million. That is a ministerial decision which will have a direct impact on service quality, on jobs, on fares and on safety expenditure. Who is to be answerable for the consequences of that budget cut? Will it be the Ministers who make that decision? It seems not, because they will have shifted the burden of responsibility from themselves to the already hard-pressed shoulders of the staff and management of London Underground.

As the London *Evening Standard* said on 1 February 1995:

"What else do we go to the trouble of electing Members of Parliament for, if not to represent our interests in these matters?"

What do we have Ministers for, if they regard a matter as important as the safety of the travelling public as something beneath their responsibility?

Ministers are not just attempting to avoid responsibility through their increasingly inconsistent responses to the questions put to them by the House. Last month, I tabled another question to the Department of Transport, this time on the subject of fees paid to consultants assisting with the Government's deeply unpopular attempt to privatise our railways.

On 14 February, I received the response that information about fees paid to individual contractors had become commercially confidential. I then tabled another question, asking at what point and for what reason that information had suddenly become so sensitive. The Minister's response arrived on my desk on 22 February. It said:

"Information about specific fees paid on individual commissions has always been commercially confidential."—*[Official Report,* 22 February 1995; Vol. 255, c. *191.]*

That was somewhat surprising, given the answer that had been given just seven months earlier by the Minister's Department to my hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson).

That answer provided very detailed information about specific fees paid on individual commissions. It informed him, for example, that Linklaters and Paines had been paid £5.6 million for privatisation advice, that KPMG Peat Marwick had been paid £3.3 million for privatisation accountancy and taxation advice, and that Coopers and Lybrand had been paid £2.3 million for advice on privatisation access charges.

I do not know which is more worrying, that Ministers have attempted to cover up the extent to which individual firms are profiting from the soaring costs of rail privatisation, or that we have Ministers so incompetent that, when they attempt to hide things from this House, they do not even bother to check the answers given by their predecessors less than seven months before.

Serious issues arise over the attempt by the Department of Transport to withhold information from this House. The Government have spent more than £20 million on asking consultants for advice about their flawed privatisation proposals. That £20 million has come from the pockets and pay packets of the taxpayers of this country. The people of this country have the right—I believe, the absolute right—to know precisely where their money is going.

They have a right to know how much of their money is going in consultancy payments to firms such as Hambros, which has donated more than £360,000 to the Conservative party since 1979 and whose chairman is a Conservative party treasurer. They have the right to know which portion of their pay packet is being given to firms such as Shandwick, which has donated more than £25,000 to the Conservative party over the past 15 years as payment for advice on how to break up and sell off our rail network. Indeed, they have the absolute right to expect their elected representatives to call Ministers to account when they believe that their money is being wasted or misused.

Let us remember what we are talking about: tube systems and railways, which are not matters of national security, vital though their well-being is to the nation's

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

future. We are seeking answers about the future of the 4.40 to Paddington, not the future of the nuclear weapons programme, yet we receive responses which talk of operational matters and commercial confidentiality. That language should be found in the pages of John Le Carré, not in the mother of parliaments, but it has entered the dictionary of almost every Government Department, and the vocabulary of almost every Minister.

We now face a situation in which the Secretary of State for Social Security, for example, will set up the Child Support Agency and then refuse to answer questions on its performance, or impose the heinous habitual residence test, but with no mechanism for collating detailed information on numbers of individuals left destitute by its implementation. The Minister with responsibility for prisons, the right hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), privatises a jail and then refuses to answer questions on the consequences.

Ministerial accountability is at the heart of our parliamentary democracy. If Ministers, or even Prime Ministers, do not like the questions posed to them by this House, they should respond with better answers, but if Ministers are allowed to evade the questions posed them by this House, they have ceased to become accountable to those who they govern. When government ceases to be accountable, democracy ceases to be democracy, and becomes dictatorship.

2.43 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science (Mr. Robert G. Hughes): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson) on pursuing this matter with enormous skill and some invective. She has put powerful points which not only deserve an answer but have a very ready answer.

The title that the hon. Lady chose for this debate was a rather disarming one: "Ministerial Inconsistencies in Response to Parliamentary Questions". I approached the task of responding with some trepidation as I did not want anyone to get the impression that I intended to develop a spirited and cogent defence of the right to be inconsistent.

The hon. Lady has raised an important point, and a large and powerful part of her speech related to questions that she had put previously to my hon. Friend the Minister for Railways and Roads about consultants engaged by the Department of Transport in connection with rail privatisation and to my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London about operational matters. I will come to those points in a moment.

I want first to consider the general question of commercial confidentiality because the hon. Lady branched out into the generalities towards the end of her speech. I hope that the hon. Lady would agree that there are difficult issues here and it will often require careful judgment to decide whether a particular piece of information should or should not be made public. There is a genuine, and unavoidable, tension between the duty of Government to be as open as possible about the information that they hold and the duty to protect information which they hold in confidence.

The Government gave that point careful consideration when drawing up the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information" which has been in force since last April. It was a point that was discussed when the House considered the Right to Know Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) and I know that the hon. Lady made a contribution to that debate.

Everyone who has considered the question would agree that it is difficult to arrive at hard and fast rules which can be applied in any obviously mechanical way. The question one has to ask is whether this particular information would be of commercial value to a firm's competitors and whether it would otherwise be unobtainable by them. Where the answer is no, there should be no problem about providing the information in answer to a parliamentary question, or indeed to anyone else who asks.

If, however, the answer is yes, it is right to pause before releasing the information. It simply would not be right, unless there was a strong public interest reason for doing so, to prejudice a firm's legitimate commercial interests or to prejudice fair competition between contractors—thereby, I believe, prejudicing the Government's position and ability to negotiate.

With that important caveat, it is the Government's aim to provide as much information as possible. I should like to quote briefly from the guidance issued to Government Departments in connection with the code of practice. Copies of the full guidance are available in the Library. In the context of competitive tendering for goods and services provided to Government, the guidance states:

"The aim is to increase accountability and transparency where possible . . . At least the following information should normally be made public:

the identity of the succesful tenderer

the nature of the job, service or goods to be supplied

the performance standards set

the criteria for award of contract

the winning tender price, or range of prices paid."

I shall refer next to the two particular points raised by the hon. Lady. Obviously, I understand her point about inconsistency. It is true that there has been a change in the way in which the Department of Transport views its response to operational questions. However, whereas Ministers hitherto have been prepared to stretch a point and answer certain questions on operational issues on the basis of advice from London Transport, they no longer consider that an appropriate way of working.

I believe that Ministers are right. In addition, I am not misquoting the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee report when I say that it understood the difference between day-to-day operational strategy and policy. What the hon. Lady is asking for sounds like accountability, but it is really a replacement for accountability: it would be a pretend accountability. For day-to-day operational matters, the people who operate the service must answer for any shortcomings that the hon. Lady or any other hon. Member may wish to identify. Transport Ministers are responsible for the overall policy and financial framework within which LT operates, to which the hon. Lady has referred, but not for day-to-day operations. Therefore, questions about operational matters, which are the responsibility of LT,

should be addressed directly to it. Ministers will continue, despite what the hon. Lady said, to answer questions on policy issues, including health and safety.

The hon. Lady referred to consultants engaged by the Department of Transport in relation to rail privatisation. In preparing for this debate, I have of course taken the opportunity to read the hon. Lady's exchanges with my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr. Watts), the Minister for Railways and Roads. My hon. Friend decided that information about fee rates paid to individual consultants—or information which could lead to those rates being deduced—should not be disclosed.

There are two reasons for that. First, such information could be used to the disadvantage of the Department in its efforts to obtain best value for money. Consultants are selected by competitive tender, and disclosure of the fee rates of successful tenderers could encourage what in effect would be a cartel by setting a going rate for consultancy advice. Secondly, the release of information about fee rates could prejudice the legitimate commercial confidences of tenderers and contractors and put them at a disadvantage in their other business activities or in future tendering exercises with Departments. In the highly competitive world in which consultants operate, those are not trivial points.

The hon. Lady objected to an apparent inconsistency in the way in which my colleagues from the Department of Transport have answered questions on this subject, and she referred in particular to a question asked by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) in July 1994. That question asked for the value of payments made to date to individual consultants advising the Department of Transport on rail privatisation. The hon. Lady's recent question asked for the information provided to be updated, but in his reply my hon. Friend declined on the ground of commercial confidentiality. The hon. Lady has every right to ask, but I hope that what I have said explains why that judgment was made.

My right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Transport took the view that providing a regular updating of information about payments to individual consultancy firms could enable competitors to deduce specific information about fee rates by relating the level of payments to specific periods. It would then not be too difficult for competitors to make a reasonable estimate of the level of fees which contributed to the value of the payments, or the fees paid for individual commissions providing very specific advice. I have no doubt that that was not the hon. Lady's intention when seeking the information—I do not suggest for a moment that it was—but it is a possible consequence and, for the reasons that I have given, a consequence which would not be in the public interest.

That is not to say, of course, that one should deny the hon. Lady or the House information on what is being spent on consultancy services. There was a distinct flavour in the latter part of the hon. Lady's speech that, somehow, we were seeking to do that. It is quite clear that that is not what we would seek to do. My right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Transport are very ready to provide information about the overall costs of the consultants engaged—as, indeed, my hon. Friend did in his answer of 14 February—either in total or on an annual basis.

These are difficult matters and it is right that an hon. Member should question the Government about them, but I hope that the House will understand that it is common sense and good for the taxpayer and for the good running of Government that we should proceed in the way that I have outlined.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 20 February 1995

TRANSPORT

Fort William Sleeper

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what is the estimated subsidy per passenger of providing the Fort William sleeper service.

Dr. Mawhinney: The cost net of revenue per passenger of the Fort William sleeper, excluding infrastructure charges, is £180. The figure is £540 if infrastructure costs are allocated pro rata to non-infrastructure costs. Using infrastructure charges specific to the Fort William service the figure becomes £453. The figures are based on British Rail's best estimates, using 1993–94 demand levels and the 1994–95 price base.

Runway Capacity, South-East

Mr. Renton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the distinctions drawn by his Department between *(a)* a second runway at Gatwick and *(b)* a close parallel runway at Gatwick; and what factors cause *(a)* to be ruled out and *(b)* not be ruled out by the existing legal agreement between the British Airports Authority and West Sussex county council.

Mr. Norris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *861–62*, to the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) said that the options studied by RUCATSE for a second runway at Gatwick should not be considered further. These options were for full runways, located well away from the existing runway. A close parallel runway would deliver a smaller gain in runway capacity, but would also have less widespread environmental impacts. I understand that the existing legal agreement between BAA and West Sussex county council applies to any additional runway at Gatwick.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make publicly available the results of public consultation referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) on 2 February, *Official Report*, column *861–62* concerning runway capacity in the South-East.

Dr. Mawhinney: My Department has recorded some 350 responses from organisations and some 4,100 letters from members of the public. A number of petitions were also received.

A1

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated cost of the A1 road development from Darrington to Hook Moor in West and North Yorkshire.

Mr. Watts: A total of £110 million.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to introduce the design, build, finance and operate concessions in respect of the proposed A1 new road developments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: There are no proposals at present to introduce design, build, finance and operate projects in respect of proposed A1 new road developments, beyond the short length of A1 between Hook Moor and Bramham included as part of the M1–A1 link road design, build, finance and operate project and the A1 widening project between Alconbury and Peterborough in Cambridgeshire. Tenders for both were invited on 9 January.

Area Flying Restrictions

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reasons underlie the policy of not publishing individual area flying restrictions.

Mr. Norris: Temporary restriction of flying regulations are classified as local statutory instruments. By virtue of regulation 5 of the Statutory Instruments Regulations 1947, local instruments are exempt from the requirement to be printed. We believe this is due to the limited number of persons affected by such statutory instruments and the disproportionate costs that would be incurred in publication.

Full details of these statutory instruments are promulgated to the aeronautical industry by aeronautical information circulars or, in cases of urgency, by notices to airmen.

Search and Rescue

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what review is being undertaken of search and rescue helicopter provision along the channel coast.

Mr. Norris *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* None.

School Buses

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what types of seat belts and fittings his Department recommends for fitting into minibuses used for the transportation of children;

(2) what types of seat belts and fittings are recommended for school minibuses.

Mr. Norris: Regulations 46 and 47 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 (as amended) specify, for all vehicles, the minimum standards for both seat belts and anchorages. In the case of minibuses, most seats may be fitted with either lap or three-point belts suitable for use by adults or children.

Vehicle Tax

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effects on employment in the regional vehicle registration offices of proposals to privatise the means of preventing vehicle tax evasion.

Mr. Norris: No decisions on the future vehicle excise duty enforcement regime will be made until after the consultation period has ended later this year.

Driving Tests

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce a requirement to retake the driving test for all drivers whose driving licences have been suspended *(a)* for drink driving, *(b)* for refusing breath tests or *(c)* for any other reason, for six months or more.

Mr. Norris: None, but the courts have discretionary powers to require any such drivers, or other drivers convicted of endorsable offences, to retake the driving test.

Bray's Detective Agency

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contract Bray's detective agency has with his Department; and what was the purpose of the attendance of an employee of the agency at Winchester county court on 30 January.

Mr. Watts: Bray's detective agency has no contract with the Department of Transport and did not attend Winchester county court on the Department's behalf on 30 January.

QE2 (Safety)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the reasons the QE2 was found unsafe by United States officials during the vessel's visit to the United States of America in December 1994;

(2) what were the responsibilities regarding safety of the Marine Safety Agency surveyor who sailed with the QE2 from Southampton in December 1994;

(3) what were the precise differences between United Kingdom and United States regulations which allowed British authorities to allow the QE2 to sail from Southampton in December 1994, but which led the United States authorities to require further work to be undertaken.

Mr. Norris: The United Kingdom and the United States of America apply the same international standards relating to passenger ships—the safety of life at sea convention. In accordance with those standards, a limited passenger certificate was issued authorising the QE2 to sail from Southampton to New York with a reduced number of passengers. Heavy weather prevented completion of work during the voyage, and it became clear that further work would be required by the Marine Safety Agency before the ship could leave New York with her full complement of passengers.

The MSA principal surveyor who had been involved from the conceptual designs through to the refit sailed with the ship to see the completion of outstanding survey items and witness appropriate tests. He had no wider responsibility for the safety of the ship during the voyage. The surveyor remained on board in New York until satisfied that all necessary safety work was being undertaken and would be completed before departure.

Ministerial Visits Overseas

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what overseas visits he or his Ministers have made since 1 July 1994; and what was the duration and cost of the visits and the organisations and groups that he met during the course of such visits.

Dr. Mawhinney: Details of the overseas visits made by Transport Ministers since 1 July 1994 are as follows:

Country visited	*Duration*	*Cost £*	*Organisations/Groups met*
THE RT HON DR BRIAN MAWHINNEY, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT			
USA	1 day	2,863.20	HM Ambassador, Washington*
France	1 day	115.08	EPS Eurostar
USA	5 days	11,764.20	Texas Instruments Texas Turnpike Authority American Airlines United Airlines Illinois Dept of Transport Winconsin Central GT Capital Railcar Thrall Car Manuf. Co. Wabash National Corp. Union Tank Car Co. Chicago Aviation Commissioner Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority Massachusetts Institute of Technology Boston Central Artery/Tunnel Project
France	1 day	579.99	Telematics Conference
Holland	2.5 days	624.64	Dutch Transport Ministry; Town of Houten; Schiphol Airport
France	1 day	663.20	French Transport Minister
Belgium	2 days	1,040.58	Transport Council
Belgium	1 day	722.38	Transport Council
JOHN WATTS, MINISTER FOR RAILWAY'S AND ROADS			
Germany	3.5 days	3,419.96	German State Secretary and President of Deutsche Bahn
France	1 day	470.85	Chambers of Commerce and Bridge Designers
France	1 day	318.00	Prometheus Ministers' Day
Germany	2 days	603.40	German State Secretary and Rhineland TüV
France	2 days	689.64	Informal Transport Council
LORD GOSCHEN, MINISTER FOR AVIATION AND SHIPPING			
Denmark	1 day	704.00	Danish Shipping Minister
Japan	3 days	10,967.22	Kansai Airport Management; Transport, Trade and Industry Ministers; Defence Agency; Shipowners, Shipping and Marine Associations; Kawasaki Heavy Industry; Wakagyama Marine City; Virtuality Group; Airline, Railway, Shipping, Heavy Industry and Travel Companies; Media Representatives
Denmark	1 day	1,125.08	Ministers of Paris Memorandum of Understanding Group
France	1 day	No costs	P&O Ferries and Calais Chamber of Commerce
Belgium	1 day	649.40	Transport Council
STEVEN NORRIS, MINISTER FOR LOCAL TRANSPORT AND ROAD SAFETY			
Portugal	2 days	1,248.80	Road Haulage Assn Conference
France	1 day	514.20	Paris; Ministry of Interior; The Paris Region Transport Administration

The figures include the cost of officials accompanying Ministers, with the exception of .*.

EMPLOYMENT

Earnings

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the real increase in take-home pay for a married couple with two children at the bottom 25 per cent. of the earnings distribution between *(a)* 1973–74 and 1978–79 and *(b)* 1978–79 and 1993–94.

Mr. Oppenheim: Real take-home pay for married couple with two children at the bottom 25 per cent. of the earnings distribution increased in real terms by 1 per cent. between 1973–74 and 1978–79 and by 24 per cent. between 1978–79 and 1993–94.

Workshops

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average cost per person employed by *(a)* Remploy, *(b)* local authority workshops, *(c)* voluntary run workshops, *(d)* local authority sponsored sheltered placements and *(e)* voluntary organisation sheltered placements on each of the last five years.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Peter Thurnham, dated 20 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the average cost per person on the Supported (formerly Sheltered) Employment scheme.

The information you requested is shown in the following table. This shows the full cost to the contractor, per person, per year, towards which the Employment Service (ES) makes a contribution. In 1993/94 the ES contribution was £3,480 per worker to local authorities and £4,310 per worker to voluntary bodies. In the same year, the subvention for Remploy was £89.2 million.

	1989–90 £	*1990–91* £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £
Remploy	7,229	8,325	8,864	9,472	9,727
Local Authority Workshops	7,292	8,262	8,907	9,547	9,729
Voluntary Body Workshops	5,776	7,022	7,733	8,488	9,200
Local Authority Placements	3,683	4,064	4,337	4,530	4,600
Voluntary Body Placements	3,456	3,748	3,907	4,138	4,223

I hope this is helpful.

Remploy

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his Department's view on the decision of Remploy in Barking to increase the number of able-bodied employees and of the effect of this policy on employment opportunities for disabled people.

Miss Widdecombe: Remploy's Barking factory is a twin site, with both bookbinding and packaging units. There are 146 severely disabled employees with 15 non-disabled employees in clerical, technical, supervisory and managerial roles. Remploy has not increased, and does not intend to increase, the number of non-disabled employees in either unit.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration his Department has given to the knock-on effects of the interwork scheme on the skills base of Remploy; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Remploy has around 8,900 severely disabled employees of whom about 1,450 are employed under interwork. The interwork scheme enables Remploy's disabled workers to be supported in jobs in a variety of host firms outside Remploy. The interwork scheme has had no knock-on effect on the skills base in Remploy factories; the company is in fact taking steps to increase the skills of its employees.

Remploy has introduced a special programme called Choices designed to give new recruits to Remploy, as well as the company's existing employees, the opportunity, guidance and training to plan a career best suited to their individual needs. Remploy has introduced individual training plans aimed at improving skills. Company training programmes encourage development of basic core skills, such as numeracy and literacy, while aiming to help people gain a national vocational qualification or credits towards one. Remploy groups are working towards investors in people status and some factories have already achieved this.

Petroleum

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he had made of *(a)* current progress towards the revision of the Petroleum Consolidation Act 1928 by the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* the interim measures that have been agreed under the deregulation process.

Mr. Oppenheim: The Health and Safety Commission is seeking to make early progress with the review of the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928 and other petroleum legislation but the timetable for completion is currently under review. HSC's review of the guidance on petrol filling stations and other sites where petroleum is dispensed is already well advanced and the first part will be available in the summer.

Mercury

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps the Health and Safety Executive is required to take when notification of the arrival of a consignment of waste mercury has been received.

Mr. Oppenheim: There is no legal requirement for notification to the Health and Safety Executive of the arrival, transportation, treatment and disposal of a consignment of waste mercury at premises for which it has enforcement responsibility.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what notice is required by the Health and Safety Executive of the arrival, transportation, treatment

and disposal of a consignment of waste mercury; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: There is no legal requirement for notification to the Health and Safety Executive of the arrival, transportation, treatment and disposal of a consignment of waste mercury at premises for which it has enforcement responsibility.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment of those unemployed in the London borough of Lambeth how many have been unemployed for more than *(a)* two years, *(b)* one year and *(c)* six months.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested is given in the following table:

Unemployed claimants in Lambeth
(January 1995, not seasonally adjusted)

	Total
Claimants unemployed for over 2 years	6,228
Claimants unemployed for over 1 year	10,940
Claimants unemployed for over 6 months	15,485

Information on ILO unemployment in Lambeth is not available by duration.

PRIME MINISTER

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his reply to the question from the hon. Member for Monklands, West on 31 January, *Official Report*, column *849*, if he will publish the statement of the Medical Research Council on alleged Gulf war syndrome; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, on 8 February, *Official Report*, column *331*.

Ian Greer

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister whether all departmental ministers in answering questions on items received from Ian Greer in the last month included all packages and all correspondence from Messrs Ian Greer Associates.

The Prime Minister: It is for individual Ministers to answer questions as they consider appropriate.

European Single Act

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letters received by the then Prime Minister from Heads of Government of member states of the European Community concerning the interpretations of those points of the draft European Single Act treaty concerning controls to be exercised by the United Kingdom at the frontiers between it and other member states of European Community.

The Prime Minister: The acceptance by Heads of Government of the right of member states to take measures necessary for the purpose of controlling immigration from third countries and to combat terrorism and other serious crime was signified by their agreement to the general declaration on articles 13 to 19 of the Single European Act, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) in the last 15 months, over the opt-out negotiated to the Single European Act over frontiers in 1985; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* Meetings and correspondence between myself and my Ministers are confidential.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 14 February *Official Report*, column 793, by what article of which Community treaty he expects to maintain a degree of frontier control and inspection in respect of persons and goods arriving from other member states of the European Union similar to that practised in 1992.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* The Government take the view that there is nothing in the treaty to prevent the continuation of its practices in relation to persons and goods at frontiers. They base this view on their interpretation of article 7A, read in conjunction with the general declaration on articles 13 to 19 of the Single European Act.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if he will arrange for a copy of legal opinion obtained by the Government in 1991 concerning the legality of the opt-out from the Single European Act negotiated in 1985 permitting the United Kingdom to maintain frontier controls to be placed in the Library.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* The advice of the Law Officers is not normally disclosed.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister what specimen treaty, providing measures to exclude certain categories of people from entering the European Union, has been approved in principle on behalf of Her Majesty's Government; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* At its meetings on 30 November and 1 December, the Justice and Home Affairs Council adopted a standard format for the conclusion of bilateral readmission agreements between member states and third countries. The documents are available in the Library of the House.

TREASURY

Income

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the division in percentage terms between *(a)* all forms of earned income including PAYE and self-employed persons and *(b)* all forms of unearned income including rents, investment income, pensions, and transfers from the state in the form of benefits.

Sir George Young: Information on personal sector income is published in table 4.1 of "1994 UK National Accounts Blue Book". A more detailed breakdown based on the 1992–93 survey of personal incomes is published in table 3.4 of "Inland Revenue Statistics 1994", copies of which are in the Library.

National Lottery

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for National Heritage of 7 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *160*, what will be the income to the Exchequer, during the course of a full year, from *(a)* the investment of £65 million of lottery proceeds in Treasury bills and *(b)* of £22 million in gilts.

Sir George Young: None. Income from Treasury bills and gilts goes to the beneficial owner, which is in this case would be the national lottery distribution fund, and not to the Exchequer.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many projects are being considered for the private finance initiative; how many have been agreed; and what is the estimated value of the contracts involved.

Sir George Young: Since the autumn statement of November 1992, notices for 29 projects of a value of greater than £5 million have been issued in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities. The estimated value of the capital investment under these contracts is £5 billion. Records are not held centrally for projects which are under consideration but are not yet in procurement or which are less than £5 million in value.

Crime Prevention

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will disregard the increase in the rateable value of crime prevention measures where these have been provided at the cost of a tenant when assessing new rateable values for tenanted properties; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: Regulations due to come into effect on 1 April 1995 will require valuation officers to reflect the value of plant and machinery provided for protection of properties from a range of hazards. This will include plant and machinery that is used to protect the property from trespass of criminal damage. It is likely that the impact of these measures will be material where security is an important feature of the property concerned, for example, bullion stores, and likely to be less significant in relation to small businesses.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for taxing carbon dioxide emissions; and what discussions he has had with his colleagues in relation to improvements to the environment.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have no plans to tax carbon dioxide emissions as such. However, the commitment to increase road fuel duties by on average at least 5 per cent. a year in real terms, and the introduction of VAT on domestic fuel and power, now held to 8 per cent., both play an important part in achieving the United Kingdom's commitment to return CO_2 emissions to 1990 levels in the year 2000.

I have regular discussions with my colleagues about improvements to the environment.

Tax Self-assessment

Mr. Byers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated cost of developing the computer facilities necessary to support the introduction of tax self-assessment; and what plans he has to involve the private sector and from what date.

Sir George Young: About £200 million. The Inland Revenue's information technology partner, Electronic Data Services, is due to take formal responsibility for this work from January 1996, but EDS is already involved in the programme and has expressed its full commitment to it.

Doctors

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Treasury will publish its general schedule for 1994–95 for doctors undertaking part-time work for central Government Departments and other agencies.

Mr. Aitken: The Treasury will not be publishing revisions to the schedule which was effective from April 1993. It is not mandatory on Departments and agencies. Subject to any statutory Treasury involvement in specific cases, they can decide whether to vary the schedule's provisions in the light of their own judgments on best value for money and affordability within cash constraints.

PAYE and National Insurance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimated level of uncollected PAYE and national insurance contributions deducted but not paid over to the Revenue, in figures and as a percentage of the total amounts, for each year since 1979 expressed in 1994 prices.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The amounts of PAYE and national insurance contributions uncollected and consequently remitted or written off as uncollected are as follows:

Year	*PAYE amount in £ thousands*	*As a percentage of total PAYE collected*	*Amount expressed in 1993 prices*	*Classes 1 and 1A NIC amount in £ thousands*	*As a percentage of total NIC classes 1 and 1A collected*	*Amount expressed in 1993 prices*
1979	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980	9,914	0.05	26,975	1,056	0.01	2,873
1981	11,432	0.08	28,345	1,158	0.01	2,871
1982	15,281	0.06	34,603	1,261	0.01	2,855
1983	22,622	0.08	47,227	1,555	0.01	3,246
1984	33,312	0.11	64,863	1,971	0.01	3,838
1985	46,695	0.14	82,879	2,213	0.01	3,928

Year	PAYE amount in £ thousands	As a percentage of total PAYE collected	Amount expressed in 1993 prices	Classes 1 and 1A NIC amount in £ thousands	As a percentage of total NIC classes 1 and 1A collected	Amount expressed in 1993 prices
1986	60,915	0.17	100,334	4,377	0.02	7,209
1987	92,560	0.25	137,559	8,514	0.03	12,653
1988	130,724	0.33	174,624	15,894	0.06	21,231
1989	122,890	0.28	151,176	15,127	0.05	18,609
1990	107,091	0.22	122,314	17,239	0.05	19,689
1991	135,285	0.26	148,307	21,644	0.06	23,732
1992	381,172	0.71	401,898	32,570	0.09	34,341
1993	388,190	0.72	388,190	41,257	0.11	41,257
1994	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

The figures for 1994 are not sufficiently complete to allow the necessary comparison to be made and consequently the information is not available in the form requested. Therefore, the figures are expressed in accordance with 1993 prices.

Insolvencies, where the Inland Revenue has very little control over the amount recoverable, account for the vast majority of remissions of tax.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Colombia

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Colombian Government over the human rights situation in Colombia.

Mr. David Davis: We maintain a regular dialogue on human rights with the Colombian Government. We welcome recent measures taken to address problems they acknowledge exist. My current visit to Colombia will provide a further opportunity to discuss this issue.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts he has made to persuade the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to appoint a special rapporteur on Colombia.

Mr. Goodlad: None. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave to the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) on 14 February, *Official Report*, column *580*. We do not believe that the appointment of a special rapporteur is needed.

Chechnya

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed the crisis in Chechnya with the German Foreign Minister; and what assessment he has made of whether a common European response to it exists.

Mr. Goodlad: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs last discussed the crisis in Chechnya with the German Foreign Minister, Herr Kinkel, on 1 February.

A common European response has been agreed within the framework of the common foreign and security policy. All EU members share the view that the fighting in Chechnya needs to be brought to an end, and negotiations on a political settlement started. The EU has given its full support to the OSCE's efforts to help find a lasting solution. Its position has been made clear in statements issued by the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 January and 6 February.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's latest estimate of *(a)* Russian military casualties *(b)* civilian casualties in Chechnya.

Mr. Goodlad: There are no independently verifiable figures available for the casualty figures in Chechnya. However, on 11 February, General Kolesnikov was quoted as saying 1,020 Russian soldiers had been killed. On 9 February, the Russian Interfax agency claimed that 3,400 Russian soldiers had been wounded.

The Russian human rights ombudsman, Sergei Kovalev, has estimated 25,000 civilians have been killed or wounded. He arrived at this figure after questioning refugees about their personal experiences and extrapolating an overall figure from these eye witness accounts.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for replacing the nuclear non-proliferation treaty with a nuclear weapons convention using the chemical weapons convention as a basis.

Mr. David Davis: There are no such plans. We believe the nuclear non-proliferation treaty has worked well to contain the spread of nuclear weapons.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will now be making a new submission to the International Court of Justice on the legality of the use and threat of nuclear weapons in any circumstances following the United Nations Assembly decision on 15 December to refer the issue to the court; and if he will publish the submissions already made.

Mr. David Davis: We intend to make a further submission in the light of the resolution adopted by the 1994 United Nations General Assembly, seeking an advisory opinions the legality of the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons. The International Court of Justice requires that submissions are kept confidential until the case is heard.

Embassies

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his Department plans to open embassies in *(a)* Armenia and *(b)* Georgia.

Mr. Goodlad: On 15 February 1995, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that we would be opening embassies in Armenia, Georgia and Turkmenistan this year.

Social Summit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many countries and how many heads of state have accepted invitations to the United Nations social summit in Copenhagen in March.

Mr. Goodlad: Over 90 heads of state or Government have confirmed their attendance at the summit. A number of other countries will also be represented.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Department is responsible for co-ordinating the Government's input to the United Nations social summit in Copenhagen.

Mr. Goodlad: The Foreign Office is co-ordinating preparations for the United Kingdom's participation in the summit.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there will be a United Kingdom policy statement to the United Nations social summit in Copenhagen in March; and whether it will be publicly available.

Mr. Goodlad: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has prepared a background brief on the world summit for social development. This is available from the FCO's information department. Copies have also been placed in the Library of the House.

European Single Act Treaty

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take measures to ensure the publication in the United Kingdom treaty series of the current contents of the treaty of Rome, the European Single Act treaty and treaty of the Union and in a single command publication of A4 size; and for what reasons this has not already been done.

Mr. David Davis: In line with normal practice, the treaty on European Union was published as Command Paper No. 1934 in May 1992, following its signature by the United Kingdom, as Command Paper No. 2485, in March 1994, following its entry into force. A consolidated text is published by the office for official publications of the European Communities, and is available from Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Pirate Attacks

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many attacks by pirates on British shipping off the coast of Brazil have been recorded since 1987.

Mr. Goodlad: *[pursuant to his reply 1 February 1995, column 701]:* My Department has now been provided with new information. This shows that eight attacks off Brazil have been recorded; five on British flagged vessels, one on a Hong Kong flagged, British-managed ship, and two attacks on ships with a British interest, but flagged in other countries.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Languages (Judges)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the latest number of judges serving in England and Wales; how many of these are fluent in *(a)* Urdu, *(b)* Punjabi and *(c)* Welsh; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The table lists the number of judges in each of the offices shown in England and Wales as at 13 February 1995. Our records regarding judges' knowledge of languages are not comprehensive but show that 19 judges speak Welsh. None are recorded as speaking an Indian or Pakistani language but it is believed that a few do. Of those serving in a part-time capacity or in a full-time capacity not listed on the table, according to the limited information available, 55 speak Welsh and 16 speak an Indian or Pakistani language. Urdu and Punjabi are not separately identified in the records and the records do not indicate the degree of fluency.

	Total number
Lord Chancellor	1
Lords of Appeal in Ordinary	11
Heads of Division	4
Lords Justices of Appeal	30
High Court Judges	93
Circuit Judges	511
District Judges[1]	321
Stipendiary Magistrates	88
Masters[2]	29

[1] Including District Judges of the Principal Registry of the Family Division.
[2] Including Bankruptcy Registrars.

Residency Orders

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many shared residency orders have been granted by the courts for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Boundary Disputes

Mr. Booth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been the total cost of legal aid given for boundary disputes in each of the last three years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is not possible to identify separately the cost of boundary disputes from other proceedings relating to land. It is only possible, therefore, to provide information on the cost of all "land" related matters. The total net cost to the legal aid fund of all "land" matters—excluding landlord and tenant

proceedings—where proceedings were concluded, in each of the last three years, was as follows:

1991–92: £5.2 million
1992–93: £7.7 million
1993–94: £10.9 million

Medical Negligence

Mr. Booth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost of legal aid given for disputes involving medical negligence in each of the last three years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The net cost to legal aid of cases involving medical negligence, excluding multi-party actions, where proceedings were concluded, in each of the last three years was as follows:

1991–92: £5.9 million
1992–93: £10.8 million
1993–94: £21.9 million

HOME DEPARTMENT

Secure Training Centres

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to respond to the report of the United Nations Committee on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child regarding his policy on secure training centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The proceedings of the committee ended with its concluding observations. But I take this opportunity to record that we reject the committee's observations about secure training orders. Its observations contain serious misunderstandings, despite the extensive written material provided to the committee before its oral hearings, and despite the specific information given by United Kingdom representatives at the end of nine hours of hearings during the brief opportunity to respond to the committee's oral questions on this matter.

The committee appears to believe that the existence of the secure training centres could be inconsistent with the provisions of the convention requiring that detention or imprisonment of a child shall be used as a measure of last resort. As was explained to the committee, that is not so. By section 1 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, custodial sentences, whether for adults or children, are available to the courts only in limited circumstances and in effect as a last resort. Secure training orders, when brought into force, will be subject to that provision. Such orders will be available only for persistent offenders, and will be served in purpose-built establishments providing a high standard of training and care reflecting the needs of the young offender concerned, and the need to minimise the risk of further offending.

Football Pools

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take to enable football pools companies to pay small winnings in retail outlets, to operate on an equal footing with the national lottery through the subsidy of prize money and to remove restrictions on the type of events on which pools may be based.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My hon. Friend announced during the course of the debate on the motion on the Adjournment on 10 February, *Official Report*, column *642*, that licensed betting offices should be permitted to pay pools winnings. I intend to bring forward an order under section 1 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 later this year, following consultation.

I am currently reviewing the scope for further deregulation and have asked officials to discuss a range of issues with the Pool Promoters Association.

Immigration

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those passengers on the Leisure International Airways flight from Kingston, Jamaica in December 1993, who were granted temporary admission to the United Kingdom, have *(a)* returned to their country of origin, *(b)* been granted further leave to remain in the United Kingdom and *(c)* are of unknown location.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is not available. Comprehensive statistics are not kept of departures from the United Kingdom or of applications for leave to remain by reference to the flight of arrival.

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that the United Kingdom immigration rules are not breached by immigrants entering the United Kingdom from other European Union countries.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The United Kingdom operates a full immigration control on all non-European economic area nationals arriving here, regardless of the country from which they have travelled, and we shall continue to do so.

Roy Higginson

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the conduct of each authority under his jurisdiction in the case of the remand, conviction and subsequent escape of prisoner Roy Higginson;

(2) what inquiries he has instigated in respect of prisoner Roy Higginson since 15 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for these matters has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Andrew Miller, dated 20 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Questions about Roy Higginson.

Mr. Higginson appeared at Liverpool Crown Court on 8 May 1992, having been previously granted bail, and was sentenced to four years imprisonment. He was held in closed prisons for the first sixteen months of his sentence during which time he successfully completed a period of home leave. After careful assessment he was

judged to be suitable to work outside the prison. He was transferred to Kirkham open prison.

Two further home leaves were successfully completed before Mr. Higginson absconded on 30 December 1993. This was reported to Lancashire police immediately.

The responsibility for apprehending absconders is an operational matter for chief officers of police. The Cheshire Constabulary followed their normal procedures and made enquiries in the Ellesmere Port area and visited Mr. Higginson's house in an attempt to apprehend him. They will be looking at their procedures to see what they can learn from this incident.

He remained unlawfully at large until he surrendered to custody at Lancaster prison on 14 January 1995. He was charged under prison rules with absconding. A full inquiry was held by the governor at Mr. Higginson's adjudication on 16 January; he was found guilty and twenty eight days were added to his sentence.

It will also be necessary for Mr. Higginson to serve that part of his sentence for which he was unlawfully at large. His security category was upgraded and he is now held in secure conditions at Wymott prison.

North-east Constabularies

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how may police officers are currently serving in the north-east constabularies; and how many were serving in 1978.

Mr. Maclean: The information is set out in the table:

North-east Police Forces—Strength (as at 31 December)

Force	*1978*	*1994*
Cleveland	1,311	1,435
Durham	1,289	1,356
Humberside	1,797	2,042
Northumbria	3,208	3,595
North Yorkshire	1,303	1,313
South Yorkshire	2,472	3,026
West Yorkshire	4,621	5,037

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civilians are currently serving in the north-east constabularies; and how many were serving in 1978.

Mr. Maclean: The information is set out in the table:

North-east Police Forces—Civilian strength (as at 31 December)

Force	*1978*	*1994*
Cleveland	300	522
Durham	510	485
Humberside	503	651
Northumbria	777	1,285
North Yorkshire	341	507
South Yorkshire	583	1,157
West Yorkshire	1,170	1,945

Miscarriages of Justice

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average time taken to investigate an alleged miscarriage of justice by his Department during 1994 or for the latest year available; and how many cases which are currently being examined by C3 division of his Department, at the latest date available, have been outstanding for more than 12 months.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Excluding cases over 12 months old, the average time taken in 1994 to complete consideration of an allegation of wrongful conviction was 36 working days. On 1 January 1995, there were 38 cases which had been under consideration for more than 12 months.

Forensic Science Laboratory

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to modify the structure, management and functions of the Metropolitan police force forensic science laboratory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Luff) on 10 February, *Official Report*, columns *426–27*.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the measures *(a)* available and *(b)* used to protect the lawful export trade in live sheep; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Government keep the public order legislation under review to ensure that the right balance of measure is available to the police and prosecuting authorities. I am satisfied that no additional powers are needed at this time.

The policing of demonstrations, including those against live animal exports, are operational matters for the chief officers of police concerned. They are not matters in which Government Ministers can intervene. I am satisfied that chief officers are taking all reasonable steps to ensure that those concerned with the carrying of live sheep and other animals to their point of departure can go about their lawful activities without obstruction.

Offences against Children

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the introduction of laws in Australia, France, the United States of America, Germany, Sweden and Norway to prosecute nationals who have committed sexual offences against children extra-territorially, where that offence is also a crime under the other country's law;

(2) what plans he has to introduce extra-territorial jurisdiction over nationals who have allegedly committed offences against children, where that offence is also a crime under the other country's law.

Mr. Maclean: We continue to monitor the position in those countries known to have adopted extra-territorial jurisdiction over sexual offences against children. The most recent information available indicates that prosecutions have been brought in Germany, Norway and Sweden against citizens of those countries. In only one case—in Norway—is a prosecution known to have been successful. However, the evidential requirements of United Kingdom courts are such that similar prosecutions would probably not be successful here; our courts rely largely on oral testimony, and would require the attendance of witnesses from the countries where the alleged offences had been committed.

We have no present plans to introduce extra-territorial jurisdiction over our nationals who have allegedly

committed offences abroad against children, although we remain ready to assist the judicial authorities in other countries to enforce their laws in this area.

Wolds Prison

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria underlay the awarding of the contract for the Wolds prison to a firm which did not submit the lowest bid.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from A. J. Butler to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 20 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me, in the absence of the Director General from the office, to reply to your recent Question about the awarding of the contract for Wolds prison.

Of the bids submitted to the Prison Service, two were lower than Group 4's bid. Although all three bids were considered to be acceptable, the key factors were the assessment of the bidder's ability to deliver the service that was proposed at the price that was being offered. There was concern about the lean staffing levels in the lowest bid and that they would not be sufficient to deal with any incidents that might arise. The lowest bidder also lacked the United Kingdom experience of Group 4, which included the operation of the Harmondsworth Immigration Detention Centre. These risks were considered to outweigh the higher price bid by Group 4. The overall conclusion was that Group 4's bid offered the best value for money, together with an assurance of quality.

Metropolitan Police Committee

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the criteria used by his Department in the short-listing of individuals seeking to serve on the Metropolitan police committee.

Mr. Maclean: I considered all applications to serve on this advisory committee personally, in consultation with Sir John Quinton. We had regard to the individual merits of each candidate and took into account the need to balance skills and experience in the light of the needs of the committee as a whole. I short-listed 20 candidates from the original field of over 100, and the successful candidates were seen by Sir John Quinton prior to their appointment.

Probation Service, South Yorkshire

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the impact of the November 1994 budget statement on the South Yorkshire probation service.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The 1994 Budget statement resulted in a specific grant cash limit for 1995–96 for the South Yorkshire probation service of £9.4 million, plus a further £0.6 million to support probation service partnerships with the independent sector previously funded separately by the Home Office. It is for the South Yorkshire probation service to decide how these resources are best used and to determine what specific changes within the service should be undertaken on the basis of the total expenditure limit implied by this level of grant support.

Tote Board Chairman

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to advertise for applications for the post of chairman of the Tote Board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None.

Court of Appeal

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases were referred to the Court of Appeal following investigation by his Department in each of the last five years.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is provided in the following table:

Cases referred under section 17(1) (a) of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968

	Number of cases	*Number of defendants*
(a) in respect of conviction		
1990	7	20
1991	10	12
1992	8	11
1993	8	9
1994	9	12
(b) in respect of sentence only		
1990	3	3
1991	4	8
1992	1	1
1993	Nil	Nil
1994	2	3

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases he referred to the Court of Appeal following an investigation by C3 division at his Department in each of the last 12 months.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is given in the following table:

Number of cases referred under section 17(1)(a) of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968

Month	*Conviction*	*Sentence*
1994		
February	Nil	Nil
March	1	Nil
April	1	1
May	Nil	Nil
June	Nil	Nil
July	2	Nil
August	Nil	Nil
September	Nil	Nil
October	2	1
November	Nil	Nil
December	3	Nil
1995		
January	1	1

Pornography

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training currently exists for British police to monitor and take action on pornography or other illegal entries on the Internet.

Mr. Maclean: The way in which officers are trained in relation to the detection of computer pornography is for

chief officers to determine in the light of their operational requirements.

Prison Escapes

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 January, *Official Report*, column *810*, how many of the escapes from prisons in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1984–85 and *(c)* 1985–86 were non-key performance indicator escapes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 20 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question, pursuant to his Answer of 2 February, Official Report, Column 810, asking how many of the escapes from prisons in (a) 1979, (b) 1984/85 and (c) 1985–86 were non-Key Performance Indicator escapes.

I greatly regret that the information I gave in response to your original Question was incorrect, as the figures for 1979, 1984/85 and 1985/86 did not include all escapes. The 1993/94 figures were correct. The correct information is shown in the table below:

Year	Escapes from prison	Escapes from Greater London prisons
1979	232	[2]n/a
1984/85	211	[2]n/a
1985/86	202	[2]n/a
1993/94	[1]171	11

[1]Excludes non-Key Performance Indicator escapes (ie. those recaptured within 15 minutes).
[2] Full Information not available
Key Performance Indicators were not introduced until the Prison Service became an Agency on 1 April 1993. Non-Key Performance Indicator escapes were, therefore, not recorded in 1979, 1984–85 or 1985–86.

EU Treaty

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will confirm or modify the ministerial description of the operation of articles 100C and 7A of the current main treaty of the European Community and Union given orally by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) on 27 January 1993, *Official Report*, column 122.

Mr. Nicholas Baker *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* The position on both articles 100C and 7A of the EC treaty remains as set out by my right hon. and learned Friend. The draft external frontiers convention, if implemented, would provide for the mutual recognition of visas in certain circumstances but this convention has not yet been signed.

EU Frontiers

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has received from the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) in the last 15 months, over the opt-out negotiated to the Single European Act over frontiers in 1985; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what communications he has had with the Prime Minister over the last 15 months, concerning the legality of the opt-out negotiated by Her Majesty's Government to the Single European Act in 1985 relating to internal frontiers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* Meetings and correspondence between Ministers are confidential.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Written Questions

41. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has to make proposals to put upper and lower limits on the number of written questions an hon. Member may ask in any single parliamentary Session; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I have no such plans.

Masons

42. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make proposals to require hon. Members to declare if they are members of a masonic lodge.

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

Colonies

43. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what plans he has for greater scrutiny by Parliament of the administration and governance of the colonies in respect of those responsibilities within the jurisdiction of the governor and Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to change the existing arrangements.

Sittings of the House

44. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what assessment he has made of the making of the new timetable for the sittings of the House; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: On the basis of less than six week's experience of the experimental changes agreed by the House in December, my initial assessment is that they are working well.

Question Time

45. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will consider moving certain Question Time sessions to the morning.

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

Transferred Questions

Mr. Alton: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals for Government Departments to consult with hon. Members before transferring their oral questions to other Departments.

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Child Care Facilities

38. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, when the Commission expects child care facilities to be made available in the building.

Mr. Beith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

Stationery

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee if he will investigate the propriety of arrangements in operation for overprinting between certain printers and the suppliers of House stationery; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Micheal J. Martin: Arrangements for overprinting of House of Commons stationery provided from the Serjeant at Arms' stores is the responsibility of individual Members.

Internet

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee if he will make a statement on progress towards making the *Official Report* available to the public via the Internet and how this could be done; and what assessment he has made of whether the current production systems for the *Official Report* are capable of being connected to the Internet.

Mr. Gary Waller: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 14 February 1995 at column *573*. The Information Committee has not yet considered the possibility of distributing the *Official Report* via the Internet.

HEALTH

Jarman Indices

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the Jarman indices relating to deprivation has not been updated on the basis of the 1991 census; and if she will now take steps to do so.

Mr. Malone: In its recently published report for 1995–96, the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body recommended that future deprivation payments should be based on 1991 census data. The Government have accepted its recommendation.

Mental Illness

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many young people under the age of 14 years have been admitted to psychiatric hospitals in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Bowis: Information on admissions to national health service hospitals for the under 14 years age group for mental illness is given in table 5.24 of the annual publication "Health and Personal Social Services Statistics for England" copies of which are available in the Library.

NHS Staff Cars

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make it her policy that the range of cars provided to staff of health authorities and NHS trusts shall be limited to those costing no more than those provided for Government Ministers.

Mr. Malone: Staff employed on national terms and conditions may be eligible for a lease car under the terms of section 24 of the "General Whitley Council Handbook", copies of which are available in the Library. Employees who choose to have a car which is larger or more expensive than that due to them under the terms of the agreement must pay the excess costs involved.

National health service trusts have the freedom to make their own staff transport arrangements.

Personal Assistance for The Disabled

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will bring forward proposals to assist those local authorities which are unable to provide payments schemes for the disabled;

(2) what assessment she has made of the expense caused to the disabled by legal barriers in direct payments to disabled people for personal assistance; and if she will review this policy.

Mr. Bowis: There is, as yet, no such scheme. I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) on 24 November 1994 at columns *332–33*.

Malaria Chemoprophylaxis

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made as to the cost-effectiveness of the charging for the provision of malaria chemoprophylaxis.

Mr. Malone: The cost of malaria prophylaxis represents a small part of the overall costs of travelling to malarious areas and some anti-malaria drugs can be bought over the counter cheaper than the cost of a national health service prescription. The Government are not changing their recommendations that all travellers to malarious areas take appropriate measures to prevent malaria but do believe that, in this case, the individual traveller should meet the cost of protecting their own health. The cost-effectiveness of permitting general practitioners to charge for prescribing anti-malarial drugs has been considered as one factor in reaching this decision.

Dental Services

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists have taken on new national health service patients in *(a)* Christchurch borough, *(b)* East Dorset district, *(c)* Dorset and *(d)* Great Britain in each year since 1979.

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table.

Number of dentists who had additions to their register by year

	1991	1992	1993	1994
Dorset	244	244	242	240
England	15,126	15,295	15,268	15,217

1. Additions to the register include instances of patients reregistering with a dentist after a break in attendance and instances of reinstatement of registrations that have been cancelled in error.
2. Some dentists have contracts with more than one family health services authority. The figure for Dorset includes all dentists in contract with Dorset FHSA meeting the criterion. The England figure represents the total number of dentists in contracts in England meeting the criterion.

Capital Projects

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all major capital projects carried out at hospitals in the northern region since 1979 with their cost at 1995 prices.

Mr. Sackville: Information will be placed in the Library which lists all major capital projects with a works cost of over £1 million.

Cochlear Implants

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at which locations in England and Wales cochlear implant operations are carried out for adults and children.

Mr. Sackville: Cochlear implant operations are carried out at the following locations:

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham;
The Royal Infirmary, Manchester;
North Riding Infirmary, Middlesbrough;
General Hospital and Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham;
Bradford Hospitals Trust;
Royal Southants Hospital, Southampton;
Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge;
Central Sheffield University Hospitals Trust;
In London: University College and Middlesex Hospitals;
St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington;
Hospitals for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street.

The provision of this service in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the expenditure on cochlear implant operations in England and Wales since the start of this operation; and how many operations have been carried out in each year on *(a)* adults and *(b)* children.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. Information for Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Female Circumcision

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the number of cases that have involved female circumcision and have required treatment at NHS hospitals covering the Greater London area.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Newcastle under Lyme (Mrs. Golding) on 17 February at column *836*.

Misconduct

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to introduce fines for misconduct for all holders of public office.

Mr. Sackville: None.

Breast Cancer

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the mortality rate from breast cancer in *(a)* England and *(b)* other OECD countries for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: In 1993 the provisional mortality rate for malignant neoplasm of the female breast—ICD[1] 184—in England was 49.3 per 100,000 women.

The latest available data for other Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development countries can be found in the "United Nations Demographic Yearbook", copies of which are available in the Library.

[1] International Classification of Diseases, 9th Revision.

Medium Secure Psychiatric Units

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mentally ill people are awaiting placement in medium secure psychiatric units, by region.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Takare plc Nursing Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *649*, on how many occasions registration requirements for a Takare establishment have been relaxed as a result of representations received from Takare plc by the chairpersons of individual health authorities responsible for such legislation under the Registered Homes Act 1984.

Mr. Bowis: None to my knowledge. The hon. Member should let me have evidence of any such allegations.

HEALTH

Local Pay Guidance

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what guidance she has issued to health service units seeking trust status regarding the development of post Whitley Council arrangements for the determination to pay and conditions for employees.

Mr. Malone: In 1994, the national health service executive launched a further comprehensive programme for national health service trusts in support of the pay and personnel freedoms introduced in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990. The programme embraces advice and guidance on the key issues involved in the development of locally determined pay and conditions.

NHS Staff

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the implications for a health service unit's progress to trust status of plans to retain nationally negotiated agreements for the pay and conditions of its employees.

Mr. Malone: The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 enables NHS trusts to employ staff on such terms as the trust sees fit and a health service unit's plans for pay and conditions do not have a bearing on application for trust status.

Office of Population Censuses and Surveys

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultation the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys has had and will have with regard to the proposed 1991 area classification based on the census; and if the results of the classification will be produced at constituency level.

Mr. Sackville: The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) consulted census advisory groups representing Government Departments, local authorities, health authorities, the academic community and the market research industry about proposals for an area classification. A classification has now been prepared following the lines of classifications produced and published after the 1971 and 1981 censuses: details will appear in the next issue of "Population Trends", copies of which will be placed in the Library. OPCS has no plans to produce a classification of parliamentary constituencies.

Exploitation of Children

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures her Department undertakes to combat the commercial exploitation of children.

Mr. Bowis: A comprehensive framework of protection for children below minimum school-leaving age undertaking part-time work has existed for many years. Detailed controls are contained in local authority byelaws, and local authorities are responsible for enforcing these.

Allergy Services

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many allergy physicians there are working within the Bradford health authority;

(2) what provision there is for allergy services within the Bradford health authority.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mrs. Zahida Manzoor, chairman of Bradford health authority, for details.

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the uniformity of *(a)* provision and *(b)* availability of allergy services in the United Kingdom within the national health service.

Mr. Sackville: None. This is for providers to agree with their purchasers.

Ambulance Services

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whom she has commissioned to conduct an independent study into priority despatch systems in ambulance services; what are the terms of reference; what are the qualifications and experience of those concerned; what is the cost; and when she expects the study to be completed.

Mr. Sackville: I have commissioned the medical care research unit at the university of Sheffield to conduct this study, whose primary focus is to assess the reliability and safety of prioritised despatch systems. The research team, headed by a professor of statistics, is well qualified and has considerable experience in this field. The cost is £60,000. I expect to receive the final report of the study by the end of 1995.

NHS Trust Chairmen and Chief Executives

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the NHS earnings of each trust *(a)* chairman and *(b)* chief executive in each year since 1991–92; and what are the expected earnings in 1994–95 and 1995–96.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 13 January 1995]:* For 1991–92 to 1993–94, this information was published in the annual accounts of each trust, but for 1991–92 and 1992–93, this information was not collected centrally. For 1993–94, I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 16 February at column *808*. Forecast information for 1994–95 and 1995–96 is not available.

Health Spending

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was *(a)* total NHS expenditure, *(b)* current expenditure on the hospital and community health services, *(c)* capital expenditure on the hospital and community health services, *(d)* expenditure on the family practitioner services, *(e)* expenditure on centrally funded NHS services and *(f)* expenditure on personal social services in England in each year since 1974–75 giving each in (i) cash terms, (ii) adjusted using the relevant pay and prices index and (iii) adjusted using the GDP deflator;

(2) if she will give for each year since 1974–75 total capital spending on hospital and community health services and spending in net terms after deducting proceeds from land and property sales *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* adjusted using the GDP deflator and *(c)* adjusted using the relevant index of NHS prices.

Mr. Sackville *[pursuant to his reply, 23 January 1995, column 14]:* I regret that there was an error in one of the

tables provided. A corrected version will now be placed in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Information Society Meeting

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what are Her Majesty's Government's key priorities for the British Government at the forthcoming G7 meeting on the information society;

(2) if he will list those individuals from Her Majesty's Government who will attend the G7 information society meeting recording their post and department in each case;

(3) if he will list the ministerial representatives from G7 countries attending the meeting on the information society.

Mr. Ian Taylor: As the Minister responsible for co-ordinating policy on the information society, I shall be representing the Government at the G7 ministerial conference on the information society in Brussels on 24 to 26 February. I understand that the following Ministers from other G7 countries currently intend to participate:

Country	*Post*
Canada	
Mr. Manley	Minister of Industry
Mr. Dupuy	Minister of Canadian Heritage
France	
Mr. Rossi	Minister of Industry, Posts, Telecommunications and External Trade
Germany	
Mr. Rexrodt	Federal Economics Minister
Mr. Boetsch	Federal Minister for Posts and Telecommunications
Italy	
Mr. Clo	Minister for Industry
Mr. Gambino	Minister for Posts and Telecommunications
Japan	
Mr. Hashimoto	Minister for International Trade and Industry
Mr. Oide	Minister for Posts and Telecommunications
United States	
Mr. Gore	Vice President
Mr. Brown	Secretary of Commerce

As indicated in my reply today to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham, (Mr. Arnold) the conference will provide a timely opportunity for Ministers responsible for the information society to exchange views on latest developments in the sector. I shall be emphasising that Governments must do everything possible to remove obstacles to the creation of the information society, in particular by liberalising telecommunications infrastructure to bring prices down to a level which will make the development of a wide range of innovative services commercially attractive. I shall also urge United Kingdom industry to demonstrate how its multi-media equipment and products can contribute to educational and community services.

I shall arrange for relevant papers from the conference to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what issues will be discussed at the G7 conference on information society in Brussels to be held on 24 to 26 February; what are the United Kingdom Government's objectives in attending the conference; who will be representing the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Naples G7 Summit in July 1994 invited the European Commission to host a G7 ministerial conference on the information society. This will take place in Brussels on 24 to 26 February, and I shall be representing the Government. The conference will begin with a round table of 45 business leaders from the G7 countries. The UK participants in the round table will be Sir Iain Vallance of BT, Peter Bonfield of ICL, Lord Blakenham of Pearson, and Bob Phillis of the BBC. Ministers will then hold discussions on three broad themes: the regulatory framework and competition policy, development of information infrastructure; and social, society and cultural aspects of the information society. I shall be a lead speaker on the first of these subjects. The conference will also launch a number of pilot projects to demonstrate the scope for international collaboration in different areas of the information society.

The conference will provide a timely opportunity for Ministers responsible for the information society to exchange views on latest developments in the sector. I shall be emphasising that Governments must do everything possible to remove obstacles to the creation of the information society, in particular by liberalising telecommunications infrastructure to bring prices down to a level which will make the development of a wide range of innovative services commercially attractive. I shall also urge UK industry to demonstrate how its multimedia equipment and products can realistically contribute to educational and community services.

I shall arrange for relevant papers from the G7 conference to be placed in the Library of the House and on the Internet.

European Funding

Mr. Alton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to allow the private sector to match funding for European regional development funding and European social funding.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friends and I have agreed with the European Commission target figures for private sector contributions to the regional single programmes co-financed by the ERDF and ESF. The Merseyside programme, for example, envisages private contributions totalling 368 mecu alongside ERDF and ESF grant of 813 mecu: 816 mecu domestic public finance is also required for this programme.

Mr. Alton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what models the Government have developed of how the private sector should be encouraged to access the European regional development fund; what models have been submitted to the EC; what discussions have taken place or are planned on this issue between Her Majesty's Government and the Commission; and what plans Her

Majesty's Government have to introduce agreed changes in time for approval of 1995 submissions.

Mr. Eggar: The Government wish to maximise the private sector contribution to projects to which the ERDF makes grants and has put to the Commission proposals for facilitating this while ensuring that projects are of general economic benefit to the areas concerned and that ERDF grants do not lead to excessive profit. The Commission's comments are awaited. Any changes to current practice will be introduced as soon as they are agreed. The timetables for considering applications vary from region to region.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what consultations he has had or intends to have with the European Commission concerning procedures through which the private sector could access the European regional development fund;

(2) if he will allow private sector companies to match finance for projects obtained from the European regional development fund and the European social fund.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) today.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the application of European Commission rules concerning the private sector's ability to wholly match finance projects eligible for European regional development fund support in objective 1 regions of other European Union member states.

Mr. Eggar: Some individual projects, in other member states as in Merseyside, may be financed exclusively by the private sector and the ERDF. However, the European Commission has in each case agreed with the Governments concerned that the aggregate of projects will be co-financed by specified amounts of national, including regional and local, as applicable in each case, public sector money, and as any private sector finance.

Following are the aggregate figures in mecu for those single programming documents which show ERDF projects separately from those co-financed by other European structural funds:

	ERDF	*Private*	*National public*
Flevoland (Netherlands)	80	181	423
French Guiana	92	0	78
Guadeloupe (France)	160	37	223
Hainaut (France)	307	210	374
Martinique (France)	166	43	123
Réunion (France)	320	118	229
Merseyside	475	289	480

Northern Electric

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he sought from Trafalgar House assurances as to the continued employment of sufficient staff at Northern Electric.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: No such assurance has been sought from Trafalgar House.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he received the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading on the possible reference of the Trafalgar House bid for Northern Electric.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The advice was received on 2 February 1995.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on what date he or his representatives met Trafalgar House plc to discuss assurances in their bid for Northern Electric; whether representatives of the Director General of Electricity Supply were present; and whether Northern Electric, the takeover panel and the Office of Fair Trading were informed of this meeting.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: Officials from my Department and representatives of the Director General of Electricity Supply met representatives of Trafalgar House on the afternoon of 13 February to discuss such assurances. The Office of Fair Trading was aware of the discussions. Neither the takeover panel nor Northern Electric was informed by my Department about the meeting.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his statutory authority *(a)* for asking Trafalgar House to ensure that sufficient financial and management resources and other facilities were available to carry out the obligations of Northern Electric and *(b)* to secure compliance with such an assurance.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The assurances obtained from Trafalgar House are not based in statute. If Trafalgar's bid for Northern Electric succeeds, the Director General of Electricity Supply—DGES—will monitor Northern Electric's behaviour, under Trafalgar's ownership, in the course of his normal regulatory duties. In doing so, the DGES will have available his usual regulatory powers, including the power to make an MMC reference under the Electricity Act 1989 and the monopoly provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973, if appropriate.

Nuclear Electric

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial guarantee the Government have provided and what costs have been underwritten in relation to Nuclear Electric's bid to gain a contract for reactor construction in Taiwan.

Mr. Eggar: The Government, in their role as shareholder, have required Nuclear Electric to absorb any working capital or other financial requirements arising as a result of the bid within the company's existing external financing limit.

Trade Delegation, Malta

Mr. Barnes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the members of the delegation led by the Minister for Trade to Malta in January; who the delegation met with; and what were the results.

Mr. Needham: I was accompanied to Malta by a strong business delegation representing a broad spectrum of British industry and services, details of which are given. The visit was a success. We met four Ministers and held a seminar at the chamber of commerce. Many new business contracts were established and we have set up a United Kingdom/Malta roundtable to provide a forum for regular discussion.

The Maltese Minister of Finance, whom I met in Malta, will meet my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in London this week.

Mr. S. Naill Armstrong
Director
Andrews Holdings Ltd

Mr. Alex Josephides
Business Director
Avro International Aerospace

Mr. Keith Davis
Executive
Bovis International Ltd

Mr. Nick Cooke
Head of Corporate Affairs
Forte PLC

Mr. Geoff Ball
Sales Director
GEC Alsthom

Mr. Jeremy Hand
Assistant Director
Hambro European Venture Ltd

Mr. W. B. A. Tanner
Chairman
Motherwell Bridge Projects Ltd

Mr. Douglas J. Ridley, Managing Director and Mr. Chris Evans, Director Responsible for Malta
Mowlem International Construction

Mr. Maurice A. Hutson
Executive Chairman
Parker Plant Ltd
Mr. Ian Butler
Export Director
Stanton PLC

Mr. M. Walker
Director, Africa Department
Taylor Woodrow International Ltd

Mr. Geoff Hollyhead
Chairman
Trinity Holdings PLC

Mr. R. G. Hepburn
Sales and Marketing Director
John Brown Engineering Ltd

Mr. Walter Herd
International Sales Manager
Leyland Trucks Ltd

Mr. Roy Lester
International Sales Director
Marconi Instruments Ltd

Mr. John Hill
Vice Chairman
UBAF Bank Ltd

Sir Anthony Kershaw, Chairman and Mr. John R. Richardson, MD
Tilhurst Limited

Mr. Alistair Flemming
Director
Weir Group

Mr. Buhagiar
Local Agent
Rank Xerox

Graham Atkinson
PEP, DTI

Keith Gullick
XAAA1c, DTI

John Fordyce
Export Promoter for Malta

Nuclear Incidents

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what are the conditions under which the nuclear industry must report accidents and incidents on its sites in local newsletters and to Ministers.

Mr. Page: I refer the hon. Member to the answer by my right hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), the then Under-Secretary of State for Energy, to a question from the then hon. Member for Sherwood on 30 April 1987, *Official Report*, columns *203–4*.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which customer countries have expressed an interest in the BNFL proposal to substitute high-level waste for intermediate and low-level waste.

Mr. Page: BNFL has signed reprocessing contracts which contain return-of-waste options with organisations in Japan, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Holland. All have indicated that they would be prepared to consider substitution, if BNFL were to offer it.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to return to high-level wastes resulting from reprocessing at THORP to their customer countries, including wastes arising from spent fuel used at Japanese magnox plants.

Mr. Page: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 1 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *696*.

Anti-personnel Mines

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what considerations he has given to enacting an export moratorium on the component parts of anti-personnel mines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 14 February 1995]:* I am not aware of any case having arisen. Any application

for an export licence for specially designed components for land mines would be subject to export controls, and would be considered on a case-by-case basis in the light of the indefinite moratorium which the United Kingdom has declared on the export from the UK of anti-personnel land mines which do not have self-destruct or self-neutralising mechanisms, and other established criteria.

Voluntary Works Councils

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what study his Department has made of the work of the voluntary works councils in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have been asked to reply.

The Government encourage voluntary employee involvement and monitors significant developments in this field but have not made any specific study of voluntary works councils in the United Kingdom.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Occupational Therapy

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many occupational therapy referrals were received in the Newry and Mourne unit of management in which a case report has not yet been issued in each month since January 1994.

Mr. Moss: The information is not available in the form requested.

Quarterly data on assessment by occupational therapists for aids and adaptations to the homes of people with a disability in the Newry and Mourne HSS trust are shown below.

	Requests from Housing Executive			*Requests from other sources*
Quarter ending	*Number of requests received*	*Number of assessments carried out*	*Number waiting at end of Quarter*	*Number waiting at the end of Quarter*
March 1994	156	126	167	297
June 1994	177	94	218	313
September 1994	142	166	237	400
December 1994	177	145	216	364
Total 1994	652	531	—	—

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what steps he proposes to take to reduce the length of time taken to process occupational therapy reports in connection with Northern Ireland Housing Executive grant applications.

Mr. Moss: The health and social services boards have developed close working links with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and are exploring how the time taken to produce occupational therapy reports can be reduced. As a result, it has recently been agreed that some public sector minor adaptations can be processed directly by the Housing Executive freeing up time for occupational therapists to process other cases more speedily.

The Department of Health and Social Services will publish a charter for community services next month. The charter will set standards for getting occupational therapy assessments for housing adaptations under way and for completion within agreed time scales. Each board will be asked to produce an action plan to achieve the targets.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time occupational therapists are employed in the Newry and Mourne unit of management; and how many are currently not at work due to (i) sickness or (ii) other leave.

Mr. Moss: There are 16 full-time and no part-time occupational therapists employed by Newry and Mourne health and social services trust. One member of staff is currently not at work for a reason other than sickness.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what steps he proposes to take to increase the number of occupational therapists stationed in the Southern health board area.

Mr. Moss: It is the responsibility of individual provider units and trusts to decide, in the light of available resources, on the number of occupational therapists required to provide the level of services which health and social services boards have agreed to purchase for their resident population.

Housing Executive

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will list the outstanding Housing Executive grant applications in Newry district 1 and Newry district 2 that were received in each month since March 1993 for *(a)* renovations, *(b)* improvements, *(c)* disabled facilities and *(d)* replacements.

Mr. Moss: This is an operational matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and I have been advised by its chief executive that the information requested is not immediately available.

I have arranged for the chief executive to write to the hon. Gentleman once the information is available.

Arthur Andersen

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what *(a)* was and *(b)* is his policy in respect of giving additional work to Arthur Andersen following the collapse of the Delorean Motor Car Co. and what is the current annual total of fees paid to the consultancy arm of Arthur Andersen for work commissioned by his Department.

Sir John Wheeler *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* I regret that I am unable to answer my hon. Friend's question other than by saying that the details of the arrangements made between Government and Arthur Andersen are not available on grounds of commercial confidentiality.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is his estimate of the amount of cash earned weekly by Camelot from its work in the national lottery; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what requirement he will place on Camelot to declare its profitability, inclusive of charges for supplies and services, achieved through the operation of the national lottery.

Mr. Dorrell: There are matters for the Director-General of the National Lottery. I have therefore asked him to write to the hon. Members, placing copies of his letters in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Anne Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 1st February, *Official Report*, columns *674–75*, if his estimate of the operating profit of the National Lottery in its first weeks of operation included services provided to the national lottery by investors in Camelot and charged for at a profit; what statutory provisions govern the disclosure of such services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* This is a matter for the Director-General of the National Lottery. I have therefore asked him to write to the hon. Member, placing copies of his letter in the Library of the House.

EDUCATION

Pupil Numbers

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list, for each local education authority, the predicted change in pupil numbers for 1995–96.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) on 10 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *438*.

Class Sizes

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to her answer of 14 February, what assessment she has made of external research into the effect of class sizes on *(a)* pupil progress and *(b)* attainment levels; and if she will list the main research documents her Department has evaluated in this respect.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has taken account of relevant research including that summarised in Professor Mortimore's recent paper. There is no evidence from the accumulated research that marginal reductions in class size result in changes in pupils' performance.

Educational Standards

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made in respect of the merits of *(a)* standard assessment tasks and *(b)* league tables in respect of raising educational standards.

Mr. Forth: The Office for Standards in Education continues to confirm that national curriculum assessment is helping to raise standards. Performance tables provide parents and others with comparative data about the achievements of institutions, and encourage individual schools and colleges to consider how standards might be improved in the future.

Sixth Forms

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many sixth forms there were in the *(a)* maintained sector and *(b)* grant-maintained sector in each of the last five years.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table gives the number of sixth forms catering for the 16 to 18 age group in each of the last five years in *(a)* local education authority maintained and *(b)* grant-maintained schools.

Year	*LEA maintained*	*Grant-maintained*
1989	1989	0
1990	1926	14
1991	1830	41
1992	1733	98
1993	1587	188
1994	1377	371

Surplus Places

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the current number and percentages of surplus places in each local education authority; and if she will list those local authorities, in rank order according to the proportion of surplus places in *(a)* secondary schools *(b)* primary schools *(c)* special schools and *(d)* grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information is given in the tables. Data on special schools and on surplus places in the 286 grant-maintained schools in stage 1 authorities are not available.

The figures give the position in January 1994. In most cases, surpluses will have fallen from these levels as a result of pupil population growth. In addition, a number of authorities have implemented rationalisation proposals and further reduced their surplus capacity.

Table 1: Surplus places by local authority area in rank order (excluding GM schools in stage 1 authorities) January 1994

PRIMARY *(see note 1)*	*Actual surplus*	
LEA	*Number*	*Percentage*
Wandsworth	6,111	30
Isles of Scilly	67	27
Gateshead	4,887	23
Northumberland	4,960	21
Liverpool	11,436	21
Doncaster	6,632	20
Staffordshire	21,456	20
Lambeth	4,060	20
Sunderland	6,104	18
Southwark	3,980	18
North Tyneside	3,020	18
Wigan	5,734	17
Knowsley	3,277	17
Ealing	4,358	17
Buckinghamshire	11,457	17
Wolverhampton	4,412	17
Oxfordshire	8,237	17

PRIMARY (see note 1) LEA	Actual surplus Number	Percentage
Hammersmith	1,591	16
Newscastle upon Tyne	3,704	16
Coventry	5,133	16
Hertfordshire	14,517	16
Bedfordshire	7,272	15
Warwickshire	7,966	15
Salford	3,681	15
Cheshire	14,860	15
Leeds	10,425	15
Wiltshire	7,604	14
Sheffield	6,696	14
North Yorkshire	9,048	14
Nottinghamshire	13,457	14
Cumbria	6,104	14
Durham	8,368	14
Newham	3,631	14
Calderdale	2,722	13
Gloucestershire	6,234	13
Lincolnshire	7,434	[1]13
Wirral	4,398	13
Rotherham	3,423	13
Humberside	11,612	13
Walsall	3,556	13
Wakefield	3,924	13
Cambridgeshire	7,978	13
Derbyshire	10,637	13
Hampshire	18,287	13
Essex	17,814	[1]12
Shropshire	4,902	12
Solihull	2,443	12
Manchester	5,657	12
Hillingdon	2,464	[1]12
Kensington	722	12
East Sussex	6,671	12
Hackney	2,046	12
Cleveland	7,426	12
St. Helens	1,985	12
West Sussex	6,951	12
Hereford and Worcester	6,505	11
Dudley	3,352	11
Norfolk	7,383	11
South Tyneside	1,710	11
Surrey	8,483	11
Brent	2,291	11
Kent	14,638	11
Sefton	2,884	11
Bradford	4,099	11
Greenwich	2,220	11
Islington	1.630	10
Corporation of London	22	10
Devon	9,032	10
Leicestershire	8,082	10
Suffolk	4,559	10
Lancashire	12,398	9
Berkshire	5,946	9
Stockport	2,448	9
Croydon	2,442	9
Oldham	2,152	9
Avon	7,342	9
Bexley	1,799	9
Northamptonshire	4,410	9
Hounslow	1,656	9
Sutton	1,110	9
Havering	1,817	9
Birmingham	8,983	9
Bolton	2,187	9
Rochdale	1,709	8
Trafford	1,562	8
Merton	1,100	8
Kirklees	2,714	8
Cornwall	3,005	8
Dorset	3,242	7
Tower Hamlets	1,522	7
Waltham Forest	1,422	7
Barnsley	1,496	7
Barnet	1,598	7
Tameside	1,464	7
Haringey	1,240	7
Westminster	621	7
Bromley	1,442	7
Somerset	2,487	7
Sandwell	1,857	7
Barking	975	7
Richmond upon Thames	686	6
Bury	848	6
Harrow	998	5
Lewisham	999	5
Kingston upon Thames	503	5
Isle of Wight	384	5
Enfield	1,013	5
Camden	325	3
Redbridge	406	2
Total	540,729	12

[1] Stage two for planning purposes.

1. Primary figures show surplus after taking account of any summer entry.

2. Stage 1 = less than 10 per cent. of pupils in the GM sector.
Stage 2 = between 10 per cent. and 75 per cent. of pupils in the GM sector.
Stage 3 = 75 per cent. or more pupils in the GM sector.

SECONDARY LEA	Actual Surplus Number	Percentage
Isles of Scilly	223	65
Manchester	12,294	36
Lambeth	3,142	[1]33
Hammersmith	2,606	[1]31
Nottinghamshire	20,327	25
Salford	3,375	23
Doncaster	6,439	23
Hackney	2,132	23
Liverpool	7,687	22
Warwickshire	6,607	[1]21
Newcastle upon Tyne	4,421	21
Wandsworth	2,308	[1]21
Southwark	2,296	[1]20
Wakefield	4,728	19
Gateshead	2,695	19
Wolverhampton	3,638	[1]19
Islington	1,656	19
Cleveland	8,276	19
Sheffield	5,612	18
Kensington	712	[1]18
Avon	11,596	18
Coventry	4,236	18
Greenwich	3,038	18
South Tyneside	2,076	18
North Tyneside	3,101	18
Durham	8,144	18
Wirral	4,064	18
Sefton	3,956	18
Newham	2,794	17
Rochdale	2,436	17
Merton	1,488	17
Tower Hamlets	2,239	17
Barnsley	2,611	17
Bedfordshire	9,021	[1]17
Hertfordshire	13,552	[1]17
Cumbria	6,169	[1]17

SECONDARY LEA	Actual Surplus Number	Percentage
Shropshire	4,947	[1]17
Sandwell	3,445	16
Oxfordshire	6,858	16
Humberside	10,912	16
Knowsley	1,635	16
St. Helens	2,245	16
Derbyshire	10,782	[1]16
Essex	18,008	[1]16
Brent	2,383	[2]16
Walsall	3,565	[1]16
Hereford and Worcester	7,851	15
Leicestershire	10,076	15
Kent	18,000	[1]15
Birmingham	11,330	[1]15
Trafford	2,067	[1]15
Wiltshire	5,812	[1]14
Berkshire	7,754	[1]14
Calderdale	2,221	[1]14
Haringey	1,515	14
Rotherham	2,875	14
Wigan	2,969	14
Havering	2,284	[1]13
Bradford	6,914	[1]13
Lancashire	11,754	13
Lewisham	1,587	13
West Sussex	6,051	13
Leeds	6,358	13
Waltham Forest	1,737	[1]13
North Yorkshire	6,304	13
Stockport	2,209	12
Bexley	2,005	[1]12
Tameside	1,737	[1]12
Kirklees	3,160	12
Westminster	938	12
Cheshire	7,983	12
Lincolnshire	4,864	[1]12
Hampshire	10,114	[1]12
Surrey	5,407	[1]11
Somerset	3,486	11
Suffolk	6,000	11
Bolton	2,000	[1]11
Northamptonshire	5,423	[1]11
Sunderland	2,408	11
Dudley	2,218	[1]11
Croydon	1,716	[1]11
Northumberland	3,333	11
East Sussex	3,783	10
Kingston upon Thames	843	[1]10
Isle of Wight	1,093	10
Barnet	1,947	[1]10
Gloucestershire	3,417	[1]10
Camden	1,047	[1]9
Enfield	1,781	[1]9
Norfolk	4,041	[1]9
Dorset	3,964	[1]9
Hillingdon	1,336	[2]9
Bury	947	9
Cornwall	2,601	8
Buckinghamshire	3,231	[1]8
Solihull	1,144	8
Ealing	1,056	[1]7
Staffordshire	4,919	7
Devon	4,160	7
Oldham	1,145	7
Cambridgeshire	2,837	[1]7
Redbridge	835	6
Bromley	891	[1]5
Richmond upon Thames	288	4
Harrow	278	4
Sutton	367	[1]3
Barking	307	3
Hounslow	435	[1]3
Corporation of London	—	—
Total	475,628	14

[1] Stage two for planning purposes.
[2] Stage three for planning purposes.:

1. Primary figures show surplus after taking account of any summer entry.
2. Stage 1 = less than 10 per cent. of pupils in the GM sector.
Stage 2 = between 10 per cent. and 75 per cent. of pupils in the GM sector.
Stage 3 = 75 per cent. or more pupils in the GM sector.

Table 2: Surplus places in GM schools, by LEA area and in rank order, in stage 2 and 3 authorities

PRIMARY LEA	Surplus	Percentage
Lincolnshire	673	10
Essex	2,060	9
Hillingdon	124	4

1. Includes schools which became grant-maintained on or before 1 April 1994 2. The percentage column shows the actual number of surplus places as a proportion of total capacity within the GM sector.

SECONDARY LEA	Surplus	Percentage
Warwickshire	1,239	21
Cumbria	2,288	18
Brent	1,988	17
Lambeth	676	17
Wandsworth	1,179	15
Berkshire	1,277	15
Essex	11,090	14
Kingston upon Thames	440	14
Walsall	892	14
Bolton	401	13
Wolverhampton	360	13
Hertfordshire	3,067	13
Kent	7,303	13
Southwark	389	12
Croydon	725	11
Wiltshire	1,653	11
Derbyshire	1,711	10
Trafford	356	10
Surrey	1,285	10
Lincolnshire	1,733	10
Northamptonshire	961	9
Bedfordshire	895	9
Birmingham	1,534	9
Calderdale	615	9
Gloucestershire	1,906	8
Dorset	810	8
Hampshire	1,280	8
Barnet	745	7
Dudley	327	7
Enfield	378	6
Hillingdon	776	6
Cambridgeshire	997	6
Bromley	684	6
Norfolk	512	6
Buckinghamshire	487	5
Bradford	231	5
Ealing	272	4
Bexley	134	4
Shropshire	127	3

Secondary LEA	Surplus	Percentage
Hounslow	63	3
Sutton	192	3
Waltham Forest	40	2
Tameside	28	1
Havering	18	0
Camden	6	0
Hammersmith	0	0
Kensington	0	0

1. Includes schools which became grant-maintained on or before 1 April 1994 2. The percentage column shows the actual number of surplus places as a proportion of total capacity within the GM sector.

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State how many orders have been issued in the last 12 months to *(a)* local education authorities and *(b)* the Funding Agency for Schools requiring the elimination of surplus places in (i) secondary schools and (ii) primary schools; and to whom those orders were issued.

Mr. Robin Squire: No orders have yet been made under section 232 of the Education Act 1993. My officials are consulting a number of local education authorities and, where those LEAs share responsibility for the supply of places, the Funding Agency for Schools, about the extent to which surplus within the LEA area might be removed. In the light of the outcome of these consultations, my right hon. Friend will consider whether in any case an order would be appropriate.

Private Education

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her Department's latest estimate of the number of children under the age of five years who are educated privately in the United Kingdom, and what information she has on the current average cost of such education for a half-day session.

Mr. Forth: In 1992–93, there were over 50,000 pupils aged under five in independent schools in the United Kingdom.

Information on the average cost per session of such education is not available. Figures published by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in "Day care services for Children", copies of which are in the Library, indicate that in 1990 the average termly cost to parents in England of sending a child aged under five to independent infant or primary school full-time was £650.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her estimate of the total level of expenditure on private education for children under the age of five years in the United Kingdom, and what this amount is per head of children under the age of five years who are privately educated.

Mr. Forth: An estimate is not available. Information on expenditure on private education is not collected.

Nursery Education

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many three and four-year-old children currently attend *(a)* maintained nursery schools and *(b)* nursery classes in maintained primary schools.

Mr. Forth: In England in January 1994, there were 52,262 pupils under five years of age in maintained nursery schools and 294,331 pupils in nursery classes in maintained primary schools.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the current ratio of staff to children in state nursery schools.

Mr. Forth: In January 1994, the pupil—staff ratio in maintained nursery schools in England was 8.9:1.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of children under the age of five years has *(a)* a full-time and *(b)* part-time place in (i) reception classes in schools, (ii) nursery classes in schools and (iii) nursery schools by local education authority area.

Mr. Forth: Information on pupils aged under five being taught in maintained nursery and primary schools in each local education authority area in England in January 1994 is shown in the table.

Percentage of children under five in maintained nursery schools and primary schools in each LEA in England[1] January 1994

	Nursery schools		Primary schools			
			Nursery classes		Infant classes	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Camden	1.0	0.8	11.4	12.2	23.6	0.0
Greenwich	4.8	5.0	4.1	33.4	14.7	0.1
Hackney	1.0	1.7	12.4	22.7	13.7	0.0
Hammersmith and Fulham	7.3	8.1	12.6	15.7	14.2	0.3
Islington	3.2	3.7	20.3	11.9	29.2	0.3
Kensington and Chelsea	5.0	2.5	11.9	6.3	11.3	0.6
Lambeth	2.7	3.7	7.9	19.7	14.2	0.6
Lewisham	1.4	1.9	5.2	28.5	14.4	1.1
Southwark	2.8	4.9	8.8	26.6	29.5	0.0
Tower Hamlets	7.4	4.8	22.8	18.0	30.7	0.0
Wandsworth	1.7	1.6	12.6	20.2	26.4	—[4]
Westminster	1.4	3.6	10.9	14.9	12.7	0.3
Barking and Dagenham	0.0	0.0	0.4	40.1	33.3	0.0
Barnet	0.2	6.4	0.1	24.6	25.2	1.0
Bexley	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.5	17.3	0.2
Brent	2.6	0.6	9.8	25.1	30.1	0.0
Bromley	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.2	31.0	—[4]
Croydon	0.0	4.9	—[4]	11.5	30.1	0.1
Ealing	0.2	5.2	0.1	39.2	28.5	0.1
Enfield	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.7	30.7	0.3
Haringey	2.9	1.2	7.8	34.3	29.6	0.0
Harrow	0.0	0.0	0.0	19.2	30.6	—[4]

Percentage of children under five in maintained nursery schools and primary schools in each LEA in England[1]
January 1994

	Nursery schools		Primary schools			
			Nursery classes		Infant classes	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Havering	0.0	0.0	0.2	8.3	16.8	17.7
Hillingdon	0.0	1.8	0.0	44.7	0.7	0.9
Hounslow	0.0	0.0	2.1	41.0	28.6	0.0
Kingston upon Thames	1.7	4.4	0.3	26.7	13.4	14.4
Merton	0.0	0.0	0.0	54.5	16.7	3.9
Newham	1.1	10.8	1.2	44.7	0.1	0.0
Redbridge	0.0	0.0	0.7	18.8	18.5	1.7
Richmond upon Thames	0.2	1.4	0.0	18.3	0.8	23.3
Sutton	0.0	5.2	0.0	34.6	0.8	0.0
Waltham Forest	0.6	4.2	1.6	32.8	14.7	0.2
Birmingham	2.8	4.8	6.4	20.6	31.7	—[4]
Coventry	0.3	2.0	0.8	22.1	32.8	—[4]
Dudley	0.1	0.7	1.2	34.0	33.3	0.0
Sandwell	1.3	1.3	1.7	51.6	34.1	0.1
Solihull	0.0	0.0	0.0	34.9	35.6	0.0
Walsall	1.2	9.8	0.6	47.7	33.1	—[4]
Wolverhampton	0.0	11.6	—[4]	42.0	31.1	0.0
Knowsley	0.0	0.0	0.0	55.4	32.8	0.2
Liverpool	1.7	2.9	3.8	43.3	35.7	0.0
St. Helens	0.1	1.5	—[4]	33.8	32.5	0.0
Sefton	—[4]	4.0	—[4]	27.9	31.5	0.1
Wirral	0.1	3.4	—[4]	21.4	31.6	0.0
Bolton	0.3	6.4	4.6	29.1	31.6	0.0
Bury	1.1	2.0	3.3	23.7	31.1	0
Manchester	3.0	1.2	30.5	20.9	17.4	0.1
Oldham	0.0	0.0	13.7	22.9	33.5	0.0
Rochdale	0.8	13.4	1.6	17.2	31.2	—[4]
Salford	7.2	8.2	26.8	13.5	31.9	0.0
Stockport	1.1	11.1	0.0	13.8	31.4	—[4]
Tameside	0.0	5.3	0.1	33.9	33.6	0.0
Trafford	0.0	0.0	—[4]	38.1	30.5	—[4]
Wigan	—[4]	2.2	0.0	22.8	31.8	0.3
Barnsley	0.0	3.0	0.0	46.5	16.6	0.2
Doncaster	0.0	0.0	0.8	41.3	32.3	—[4]
Rotherham	0.0	5.5	1.7	37.5	14.9	0.0
Sheffield	1.0	5.5	1.8	35.6	15.9	2.9
Bradford	1.3	2.2	1.2	38.3	25.6	1.6
Calderdale	0.0	0.0	5.0	29.1	33.4	0.0
Kirklees	0.0	5.3	0.0	36.0	31.1	—[4]
Leeds	0.0	0.5	0.6	43.7	29.9	0.2
Wakefield	0.0	5.4	0.5	47.8	17.5	1.2
Gateshead	0.1	1.1	0.1	34.7	31.8	—[4]
Newcastle upon Tyne	8.5	0.4	11.2	22.2	29.9	0.0
North Tyneside	0.8	3.9	1.3	48.0	33.0	0.0
South Tyneside	0.4	9.8	0.4	43.2	31.8	0.0
Sunderland	0.5	12.2	—[4]	28.5	32.8	0.1
Avon	2.8	4.4	1.0	13.0	31.3	—[4]
Bedfordshire	2.1	7.1	3.1	21.5	11.1	4.6
Berkshire	0.6	9.4	0.5	19.2	2.7	0.3
Buckinghamshire	0.0	3.1	0.0	11.9	5.5	11.5
Cambridgeshire	0.1	3.8	—[4]	7.9	30.6	0.4
Cheshire	0.1	3.1	0.1	17.7	31.9	—[4]
Cleveland	0.0	0.8	—[4]	56.5	32.4	—[4]
Cornwall[3]	0.2	0.8	—[4]	13.1	15.8	14.6
Cumbria	0.0	6.5	0.0	18.2	31.6	0.1
Derbyshire	0.6	5.6	1.4	30.9	16.2	5.7
Devon	0.2	1.0	0.6	9.2	15.9	0.4
Dorset	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.5	7.1	24.3
Durham	0.3	16.1	0.1	29.2	31.1	—[4]
East Sussex	0.0	1.7	0.0	7.5	14.6	15.3
Essex	0.0	0.7	0.2	5.3	15.7	0.4
Gloucestershire	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	31.9	0.1
Hampshire	—[4]	0.7	0.1	3.9	22.1	8.9
Hereford and Worcester	0.0	0.0	0.7	6.4	15.1	0.4
Hertfordshire	0.2	6.2	0.1	26.0	16.0	2.0
Humberside	0.8	4.1	2.9	31.0	22.9	0.1
Isle of Wight	0.0	0.0	0.1	6.3	32.8	0.0
Kent	0.0	0.2	0.0	4.7	23.4	7.9
Lancashire	0.2	9.1	—[4]	11.3	32.6	—[4]
Leicestershire	0.0	0.2	6.5	14.1	15.2	2.3

Percentage of children under five in maintained nursery schools and primary schools in each LEA in England[1] January 1994

	Nursery schools		Primary schools			
			Nursery classes		Infant classes	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Lincolnshire	0.4	1.3	0.3	7.9	32.8	—[4]
Norfolk	—[4]	2.1	0.0	2.6	19.9	9.7
North Yorkshire	—[4]	2.2	0.7	18.5	25.9	1.5
Northampton	0.0	3.6	0.2	13.6	32.6	—[4]
Northumberland	0.5	1.2	0.3	37.7	30.8	0.2
Nottinghamshire	—[4]	2.2	0.8	45.7	7.2	0.7
Oxfordshire	0.3	7.2	0.4	10.9	4.6	2.2
Shropshire	0.0	1.6	0.0	16.3	16.1	2.2
Somerset	0.0	0.0	0.3	3.7	31.9	0.8
Staffordshire	2.6	4.9	5.2	11.5	31.4	0.2
Suffolk	0.0	0.5	—[4]	16.4	14.3	0.2
Surrey	0.3	1.3	—[4]	9.4	16.5	1.8
Warwickshire	0.0	5.9	0.7	10.3	32.2	—[4]
West Sussex	0.1	2.6	0.0	3.4	15.8	0.3
Wiltshire	0.0	0.0	—[4]	3.5	19.2	0.8
England[2,3]	0.7	3.3	2.1	20.4	22.9	2.2

[1] Excludes pupils who became five years of age by 1 January 1994.
[2] Includes Isles of Scilly.
[3] Includes Corporation of London
[4] Less than 0.05.

Teacher Qualifications

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what information is held by her Department on *(a)* the total number of staff and *(b)* the proportion of staff working in state nursery schools who hold each relevant qualification.

Mr. Forth: In January 1994, there were some 3,600 full-time equivalent staff working in maintained nursery schools. Of these, 1,575 were qualified teachers.

Examination Results

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list all local education authorities in England in rank order showing the proportion of school leavers with five or more GCSE results at grade A to C.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on school leavers is no longer collected by the Department. The table lists the percentage of 15-year-old pupils achieving five or more GCSE Grades A to C in each local education authority in England in rank order for 1994.

Percentage of 15 year old pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A to C in England, 1994 School performance tables 1994

	Percentage	Rank
Isles of Scilly	68.0	1
Sutton	52.9	2
Kingston upon Thames	51.6	3
Barnet	51.1	4
West Sussex	50.4	5
Richmond upon Thames	50.0	6
Buckinghamshire	49.4	7
Dorset	49.3	8
Bromley	49.2	9
North Yorkshire	49.0	10
Stockport	48.6	11
Harrow	48.4	12
Berkshire	48.2	13
Solihull	48.0	14
Surrey	47.8	15

Percentage of 15 year old pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A to C in England, 1994 School performance tables 1994

	Percentage	Rank
Hertfordshire	47.6	16
Somerset	47.4	17
Shropshire	47.3	18
Cheshire	47.0	19
Redbridge	46.5	20
Gloucestershire	46.3	21
Oxfordshire	46.3	21
Cornwall	46.0	23
Bury	45.6	24
Wiltshire	45.5	25
Sefton	45.1	26
Hampshire	44.3	27
Trafford	44.1	28
Suffolk	44.1	28
Hereford and Worcester	43.8	30
Cumbria	43.4	31
East Sussex	43.3	32
Cambridgeshire	43.3	32
England Average	43.3	32
Devon	42.9	35
Lincolnshire	42.6	36
Warwickshire	42.6	36
Havering	42.5	38
Bolton	41.9	39
Wigan	41.7	40
Dudley	41.4	40
Essex	41.4	40
Northumberland	41.3	43
North Tyneside	41.2	44
Lancashire	41.1	45
Derbyshire	40.9	46
Camden	40.6	47
Isle of Wight	40.5	48
Enfield	40.4	49
Kent	40.4	49
Bexley	40.3	51
Hounslow	40.3	51
Bedfordshire	40.3	51
Avon	40.1	54
Norfolk	40.1	54

Percentage of 15 year old pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A to C in England, 1994
School performance tables 1994

	Percentage	Rank
Wirral	39.7	56
Leicestershire	39.3	57
Northamptonshire	38.9	58
Staffordshire	38.1	59
Hillingdon	37.7	60
Kirklees	37.3	61
Croydon	37.2	62
Calderdale	36.8	63
Leeds	36.2	64
Sheffield	35.6	65
Wakefield	35.6	65
St. Helens	35.5	67
South Tyneside	35.5	67
Brent	34.9	69
Rotherham	34.8	70
Cleveland	34.8	70
Nottinghamshire	34.6	72
Durham	34.6	72
Kensington and Chelsea	34.5	74
Coventry	34.3	75
Tameside	34.2	76
Humberside	33.8	77
Doncaster	33.7	78
Gateshead	33.6	79
Merton	33.4	80
Walsall	32.3	81
Rochdale	32.3	81
Ealing	32.2	83
Oldham	32.1	84
Hammersmith and Fulham	31.9	85
Birmingham	30.4	86
Newcastle upon Tyne	30.3	87
Waltham Forest	30.1	88
Sunderland	30.0	89
Barnsley	29.8	90
Wolverhampton	29.6	91
Wandsworth	29.1	92
Salford	29.1	92
Haringey	28.4	94
Barking and Dagenham	27.6	95
Sandwell	27.3	96
Lewisham	21.1	97
Greenwich	27.0	98
Bradford	26.7	99
Westminster	25.1	100
Liverpool	25.0	101
Manchester	23.2	102
Newham	23.0	103
Hackney	22.7	104
Lambeth	22.0	105
Islington	21.9	106
Knowsley	21.3	107
Tower Hamlets	18.7	108
Southwark	18.3	109

Underspending

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate she has made of the numbers of primary and secondary schools and the amount involved where underspending of the budget has occurred in 1994: and if she will make a statement on the level of teaching staff in those schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on the cumulative net balances recorded in local education authorities' local management of schools outturn statements for 1993–94 is contained in the answers which I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 19 and 27 January, *Official Report*, column *641–43* and column *410–11* respectively. The Department has made no estimate of the number of schools whose expenditure in that year fell short of their budget shares for the year. Where schools have delegated budgets, it is for their governing bodies to consider what level of staffing is appropriate and affordable.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the capital allocation as a percentage of the bid for each local education authority for 1995–96.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information requested is given in the table, covering schools annual capital guidelines for English LEAs in 1995–96.

LEA	Total ACG for 1995–96	ACG as percentage of bid
Barking	1,899	26
Barnet	1,408	16
Bexley	1,420	31
Brent	179	4
Bromley	1,335	17
Croydon	1,860	17
Ealing	891	2
Enfield	3,234	20
Haringey	2,713	18
Harrow	1,644	13
Havering	199	2
Hillingdon	475	5
Hounslow	2,035	14
Kingston	487	8
Merton	681	7
Newham	829	5
Redbridge	5,132	86
Richmond	121	2
Sutton	1,660	27
Waltham	2,028	16
City	0	0
Camden	570	10
Westminster	40	5
Greenwich	487	4
Hackney	241	3
Hammersmith	91	3
Islington	207	2
Kensington	67	2
Lambeth	389	3
Lewisham	1,540	7
Southwark	740	12
Wandsworth	2,994	29
Tower Hamlets	12,131	55
Birmingham	9,210	23
Coventry	3,587	63
Dudley	499	8
Sandwell	275	3
Solihull	1,805	35
Walsall	430	6
Wolverham	1,087	9
Knowsley	935	6
Liverpool	4,576	25
St. Helens	1,236	20
Sefton	1,698	38
Wirral	1,912	26
Bolton	884	15
Bury	557	18
Manchester	17,190	30
Oldham	1,660	18
Rochdale	301	3
Salford	5,625	26

LEA	Total ACG for 1995–96	ACG as percentage of bid
Stockport	736	20
Tameside	2,403	53
Trafford	575	8
Wigan	2,066	23
Barnsley	3,314	62
Doncaster	536	6
Rotherham	267	6
Sheffield	4,177	10
Bradford	5,076	12
Calderdale	2,193	37
Kirklees	1,455	15
Leeds	2,081	7
Wakefield	8,704	31
Gateshead	1,306	21
Newcastle	3,093	12
North Tyneside	1,520	19
South Tyneside	827	14
Sunderland	4,159	41
Isle of Scilly	37	100
Avon	9,318	37
Bedfordshire	1,455	13
Berkshire	1,961	13
Bucks	9,245	36
Cambridge	6,669	25
Cheshire	6,657	21
Cleveland	6,051	57
Cornwall	3,719	23
Cumbria	4,105	16
Derbyshire	4,031	11
Devon	11,627	34
Dorset	3,340	14
Durham	3,545	7
East Sussex	15,026	43
Essex	9,668	13
Gloucester	10,611	23
Hampshire	14,762	44
Hereford and Worcester	6,865	44
Hertford	1,109	7
Humberside	4,994	25
Isle of Wight	4,693	46
Kent	21,248	31
Lancashire	8,105	20
Leicester	3,845	40
Lincoln	9,867	61
Norfolk	3,122	18
North Yorkshire	3,647	11
Northampton	3,454	20
Northumber	1,499	29
Notts	1,677	9
Oxfordshire	6,767	22
Shropshire	7,423	75
Somerset	2,608	22
Staffs	1,291	5
Suffolk	7,676	38
Surrey	5,545	24
Warwick	1,074	6
West Sussex	2,400	13
Wiltshire	2,786	36

Students

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment she has made of the correlation between student drop-out rates in higher education and student poverty.

Mr. Boswell: Information about the reasons for student drop-out is not collected centrally. Since 1990, total support available to students has increased in real terms. The Government have also provided access funds to help students in particular need. There is no evidence of widespread student poverty.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for each local education authority *(a)* the total number of discretionary awards, schedules 1 and 2, *(b)* the total value of those awards and *(c)* the average value of each award, for (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1993–94.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested for 1992–93 is published in tables 7 to 12 of "Statistics of Education, Student Support Volume 1992–93" copies of which are in the Library. Tables 7 to 9 show data for section 1(6) awards and section 2 awards in higher education; tables 10 to 12 show data for section 2 awards in further education.

Returns made to the Department by local education authorities about discretionary awards for the academic year 1993–94 are being received now. Information at LEA level will not be available for publication until this summer.

Schools, Suffolk

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much money is held in reserve by schools in Suffolk.

Mr. Robin Squire: At the end of the financial year 1993–94, £13.5 million net.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what are the total balances currently held by grant-maintained schools;

(2) what procedure is involved in authorising overspending in respect of grant-maintained schools which have incurred a deficit;

(3) if she will list the grant-maintained schools which have currently accumulated deficits, giving in each case the size of the deficit.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on, and policy relating to, balances and deficits of grant-maintained schools are a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked its chairman to write to the hon. Member.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

"Realising our Potential Awards"

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will place in the Library a full itemised list of all 239 "Realising our Potential Awards" funded projects, together with the amount of Government financial support.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: A full itemised list of all ROPA projects awarded to date and the associated amount of Government financial support has been placed in the Library.

Government Consultation Documents

Mr. Soley: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, how many HMSO Government consultation

documents have had to be reprinted because demand outstripped supply.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Since 1 January 1994, HMSO has published 41 consultative documents. At no time were stocks exhausted, but two publications were reprinted in anticipation of continuing public demand.

Information Super-highway

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what use the Government are making of the information super-highway; and how it can be used to make citizens charter data more readily available.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The CCTA Government information service enables Government Departments and agencies to make information freely and widely available over the Internet. Eighteen Departments have information available already, and most others have plans to use the service. There have been more than half a million requests for information over a four-month period. We also use the Internet to broaden the scope of consultation through consultative open groups.

The CCTA Government information service already includes a web page for the citizens charter unit, and the full text of 16 charters. The remaining charters will be made available shortly.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to stop farmers dumping milk on the land on economic grounds.

Mr. Jack: We have seen reports that some farmers who anticipate having to pay super levy are disposing of their surplus milk by dumping it on their land. However, the arrangements which the Government have provided for milk producers to buy, sell or lease milk quota to meet their individual business needs are an alternative way for farmers to avoid the payment of super levy.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to ensue that dairy farmers are assisted by the efficient completion of is annual activities by the intervention board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The intervention board is responsible under the common agriculture policy arrangements for supporting and managing a range of measures in the dairy sector including the operation of the milk quotas register. I am confident that it is able to discharge these responsibilities in and efficient and timely manner.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures are taken by his Department in cases where this is evidence of the illegal movement of milk.

Mr. Jack: The intervention board is currently investigating information it has received concerning irregularities in connection with the trade in milk. If there is evidence of such irregularities, those involved would run the risk of heavy fines, payment or super levy on undeclared sales of milk and, possibly imprisonment.

Hunting

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library current copies of the permission to hunt in respect of those hunts licensed to hunt the New forest, together with details of any special considerations imposed.

Mr. Jack: Copies of the current permits have been placed in the Library of the House. The permits include details of the conditions imposed.

Arctic Fox Farms

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many Arctic fox fur farms there have been, by region, in each of the last five years in England and Wales.

Mrs. Browning: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my predecessor the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) on 20 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *346*.

Deer

Mr. Denham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food what role is played by Forestry Commission employees in identifying the whereabouts of deer or any other activities in support of deer hunting in the New forest.

Mr. Jack: The Forestry Commission keeper selects the animal to be hunted on each occasion. The animals selected are those which would have been culled by the Commission during its normal management operations.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the Forestry Commission's keeper in the killing of a deer by the New forest buckhounds on 13 January;

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the report of the inspection of the carcase of the deer killed in Dames Slough enclosure in the New forest on 13 January.

Mr. Jack: A copy of the duty keeper's report on the hunt by the New forest buckhounds on 13 January has been placed in the Library of the House. The duty keeper does not prepare a separate report of his inspection of the carcase. He would have recorded the details in his report if he had found that the animal had sustained injuries which indicated that the hunt had not been conducted in accordance with the conditions set out in the licence.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what account of the cost of fencing hill land is made in assessing the level of the hill livestock compensatory allowance each year; what formula is used in this assessment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Decisions on the rates of hill livestock compensatory allowances are taken in the light of the autumn review of economic conditions in the hills and uplands. The source of the economic data used in the review is the farm business survey in which costs of fencing are taken into account in calculating the various measures of income.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what evidence he has of infringements of directive 74/577 in other European Community states; and if he will list the countries involved since 1990;

(2) what instructions he has given to his veterinary department for checking that *(a)* journey times for farm animals to be exported from the United Kingdom are properly completed, *(b)* that such animals are fit to travel and *(c)* animals being exported to Greece are being sent to abattoirs which comply with the European Community directive protecting the animal's welfare at slaughter; how many times since January 1993 his veterinary department has failed to follow these instructions; what steps he has taken to ensure in that future failures will be avoided; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what measures he is taking to ensure that British animals being exported for slaughter to Greece are killed in accordance with legislation designated to ensure humane slaughter;

(4) what representations he has made to the Greek Agriculture Minister regarding the slaughter of British sheep in Greek abattoirs; what was the outcome; and if he will make a statement;

(5) if he will list the abattoirs in Greece used to kill British sheep over the last three years;

(6) what discussions he has had with the RSPCA over the export of British sheep and pigs to Greece for slaughter, and if he will make a statement;

(7) when he expects to receive a reply to his letter to Mr. Franz Fischler on the subject of Greek slaughter practices; and if he will place a copy of the reply in the Library;

(8) what information he has on the compliance with the EC welfare at slaughter standards of the Tripolis abattoir in Greece in respect of British sheep sent there in July and August 1994; if their hauliers conformed to all welfare during transport regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* The Welfare of Animals during Transport Order 1994, as amended, requires journey plans to be completed for farm animals being consigned from the United Kingdom to another member state, and to be signed and returned to the relevant divisional veterinary officer when the journey has been completed. All such animals also require a health certificate, completed by a local veterinary inspector stating that the animals are fit to travel; officials are fully instructed in the application of the rules,

From contacts with the RSPCA, it has emerged that there is no evidence that sheep or pigs originating in the United Kingdom travelled to the slaughterhouses which featured in the society's recent report and video, I have written to both the EC Agriculture Commissioner and the Greek Minister urging them to take action on the quite appalling scenes of cruelty depicted in the RSPCA video.

Enforcement of the EC legislation both on the welfare of animals during transport and at slaughter is the responsibility of the competent authorities in the member states. The European Commission is responsible for overseeing the application of EC miles across the European Union. It is MAFF Minister's practice to bring any apparent infringements of directive 74/577 to the attention of the Commission and of the authorities in the member states concerned. Since 1990, allegations of infringements of directive 74/577 have been made in relation to slaughterhouses in several member states. Those which appeared to be supported by reasonable evidence were reported to the appropriate authorities and to the Commission.

The Greek authorities have undertaken to investigate the recent RSPCA report and video on Greek slaughterhouse practices and Commissioner Fischler is considering sending Commission personnel to Greece to investigate the implementation of welfare at slaughter legislation there. Copies of the Commissioner's press statement leave been placed in the Library.

SCOTLAND

Nurses' Pay

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will fully fund in Scotland the recommendations of the pay review body for nurses and midwives.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Individual increases arising from the recommendations of the pay review body are a matter for individual employing bodies. All Scottish NHS employers are expected to make efficiency savings in 1995–96. In addition, the NHS in Scotland will receive a cash terms increase of £143.2 million in 1995–96; an increase of 3.6 per cent.

Common Services Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of the feasibility study commissioned from KPMG Peat Marwick into the assessment system for earnings of the NHS supplies division of the Common Services Agency, and the ability of management to handle the system; and if he will place a copy of that report in the Library.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Following a competitive tendering exercise, the study was carried out at a cost of £12,500. The report to the CSA board was made on a commercial in confidence basis and will not be published.

Marriages

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the refusal of the Registrar General to grant temporary written authorisation to the Humanist Society in Scotland to solemnise a marriage under section 12 of the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977.

Mr. Lang: Sections 9 to 16 of the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 deal with religious marriages solemnised by approved celebrants, defined in section 8. Section 12 gives the Registrar General power to grant a temporary written authorisation to a person over the age of 21 to solemnise a specified marriage or marriages. The Humanist Society of Scotland wrote to the Registrar General in November 1994 seeking an authorisation under section 12 for a person to solemnise a particular marriage, but it made it clear in its application that this would not

be a religious marriage. The Registrar General, having obtained legal advice, replied to the effect that, as the proposed marriage ceremony was not intended to be the religious solemnisation of a marriage, he had no power to grant authorisation. The Secretary of State has no function in granting such authorisations and it would therefore be inappropriate for him to comment upon the matter.

Cochlear Implants

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the average cost of the cochlear implant operations carried out for children at Crosshouse hospital in the current year; and what will be the marginal cost of further operations in the current year;

(2) how many profoundly deaf children there are in Scotland in each age group; and what percentage of them is assessed as likely to benefit from cochlear implants;

(3) pursuant to his answer of 10 February, concerning cochlear implants, *Official Report*, columns *449–50*, what he has to add to his answer in relation to the case of Gillian Graham;

(4) what steps he has taken to inform all doctors and health centres in Scotland about the availability of cochlear implant operations at Crosshouse hospital, Kilmarnock.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The average cost of a paediatric cochlear implant operation is £28,725 in 1994–95. The cost of the additional operation purchased in the current financial year was £17,960.

Information is not yet available on the numbers of profoundly deaf children in Scotland and those who might benefit from cochlear implants but this is being collected as part of the on-going needs assessment. Information on the range of all national services, including cochlear implantation, is issued by the national services division of the Common Services Agency.

As my noble and learned Friend the Minister of State explained in his letter to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie of 26 January, Crosshouse hospital hopes to provide Gillian Graham's operation in the spring.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many children in Scotland are in the process of being assessed for cochlear implants;

(2) how many adults in Scotland are in the process of being assessed for cochlear implants;

(3) what plans he has to fund cochlear implants in Scotland on the same basis of contractual referral as in England and Wales;

(4) if financial restraints have prevented any child in Scotland from receiving a cochlear implant at an age that the surgeon would consider optimal;

(5) what medical advice he has received in respect of the relationship between the age of the child and the benefit from cochlear implants for children between the ages of four and seven years;

(6) what assessment he has made of the importance of time as a factor affecting the efficacy of cochlear implants for adults; and what account he takes of this in allocating resources.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are currently nine paediatric patients and 14 adult patients undergoing assessment at Crosshouse hospital, Kilmarnock and five adult patients undergoing assessment at the Royal infirmary of Edinburgh. Assessment of individual patients is a matter for clinical judgment.

Cochlear implantation is a national specialist service in Scotland and the allocation of resources is determined through negotiations between the purchaser—national services division of the Common Services Agency—and the provider units. Activity levels for paediatric cochlear implantation in 1994–95 were agreed with North Ayrshire and Arran NHS trust at the beginning of the financial year and funding was made available to the trust in accordance with this. Future funding arrangements for cochlear implantation will be reviewed in the light of a forthcoming national needs assessment.

The initial findings of the Medical Research Council's evaluation of the national cochlear implant programme suggest that implantation by about the age of seven has produced positive initial outcomes.

Police Laboratories

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to modify the structure, management and functions of the Tayside police force laboratory and the Strathclyde police force laboratory; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government have no plans to modify the structure or functions of these laboratories.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons are employed in *(a)* the Tayside police force laboratory and *(b)* the Strathclyde police force laboratory; and what are their functional responsibilities in each.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are 22 staff currently employed in the police forensic science laboratory, Dundee. This laboratory serves, and is jointly funded by, the police authorities for Tayside, for Fife and for Central Scotland police forces. The Strathclyde police laboratory currently employs 47 staff.

Each laboratory employs a range of scientists for a variety of functions. These functions are mainly in the areas of forensic chemistry, forensic biology and physical examinations, but the laboratories also undertake document examinations, ballistic and fire investigations, and blood alcohol analyses.

Secure Accommodation

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many requests for secure accommodation for young children have been made in each of the past four years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of requests for secure accommodation for young children made in each of the past four years is not available centrally. However, the numbers of actual admissions of children into secure accommodation in the past four financial years are given below:

Year	*Number*
1990–91	250
1991–92	243
1992–93	197
1993–94	'291

' provisional.

Hospital Social Workers

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland in what circumstances hospital social workers may be expected to perform the role of key worker for an individual.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Decisions about who should be an individual's key worker should be made after consultation between professionals who are aware of the individual's needs. For hospital patients and people recently discharged from hospital who need social care, it will often be appropriate for hospital social workers to perform the role of key worker.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to monitor and record the level of referrals to hospital social workers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities have varying practices for the deployment of social workers responsible for hospital patients and people recently discharged from hospital. Statistics on these would be of limited value at national level and there are currently no plans to collect them.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many social workers were based in hospitals in *(a)* Renfrewshire, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in each of the past five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The table below shows the whole-time equivalent number of local authority social workers based in hospitals for the most recent five years for which information is available centrally.

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Strathclyde	211	215	238	216	250
Scotland	478	496	500	486	511

Information at district level is not available centrally.

Secure Facilities

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the secure facilities currently available for young people which are provided by *(a)* regional and island authorities, *(b)* the voluntary sector and *(c)* the private sector.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The secure facilities currently available for young people in Scotland are given below:

Secure Facility	*Status*
Rossie School, Montrose	Voluntary
St. Mary's Kenmure, Bishopbriggs	Voluntary
Rimbleton House Young Persons Centre, Glenrothes	Fife Region
Kerelaw School, Stevenston	Strathclyde Region
St. Katherine's Centre (Guthrie Unit), Howdenhall, Edinburgh	Lothian Region
Howdenhall Children's Unit (Braid), Edinburgh	Lothian Region
Hightrees Assessment Centre, Closeburn	Dumfries and Galloway Region

Private Children's Homes

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many private children's homes were listed in each local authority for each of the last five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The definition of a private children's home is a home administered by a private commercial establishment. Numbers of such homes for each local authority for each of the last five years are given below:

Region	*Year 1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Borders	0	0	0	0	0
Central	1	1	1	1	1
Dumfries and Galloway	1	1	1	1	1
Fife	0	0	0	0	0
Grampian	0	0	0	0	0
Highland	0	0	0	0	0
Lothian	0	1	1	1	1
Strathclyde	0	0	0	0	0
Tayside	4	3	3	3	3
Total	6	6	6	6	6

Community Care

Mr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what statistics are obtained from local authorities on their use of independent sector residential accommodation and day and domiciliary services.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Statistics on independent sector residential accommodation and day centres are provided in the "Community Care Bulletin 1992", available in the Library of the House.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many social day care places were available for *(a)* the elderly, *(b)* those with learning disabilities, *(c)* those with physical disabilities and *(d)* mentally ill people in (i) local authorities, (ii) the voluntary sector and (iii) the private sector in each year since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information from 1980 to 1992 is available in the "Community Care Bulletin 1992", available in the library of the House. Figures for 1993 are shown in the table. Figures for private and voluntary centres are not routinely separated.

Number of places at 31 March 1993

Day centres for:	*Local authority*	*Voluntary and private*	*Total*
Older people	4,392	3,888	8,280
People with learning disabilities	7,756	775	8,531
Physically disabled people	1,103	577	1,680
People with mental health problems	75	225	300

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many supported hostel places were available for people with mental health problems in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in each of the past five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The only available information is contained in the "Community Care Bulletin 1992", available in the Library of the House.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his Department's definition of *(a)* community care and *(b)* care provided under the care in the community provisions, and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Community care, as used in the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, refers to the provision of services and support which people who are affected by problems of aging, illness or disability need to be able to live as independently as possible in their own homes, or in residential care. Care in the community is a term used specifically to refer to policies for mentally ill people and people with learning disabilities which enable them to live as full, independent and normal lives in or as near to the community as possible.

Social Work Contracts

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many contracts have been awarded by *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* local authority social work departments to the private sector in each of the past 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested in *(a)* is not centrally available and in relation to *(b)* the information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ambulance Response Times

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average time taken for the ambulance service to respond to an emergency 999 call in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclye and *(c)* elsewhere in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The average response times for the period April to December 1994—the latest information available—were *(a)* eight minutes, *(b)* eight minutes, 12 seconds and *(c)* seven minutes, 15 seconds respectively.

These average response times are within the national targets of 95 per cent. of calls responded to within 14 minutes. These have been achieved against a 4 per cent. increase in the number of emergency calls last year.

Prison Service

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to convert Cornton Vale woman's prison into a mixed, local prison; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what plans he has to establish female prisoner units into prisons throughout Scotland; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what plans he has to incarcerate young male offenders in Cornton Vale prison; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subjects of the questions relate to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E.W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 20 February 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your questions about whether there are plans to convert Cornton Vale women's prison into a mixed local prison, to establish female units in prisons throughout Scotland and to incarcerate young male offenders in Cornton Vale Prison.

The Scottish Prison Service is presently considering the best use of its estate against the background of overcrowding in some prisons and under-utilisation in others. We are studying also the location of convicted women prisoners, their opportunities for progression and the possibilities of open prison conditions comparable to that available to male prisoners. There are already small remand wings for women in Aberdeen, Dumfries and Inverness Prisons but all convicted women prisoners have to go at present to Cornton Vale. We are conscious of the disparity between male and female prisoners where convicted males can serve short sentences in prisons close to their home area.

Feasibility studies of all the various options are not yet complete and no decisions have been made.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of Scotland what has been the cost to public funds of managing the Prison Service in each year since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 20 February 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about the cost to public funds of managing the Prison Service in each year since 1979.

The attached Annex sets out yearly expenditure from financial year 1979/80 onwards.

Annex: Scottish Prison Service Expenditure

£000

SPS annual report	*Total net expenditure*
1979-80	33,319
1980-81	44,037
1981-82	51,030
1982-83	56,615
1983-84	62,837
1984-85	72,443
1985-86	80,649
1986-87	85,112
1987-88	96,304
1988-89	111,073
1989-90	121,499
1990-91	125,908
1991-92	136,763
1992-93	152,214
1993-94	154,343

Note:

The figures listed in this Annex include the cost of Central Administration and expenditure met from the Votes of other Departments on behalf of the Scottish Prison Service.

Surgical Beds

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide the figures of *(a)* the number of surgical beds, *(b)* the number of intensive care beds and *(c)* the number and location of surgical beds without common-site access to an intensive care unit for (i) Renfrewshire and (ii) Strathclyde as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the tables below.

National Health Service hospitals in Scotland Table 1: Average available staffed surgical and intensive care beds. Renfrewshire and Strathclyde; year ending 30 September 1994

	Surgical[3]	Intensive[4]
Renfrewshire[1]	233	22
Strathclyde[2]	3,856	337

[1] Comprises Royal Alexandra hospital, the only hospital in Renfrewshire with surgical beds, also has an intensive care unit.
[2] Comprises Argyll and Clyde, Ayrshire and Arran, Lanarkshire and Greater Glasgow health board areas.
[3] Comprises general surgery, orthopaedics, ENT, ophthalmology, urology, orthodontics and paediatric dentistry, oral surgery and oral medicine, restorative dentistry, surgical paediatrics, gynaecology, neurosurgery, cardiothoracic surgery, plastic surgery and spinal paralysis specialties.
[4] Comprises special care baby unit and intensive therapy unit specialties.

Table 2: Hospitals in Strathclyde with surgical beds and no intensive care beds; year ending 30 September 1994

	Number of surgical beds
All hospitals	330
Rothesay Victoria hospital	8
Dunnon and District General hospital	9
West Highland hospital, Oban	33
Canniesburn hospital, Glasgow	68
Stonehouse hospital, East Kilbride	87
Ballochmyle Hospital, Mauchline	125

Rights of the Child

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has in respect of his obligations under Article 44 of the United Nations convention following the Committee's report on the Rights of the Child in the United Kingdom; if these proposals will be embodied in the Children (Scotland) Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government fulfilled their obligations under article 44 of the UN convention on the rights of the child by publishing the UK national report in February 1994.

The general principles of the convention have been taken into account in drafting the provisions contained within the Children (Scotland) Bill.

University Hospital

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he had concerning the 1985 out-of-court settlement by W. S. Atkins and Partners to the Welsh Office with respect to design faults at the University hospital of Wales, Cardiff, prior to his decision to sell the Common Services Agency of the Scottish National Health Service to W. S. Atkins and Partners.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: None

M77

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if an environmental impact assessment which conforms to European Union standards was carried out before he authorised work to begin on constructing the M77 in Glasgow; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The statutory procedures for the Ayr road route were initiated prior to the implementation date of European Community directive number 85/337. Consequently, there was no requirement to carry out an environmental assessment for this scheme. Notwithstanding this, an environmental impact assessment was undertaken for this scheme and details were presented at a pubic local inquiry prior to the Secretary of State approving the works. The Government believe that this assessment would have satisfied the directive.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the absence of security personnel and construction workers on 15 February.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to work on the M77. The responsibility for organising the resources necessary to discharge the contract lies with the contractor.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *465*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by his Department in the last year.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* The Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1994" shows 3,971 appointments in Scotland held at 1 September 1994. Of these, 3,656 are the responsibility of my Department. This figure reflects the total appointments held, including new appointments and re-appointments made in the year ended 31 August 1994. The information held centrally in my Department does not show the number of appointments made in any given year.

Generic Prescribing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *229–30*, if he will list the aggregate figures for brand name and generic prescribing costs for each health board area, classified by total GP fundholders and total non-fundholders.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* The table gives the gross ingredient cost of prescribing of generic and brand name items by fundholding and non-fundholding general practitioners for each health board area for financial years 1992–93 and 1993–94.

Health board	1992–93 fundholders Prescribed generically	1992–93 costs Prescribed by brand name	1992–93 Non-fundholders Prescribed generically	1992–93 costs Prescribed by brand name	1993–94 fundholders Prescribed generically	1993–94 costs Prescribed by brand name	1993–94 Non-fundholders Prescribed generically	1993–94 costs Prescribed by brand name
Argyll and Clyde	0.271	1.168	4.880	25.603	0.508	1.864	5.916	26.606
Ayrshire and Arran	0.039	0.218	3.456	24.786	0.311	1.448	4.199	24.916
Borders	—	—	1.536	5.404	0.143	0.329	1.831	5.166
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	1.475	9.077	—	—	1.910	9.775
Fife	0.064	0.249	3.824	17.747	0.212	0.751	4.441	18.857
Forth Valley	0.102	0.530	3.559	15.330	0.186	0.846	4.302	16.063
Grampian	0.619	2.678	4.607	21.207	3.045	10.625	3.880	14.438
Greater Glasgow	0.214	0.858	10.862	51.933	0.434	1.524	12.949	54.422
Highland	0.035	0.168	1.975	9.861	0.163	0.697	2.316	10.385
Lanarkshire	0.152	0.768	5.043	36.430	1.386	5.046	6.184	32.726
Lothian	0.152	0.546	9.632	34.963	0.998	3.093	10.935	34.376
Orkney	—	—	0.217	0.853	—	—	0.251	0.900
Shetland	—	—	0.139	0.944	—	—	0.166	1.080
Tayside	0.465	1.235	6.057	21.081	1.590	3.500	6.819	19.940
Western Isles	—	—	0.328	1.287	—	—	0.400	1.476
Total	2.113	8.418	57.590	276.506	8.976	29.723	66.499	271.126

General Practitioners

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *229-30*, if he will give the aggregate numbers of general practices in the fundholding and non-fundholding categories and the total number of general practitioners in each category on a full-time equivalent basis and the number of list patients covered at each of the dates specified.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* The information requested is set out in the table.

	Practices		GPs (whole-time equivalent)		Patients	
	Column 1 Non-fundholders	Column 2 fundholders	Column 3 Non-fundholders	Column 4 Fundholders	Column 5 Non-fundholders	Column 6 Fundholders
1992–93						
Argyll and Clyde	100	5	275.8	26.5	409,874	36,944
Ayrshire and Arran	60	4	232.8	14.8	365,971	25,475
Borders	22	1	70.3	4.8	100,153	7,064
Dumfries and Galloway	36	—	111.8	—	153,280	—
Fife	59	2	196.3	11.8	328,138	23,177
Forth Valley	53	2	179.8	7	277,793	12,369
Grampian	65	25	177.9	146.8	281,721	251,365
Greater Glasgow	219	4	588.6	22	970,192	39,328
Highland	74	1	166	8	200,111	12,311
Lanarkshire	83	9	271.3	48.3	489,873	93,750
Lothian	124	12	444.8	48	724,778	78,247
Orkney	15	—	24.0	—	20,047	—
Shetland	11	—	19.0	—	22,770	—
Tayside	67	10	207.3	43.3	337,168	73,125
Western Isles	15	—	30.0	—	29,977	—
Scotland	1,003	75	2,995.7	381.3	4,711,846	653,155
1993–94						
Argyll and Clyde	100	5	273.0	26.5	406,156	36,476
Ayrshire and Arran	58	5	230.0	21.0	357,126	34,588
Borders	20	3	63.8	10.8	91,605	16,028
Dumfries and Galloway	35	1	107.8	4.5	145,942	7,097
Fife	59	4	191.0	21.5	312,824	39,813
Forth Valley	51	4	171.5	18.0	259,114	31,421
Grampian	50	39	133.0	197.3	205,865	331,612
Greater Glasgow	212	11	554.6	55.3	910,275	90,409
Highland	68	7	154.5	21.0	184,026	29,225
Lanarkshire	79	14	228.0	92.0	409,664	174,173
Lothian	118	18	402.5	98.5	645,354	159,376
Orkney	15	—	24.0	—	20,079	—
Shetland	11	—	19.0	—	22,944	—
Tayside	68	11	201.8	50.8	326,492	83,849
Western Isles	15	—	31.0	—	29,828	—
Scotland	959	122	2,785.3	617.2	4,327,296	1,034,067

As requested in column 2 for each year the figures represent the number of individual general practices involved in Fundholding rather than the number of Fundholders since more than one practice may group together to manage a single fund.

Dental Services

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was collected within each health board area in patient charges by dentists in each financial year since 1989–90; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* The information requested is shown in the table. The figures have been taken from the annual accounts of the 15 Scottish health boards. No information can be provided for 1989–90 as, prior to 1990–91, expenditure figures were collected on a net basis only—that is, total expenditure less patient charges collected by dentists.

General dental services patients charges

£000

Health board	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Argyll and Clyde	2,995	3,476	3,135	3,000
Ayr and Arran	2,632	3,051	2,596	2,480
Borders	778	948	962	971
Dumfries and Galloway	1,051	1,229	1,101	1,014
Fife	2,361	3,582	2,620	2,710
Forth Valley	1,939	2,255	2,246	2,285
Grampian	3,372	3,928	4,633	4,634
Greater Glasgow	6,316	7,181	6,691	6,698
Highland	1,431	2,366	1,750	1,589
Lanarkshire	3,320	3,817	3,493	3,551
Lothian	6,269	7,180	6,654	7,201
Orkney	81	101	112	115
Shetland	61	102	153	177
Tayside	3,314	3,718	3,637	3,905
Western Isles	94	140	134	118
Total	36,014	43,074	39,917	40,448

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the gross expenditure on general dental services in each health board area in Scotland in the financial year 1989–90; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* Gross expenditure figures for the year 1989–90 are not held centrally. However, net expenditure figures are available. These were provided to the hon. Member in my answer to him of 26 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *347–48*.

Sheriff Courts

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the reported average waiting periods between pleading and trial dates for each sheriff court in Scotland for each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* The information requested is as shown in the following table:

Average waiting periods in weeks

Court	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Aberdeen	11	9	14	17	19	16	13	12	14	14
Airdrie	23	20	16	14	12	15	12	15	15	15
Alloa	17	16	20	12	13	10	11	8	10	9
Arbroath	11	17	14	14	11	13	12	12	12	12
Ayr	14	16	16	18	15	12	12	14	12	11
Banff	12	11	10	10	9	10	11	13	13	8
Campbeltown	8	11	12	12	13	9	6	8	8	10
Cupar	14	12	12	14	11	9	12	11	12	12
Dingwall	10	11	9	9	12	11	12	12	13	10
Dornoch	7	9	9	10	11	12	10	9	10	10
Dumbarton	17	18	23	27	19	19	16	11	10	11
Dumfries	20	24	21	18	13	9	13	11	12	12
Dundee	4	5	7	8	7	5	7	9	14	17
Dumfermline	15	14	16	12	8	10	9	7	14	12
Dunoon	22	19	12	12	12	14	12	13	10	12
Duns	6	5	6	5	7	9	9	9	10	10
Edinburgh	8	10	16	18	20	19	17	12	10	11
Elgin	13	13	9	8	9	8	8	10	8	9
Falkirk	22	16	13	9	11	12	8	15	17	12
Forfar	14	16	13	9	10	8	8	7	9	10
Fort William	9	10	11	16	11	10	10	12	15	12
Glasgow	15	12	14	16	12	13	13	17	22	26
Greenock	26	19	13	16	17	13	13	10	10	13
Haddington	18	13	10	35	8	11	12	16	15	13
Hamilton	24	26	26	16	14	22	23	17	15	15
Inverness	12	12	13	9	13	11	10	12	11	12
Jedburgh	8	4	9	6	8	10	10	9	11	11
Kilmarnock	12	15	17	18	14	13	13	12	10	12
Kirkcaldy	10	13	10	9	12	12	9	12	12	12
Kirkcudbright	13	14	12	14	10	11	11	12	11	10
Kirkwall	8	7	8	9	8	9	10	9	8	8
Lanark	17	16	10	8	10	10	11	12	12	11
Lerwick	7	10	5	9	13	11	12	8	7	8
Linlithgow	9	12	11	11	9	15	18	16	16	21
Lochmaddy	10	15	10	10	9	10	9	12	13	8
Oban	9	9	11	10	13	13	10	12	11	12
Paisley	22	29	26	21	19	15	12	13	14	16
Peebles	9	9	8	10	9	10	8	12	11	11
Perth	14	12	13	11	7	8	11	13	10	11

Average waiting periods in weeks

Court	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Peterhead	12	11	10	13	15	11	13	12	17	14
Portree	12	15	12	10	11	5	9	9	9	8
Rothesay	10	9	8	7	10	13	11	11	9	10
Selkirk	7	6	7	10	7	8	10	10	9	11
Stirling	19	19	12	12	13	9	12	12	12	12
Stonehaven	12	11	9	10	11	11	8	12	12	11
Stornoway	9	10	11	14	12	11	13	14	13	11
Stranraer	17	19	15	10	13	10	10	11	10	11
Tain	10	12	9	7	7	8	7	13	11	10
Wick	8	12	10	8	8	8	11	12	11	12

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits

6. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are his objectives for the delivery of social security benefits.

Mr. Lilley: My principal objectives are:

to focus benefits on the most needy

to improve incentives to work and to save

to encourage personal responsibility

to bear down on fraud and abuse

and to ensure that the system does not outstrip the nation's ability to pay.

Habitual Residence Test

19. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many British citizens are awaiting the outcome of their appeals against the habitual residence rule.

Mr. Roger Evans: This information is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Post Office (Automation)

21. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to encourage the private sector to invest in Post Office automation in relation to the work of his Department.

Mr. Lilley: I am very keen to see the involvement of the private sector in the project to introduce an automated system for paying benefit at post offices. We are therefore looking to the private sector to design, build, finance and operate systems for automation of post offices, and the introduction of benefit payment cards, under the terms of the private finance initiative.

Some 90 companies responded to a notice published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* in August last year. On 9 December, *Official Report*, column *385*, my hon. Friend was able to announce the names of five companies, some of which lead consortia, which have been invited to develop proposals.

Jobseeker's Allowance

18. **Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the numbers and the percentages of unemployed who will gain the new jobseeker's allowance during its first year of operation; and how these figures differ from current claims for unemployment benefit.

Mr. Roger Evans: On current assumptions, 2,110,000 people would be receiving jobseeker's allowance at any one time in its first year of operation. Once transitional protection has ended, it is estimated that 90 per cent. of unemployed claimants will be receiving JSA. This compares with 20 per cent. who currently receive unemployment benefit.

The figures are in the table. The figures for 1996–97 reflect the transitional protection which will apply to unemployment benefit claimants in the first year of jobseeker's allowance.

Number of unemployed claimants by benefit entitlement

	Total	UB only, or contribution-based JSA only	UB and IS, or JSA based both on contributions and on income	IS only, or income-based JSA only	No benefit (NI credits only)
Latest actual estimates August 1994	2,542	381 15 per cent.	132 5 per cent.	1,763 69 per cent.	266 10 per cent.
Estimates for 1996–97 assuming JSA system	2,410	350 15 per cent.	100 4 per cent.	1,660 69 per cent.	300 12 per cent.
Estimates for 1997–98 assuming JSA system	2,410	240 10 per cent.	100 4 per cent.	1,730 72 per cent.	340 14 per cent.

Notes:

1. UB = Unemployment Benefit. IS = Income Support. JSA = Jobseeker's Allowance. NI = National Insurance.
2. Assumes that in 1996–97 and 1997–98 the personal rate of Unemployment Benefit is higher than the personal allowance of Income Support for people aged 25 or over.
3. Assumes in 1996–97 and 1997–98 claimant unemployment of 2.4 million and an Unemployment Benefit caseload of 500,000.
4. Estimates for 1996–97 and 1997–98 rounded to the nearest 10,000. Current figures rounded to the nearest 1,000. Percentages rounded to the nearest percentage point. Individual figures may not sum due to rounding.
5. Assumes that claimants who lose entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance continue to sign for credits. If they do not, then the claimant total falls.

28. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effect of the jobseeker's allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: The jobseeker's allowance is designed to help get people back to work, to secure better value for money for the taxpayer, and to improve the service to unemployed people themselves. Its financial effects are summarised in the explanatory and financial memorandum to the Jobseekers Bill.

Benefit Payment Card

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce a benefit payment card.

Mr. Lilley: On 11 May 1994, I announced plans to automate the payment of benefits at post offices. Order books and girocheques will eventually be replaced by a benefit payment card which will allow access to payment information held electronically. This will reduce cost for taxpayers, be more secure for customers and guarantee the future of post offices. People wishing to be paid by automated credit transfer will continue to be paid in this way and will not hold a benefit payment card.

Child Support Agency

24. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received in the last month concerning the operations of the Child Support Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: Approximately 500 letters, covering a range of views about both child support policy and operations, were received at DSS headquarters during January 1995.

Benefit Arrangements (Europe)

25. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish details of the social security arrangements in other European countries which limit the payment of income-related benefits to persons who are not habitually resident in a country in which they claim benefit.

Mr. Roger Evans: Details of the social security arrangements, including payment of income-related benefits, in other European countries are in the following publications, copies of which can be found in the Library:

Social Protection in the Member States of the Community—"MISSOC"—tables, published by the European Commission.

Comparative tables of social security schemes in Council of Europe member states, published by the Council of Europe.

Disabled People

27. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on the action the Government are taking to tackle discrimination against disabled people.

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to reduce discrimination against disabled people.

Mr. Hague: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friends the Members for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Spring) and for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Congdon).

Benefits

29. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether pensioners will be able to choose to have their benefits paid through the Post Office.

Mr. Arbuthnot: We are committed to giving pensioners the choice of payment directly into their bank or building society by automated credit transfer or at a post office. If they choose to continue to receive their pensions at a post office, they can still be paid by ACT into a Girobank or National Savings account. For pensioners and others who do not want to be paid in this way, we are planning significant improvements in the delivery of benefits at post offices. The post office network will be automated, and orderbooks and girocheques replaced with a benefit payment card.

Social Security Reforms

30. **Mr. Legg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what savings he estimates will result from the social security reforms announced since 1 January 1993.

Mr. Hague: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Lady Olga Maitland) earlier today.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps his Department takes to ensure that payments of housing benefit to local authorities should at all times be in time to avoid any arrears arising on tenants' rent accounts due to late housing benefit payments.

Mr. Roger Evans: Housing benefit is paid by local authorities. Regulations require local authorities to make payments of housing benefit within 14 days of receipt of the claim or as soon as practicable thereafter. Local authorities are also required to make payments on account if it is impracticable to determine a rent allowance within 14 days of the claim being made provided that the delay is not due to the failure of the claimant to provide information in support of that claim.

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the additional cost to the housing benefit budget of people moved out of care institutions under the care in the community programme to date.

Mr. Roger Evans: No information is collected about the number of people re-entering the community under the care in the community programme, or about their housing arrangements. Consequently, it is not possible to estimate the additional expenditure in housing benefit.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what sum was paid in housing benefit in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on 10 January, *Official Report*, column *55*. I have nothing to add to the statement which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made on 30 November, *Official Report*, column 1205, concerning the measures we propose to introduce to tackle the rapid growth in housing benefit expenditure.

National Insurance Benefits

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many self-employed people failed to qualify for sickness benefit due to inadequate contributions for each of the last 30 years;

(2) how many self-employed have failed to draw national insurance benefits in each of the last 30 years because of an inadequate contributions record; and if he will present these data according to each of the major national insurance benefits.

Mr. Hague: The available information for sickness benefit is in the table. Earlier figures can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Figures are not available for the other national insurance benefits.

Period	*Number of sickness benefit spells commencing in the period, where the claimant declared themselves self-employed, and did not satisfy the contribution conditions for the payment of the benefit.*
4 April 1988 to 1 April 1989	24,000
3 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	32,000
2 April 1990 to 30 March 1991	38,000
1 April 1991 to 4 April 1992	35,000
6 April 1992 to 3 April 1993	35,000

Notes:

1. The employment status is that declared by the claimant at the start of their spell of incapacity, and is not verified by the Department. There are a number of spells where the employment status is not known or "other".
2. The information is based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants to benefit in Great Britain, and is rounded to the nearest thousand.

Mortgage Interest

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households have received income support for mortgage interest; and what was the average amount of benefit received in each year since 1979.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table.

Year	*Number of cases with mortgage interest included in the assessment*	*Average weekly amount of mortgage interest included in the assessment (£s)*	*Estimated annual expenditure on mortgage interest (£m)*
1979	98,000	5.96	31
1980	134,000	10.18	71
1981	196,000	12.18	124
1982	235,000	13.87	170
1983	242,000	11.94	150
1984	277,000	15.18	219
1985	—	—	—
1986	356,000	18.96	351
1987	334,000	19.31	335
1988	300,000	18.33	286
1989	281,000	24.18	353
1990	310,000	34.33	553
1991	411,000	44.41	949
1992	499,000	44.03	1,143
1993	555,000	42.17	1,217
1994	548,000	37.98	1,082

Notes:

1. Income Support replaced Supplementary Benefit in 1988.
2. All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Figures are not available for 1985.
4. Mortgage interest has only been collected as a separate item since 1983. Previous estimates were based on owner-occupiers' residual housing costs and included an element for ground rent.
5. Estimated annual expenditure on mortgage interest is calculated as total numbers multiplied by average weekly amount multiplied by 52.

Source:

Supplementary Benefit/Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiries 1979–1993 for number of cases and 1983–1993 for expenditure.
Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry February 1994.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many workers failed to pay full national insurance contributions in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will give the distribution and the spread and the number of weeks of contributions not covered by the weighted number of workers.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The administration of national insurance is the responsibility of Mr. George Bertram, the acting chief executive of the Contributions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from George Bertram to Mr. Frank Field, dated 17 February 1995:

As Acting Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency, I have responsibility for all operational aspects of the National Insurance scheme. I have been asked to reply to your question to the Secretary of State for Social Security regarding the number of workers who have failed to pay full National Insurance contributions (NICs).

I am afraid that our management information systems do not provide the information you have asked for in your question.

I can however tell you that contributors who have not paid (or been credited with) sufficient contributions to provide a qualifying year for benefit purposes are notified through the issue of a

deficiency notice about 18 months after the end of the tax year. About 3.5 million deficiency notices are issued annually.

Deficiency notices provide contributors with the opportunity to confirm that the correct amount of contributions have been recorded on their NI accounts and, where appropriate provide for queries to be made or make up contributions paid. There are various reasons for deficient records, the most common being where earnings are below the appropriate threshold, persons may be employed for only part of the year or contributors may have spent time outside the UK. The 3.5 million do not include those married women who elected to pay reduced rate contributions. Because they have made such an election they are not entitled to pay make up contributions which make the deficient year count.

Separate arrangements exist whereby self-employed contributors are advised of liability for unpaid weeks through the Quarterly Billing payment system.

I regret that I am unable to give you the precise information that you requested but I hope that this reply will prove helpful.

Disability Living Allowance

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, how many applications for disability living allowance have been lodged for each month since June 1994 for babies at the local district office for the parliamentary constituency of Lewisham, Deptford; how many were lodged nationally; of these, how many were refused; what were the grounds for refusal; how many lodged appeals and how many appeals were successful; and what is the average time taken to process appeals.

Mr. Hague: The administration of disability living allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 17 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about claims for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for babies.

Information is not available in the exact format requested. The vast majority of claims to DLA are forwarded by the applicant direct to one of eleven regional Disability Benefit Centres at which all claims to DLA are processed. Thereafter any action required is undertaken, in the main, by the Disability Benefit Unit at Blackpool. It is not possible to establish the number of claims, awards refused and appeals made within any particular Benefits Agency District area without incurring disproportionate cost.

However, I am able to provide you with the national figures as requested. As at 30 November 1994, 1,600 awards for DLA were estimated to be in payment for children aged under one. At the same date, 5,400 awards were estimated to be in payment for children aged between one and two. This information is an extrapolation of a 5% sample of the DLA liveload at the given date.

The average time taken to process all DLA appeals to the point at which the case is submitted to the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS) is 35 days. That average has been calculated for the period 1 April 1994 to 31 January 1995. The ITS is an independent body and the listing of hearing dates cannot be influenced by the Benefits Agency. When a Tribunal's decision is notified to the Benefits Agency by ITS the aim is to implement the decision within 10 days.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Family Credit

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for family credit were lodged in November 1994, December 1994 and January 1995 in the local district office for the parliamentary constituency of Lewisham, Deptford; of these, how many applications for family credit are still waiting to be processed; what is the average time taken to process applications for family credit; and what help is available to applicants who are experiencing unusually long delays in processing their applications.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of family credit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Ms Joan Ruddock, dated 17 February 1995

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Family Credit (FC) claims made from the Lewisham area; also about the time taken to process a FC claim and the help that is available to applicants who experience unusually long delays in processing their applications.

The vast majority of claims to FC are forwarded by the applicant direct to the FC Unit in Blackpool. Information is not available in respect of the number of applications lodged from any particular Benefits Agency District area.

The average time taken to process applications to FC for the months of November 1994, December 1994 and January 1995 are 13.19, 14.93 and 15.21 days respectively. The increase in the average clearance time over this period is due firstly to the loss of productivity over the Christmas period; secondly due to the FC Unit concentrating its resources on clearing cases where there has been a long delay. These cases have arisen due to an increase in workload experienced during October and November.

Help is available to those who are experiencing delays in processing their applications. Customers can contact the Family Credit Helpline Service on 01253 500050 where full explanations of any delay can be made and outstanding matters resolved if at all possible. Alternatively, customers can contact the Customer Services section in their local Benefits Agency office, or the Client Advisor in their local Employment Service office, who will attempt to expedite any outstanding claim.

If a customer is in financial difficulty as a result of an outstanding FC claim which cannot be resolved, a claim can be made to the Social Fund (SF) section at their local Benefits Agency office. Crisis Loans are available to anyone who needs financial help to meet expenses in an emergency or a disaster, who is facing serious risk or serious damage to their health or safety. The applicant does not have to be in receipt of any benefit, but any income or capital which he has will be taken into account by the SF officer.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Information Technology

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many members of the Information Technology Services Agency have left in the last five years to take up employment with companies concerned with information technology or consultants; and if he will give the companies concerned.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The Information Technology Services Agency has records of seven staff who were given permission in the last five years to take up outside business appointments with companies concerned with information technology or consultants in accordance with civil service rules. The companies concerned were Siemens Nixdorf, Price Waterhouse, Andersen Consulting, ICL, BT Telecommunications, Syntegra and Fairhaven Computer Services.

Income Support

Mr. Colin Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what plans he has to help students whose

levels of student maintenance are lower than the minimum income support threshold.

Mr. Roger Evans: In general, it is the education maintenance system, not social security benefits, which is designed to provide for full-time students and we have no plans to change this.

Correspondence

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will reply to the letters dated 29 November 1994 and 5 January 1995 from the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford concerning her constituent, R. Wilson.

Mr. Roger Evans: I sent a reply to the hon. Member on Thursday 16 February.

Social Fund

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what account he has taken of the actual costs incurred in arranging a funeral when setting a new ceiling on social fund payments to those with insufficient funds to pay for a relative's funeral.

Mr. Roger Evans: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on Thursday 16 February, *Official Report*, column *735*.

WALES

Welsh Manufacturing Output

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will express total Welsh manufacturing output for *(a)* 1994 and *(b)* 1993 as an index with total Welsh manufacturing output for 1979 equal to 100; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Data for 1994 are not yet available. The total output of production industries in Wales in 1993, indexed with 1979=100, is estimated to be 102.8. Information for manufacturing only, for 1993 and 1979, on a consistent basis, is not available.

Completed Consultant Episodes

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing for each year since 1990 *(a)* the number of finished consultant episodes completed and *(b)* the number of individual patients seen by doctors in hospitals.

Mr. Richards: Information on the number of completed consultant episodes is available only from 1991–92 onwards. The latest estimates of the number of completed consultant episodes and discharges and deaths each year are given in the following table. Information on the numbers of individual patients seen by doctors in hospitals is not available.

	Completed consultant episodes[1]	*Discharges and deaths*
1990–91	n/a	577,400
1991–92	619,600	627,700
1992–93	660,900	662,700
1993–94	709,400	712,500

Source:
Patient episode database for Wales, Form QS1.
Note:
[1] Not all hospitals return complete information to the patient episode database for Wales. The figures on completed consultant episodes will therefore slightly underestimate activity.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will express the total manufacturing output in Wales at factor cost and constant 1994 prices for *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1987; and if he make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Total manufacturing output at factor cost and current prices in Wales was estimated at £6,081 million in 1993 and £4,485 million in 1987. No official Welsh deflators are available to convert the figures to constant prices. Information for 1994 is not yet available.

York Road CP School

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will visit York Road county primary school, Connah's quay;

(2) if he will visit York Road CP school, Connah's quay to discuss staffing with the governors and parents.

Mr. Richards: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have any plans at present to do so.

Custom House School

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations he has had with the Education Assets Board concerning Custom House county primary school, and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects to resolve the problems concerning a building on the site of Custom House CP school Connah's quay, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: I have had no consultations with the Education Assets Board concerning the annexe to the Custom House Lane county primary school at Connah's quay, nor would it be proper for me to do so in view of the appeal I have received from Clwyd county council. This case is under active consideration and I shall reach a decision regarding the appeal in due course.

Osteoporosis

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what specific objectives he has set for his health strategy in Wales for osteoporosis diagnosis and treatment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Richards: Objectives for people in Wales with osteoporosis are included in the Welsh health planning forum guidance on physical disability and discomfort and on injuries, and in the forum advice on health and social care for older people.

Dental Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those family health service authority sub-areas

in Wales where there are no longer any dentists taking on new NHS patients.

Mr. Richards: The information is not held centrally. General dental practitioners are independent contractors who are free to choose who they will accept on to their NHS dental lists. Most dentists have NHS patients on their lists but may open and close those lists to new patients as they see fit. The situation may vary from week to week.

If any person has difficulty in obtaining treatment from a general dental practitioner, they should contact their local family health services authority which is best placed to advise on local availability of NHS dental services, including emergency dental clinics and the community dental service.

Crystal Chandeliers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many NHS trusts installed crystal chandeliers in boardrooms in each of the last three years.

Mr. Richards: This information is not held centrally.

Habitats Directive

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what are the specific differences pertaining for Wales and not England that have led to his Department being in the consultation process for the implementation of the EU habitats directive at present when in England policy planning guidance was issued in October 1994;

(2) what is the compliance date that his Department has to observe in respect of the EU habitats directive; and when he expects to issue a policy planning guidance paper to enable the directive to be complied with in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations 1994 make provision for the purpose of implementing, for England, Scotland and Wales, the habitats directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, and came into force on 30 October 1994. The directive requires member states to submit a list of proposed special areas of conservation to the Commission by June 1995. The Commission has to establish a list of sites of community importance by June 1998 and the member states then have a further six years in which to designate the sites as special areas of conservation. Draft planning guidance is being prepared and my right hon. Friend intends to go out to consultation with Welsh interests before the summer.

Sixth Form Colleges

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will list the sixth form colleges in Wales by local education authority giving the numbers of teachers employed and students attending in each case.

Mr. Richards: There is one such college in Wales—St David's Roman Catholic sixth form college in south Glamorgan. The college employs 57 full and part-time lecturers and at November 1994 there were 787 students attending.

Still-Born Babies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to establish statutory guidelines with respect to transportation of still-born babies and foetuses between hospitals for pathological examinations and for the establishment of minimum standards on use of specialised containers, dedicated vehicles and drivers and other matters.

Mr. Redwood: I am at present considering the matter.

School Class Sizes

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how many children in Wales are currently in classes of more than 30 children; and if he will give the numbers for each local education authority.

Mr. Richards: Information on primary school pupil numbers is not held centrally in the form requested. Some information on the size of registered classes in primary schools in each local education authority area is shown in table 3.04 of "Statistics of Education in Wales: Schools No 2, 1994", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Tables 4.15, 4.16 and 4.17 of the same publication show details of pupil numbers by size of class in secondary schools.

Grant-Maintained Schools

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the grant-maintained schools in Wales giving their total budgets together with the capital and revenue allocations made by him in each year since becoming grant maintained.

Mr. Richards: The main recurrent grant for GM schools is annual maintenance grants. In addition to this, GM schools also receive transitional grants to help meet the transitional costs of school's newly approved for GM status, special purpose grants to help with a variety of activities, and capital grants. Details of the budgets allocated to GM schools, broken down between revenue and capital, are as follows:

School	1991–92		1992–93		1993–94		1994–95[5]	
	Revenue	Capital	Revenue	Capital	Revenue	Capital	Revenue	Capital
Bryn Elian	—	—	—	—	485,753	6,285	1,728,982	160,000
Derwen	—	—	—	—	187,104	8,447	266,160	97,632
Eirias	—	—	—	—	1,437,715	18,655	2,377,713	280,000
Emrys ap Iwan	—	—	675,534	7,695	2,572,873	1,502,114	2,600,799	315,726
Maelor	—	—	—	—	1,299,960	776,172	1,256,667	460,241
Pen-y-Bryn	—	—	—	—	262,174	9,228	404,731	45,096
Brynmawr	—	—	786,883	156,068	1,357,858	1,440,649	1,391,797	680,042
Cwmcarn	517,899	—	857,744	60,944	911,486	405,620	954,412	265,853
Our Lady and St. Michaels	—	—	—	—	128,140	3,850	369,555	190,000
St. Albans	—	—	—	—	411,915	5,610	1,435,871	598,846
Caergeiliog	—	—	—	—	435,543	15,360	409,665	337,230

School	1991–92 Revenue	1991–92 Capital	1992–93 Revenue	1992–93 Capital	1993–94 Revenue	1993–94 Capital	1994–95[1] Revenue	1994–95[1] Capital
Llanerfyl	—	—	—	—	66,572	6,837	77,233	85,831
Mary Immaculate	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,543,300	—
St. Cyres	—	—	—	—	808,996	9,610	3,192,764	432,000
Stanwell	—	—	—	—	2,222,422	1,159,664	2,431,228	1,934,065
Bishop Vaughan	583,235	—	2,220,813	292,260	2,523,603	827,650	2,416,363	510,171

[1] 1994–95 figures are provisional.
Revenue figures include annual maintenance grant, transitional, and special purpose grants.

Private Sector Institutions

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the legal status of *(a)* grant-maintained schools and *(b)* universities and colleges as private sector institutions.

Mr. Richards: Grant-maintained schools are classified as private sector institutions by the Central Statistical Office according to its criteria for the purpose of national income accounts. Universities and colleges which receive funding from the higher and further education funding councils for Wales are independent autonomous bodies in the private sector. These are publicly funded institutions and are subject to public law—that is, their decisions are subject to review by the courts.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place a copy in the Library of the Touche Ross feasibility study on the sale of the Estatecare division of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority; what is the deadline for the preparation of documents and decisions on the sale procedure; and if the sale will be advertised *(a)* throughout the European Community and *(b)* will be in accordance with the Public Services Contracts Regulations 1993 and the EC supply and services directive.

Mr. Redwood: The report has been commissioned by the authority for its own use. The exercise is expected to be completed during the next financial year in accordance with all relevant statutory requirements.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision he had made for the market-testing of *(a)* the work carried out by the whole of the Estatecare group of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority and *(b)* its constituent parts; what procedures he has put in place for ensuring the equal comparison between public sector and private sector bids for the work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: This is currently being considered by the authority which expects to report to me in April.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultation he has had with the health trusts and authorities in Wales with respect to the pros and cons of *(a)* market-testing and *(b)* outright sale of the Estatecare branch of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority; if he will make arrangements for publication of the views of those consulted on the modus operandi for preparation for sale; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: None. The authority is considering options in discussion with the relevant NHS bodies.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the names of those on the project board charged with following the instructions in relation to the preparation for sale of the Estatecare group of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Mr. Redwood: The project board set up to advise WHCSA on the feasibility of privatising the Estatecare group includes:

Mr. K. C. White, non-executive member, WHCSA (chairman)
Mr. Colin Hughes Davies, chairman, Glan Hafren NHS trust
Mr. E. F. Lloyd Fitzhugh, chairman, Gofal Cymuned Clwydian Community Care NHS trust
Mr. A. Beddow, chief executive, West Glamorgan health authority
Mr. N. Kirk, chief executive, WHCSA
Mr. J. I. Cook, managing director Estatecare Group
Mr. L. V. Wood, chief executive, Gofal Cymuned Clwydian community care NHS trust
Mr. E. Kinsella, chief executive, Wrexham Maelor Hospital NHS trust
Mr. R. Wheeldon, director of facilities, Swansea NHS trust
Mr. R. Badman, director of development and facilities, University Hospital of Wales and Cardiff Royal Group
Mr. S. Fletcher, chief executive, Pembrokeshire NHS trust
Mr. R. C. Williams, Welsh Office (observer)
Mr. D. Simpson, project manager, WHCSA

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision he has made for the employees of the Estatecare group of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority to be allowed financial, accountancy and legal assistance for a management led employee buyout.

Mr. Redwood: This is a matter for the authority.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision he will make to ensure a continuation of the independent steriliser testing services of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority in the event of a successful sale of the Estatecare division of Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Mr. Redwood: This will be taken into account at the appropriate time.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many inquiries there have been to date with a view to possible purchase of the Estatecare division of Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Mr. Redwood: Eight.

Water Charges

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) when he expects to reply to the letter dated 4 November 1994 entitled "Charges for household water customers in Wales" from the managing director of Welsh Water plc;

(2) what consultations he has had with the Director General of Water Services concerning the contents of the letter from the managing director of Welsh Water dated 4 November 1994 and entitled "Charges for household

water customers in Wales"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have not consulted the director general on the issues raised by Dwr Cymru. The company's views have however been taken into account by the Government during their considerations, the outcome of which will be announced in due course. At that time, Dwr Cymru will be advised of the Government's conclusions.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with water consumers, consumer organisations and the Welsh Consumer Council concerning the order of preferences of *(a)* council tax bands, *(b)* standard annual licence and *(c)* universal compulsory metering as the main basis for charging for domestic water and sewerage services after 2000; if he will issue the details of a formal programme of consultation on this issue; and what representations he has had in relation to the use of compulsory water metering in (i) new properties and (ii) old properties with renewed water mains.

Mr. Redwood: I have not undertaken any such formal consultations. However, I have from time to time received representations on water charges and the use of compulsory metering from various organisations and individuals.

W. S. Atkins and Partners

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *707*, if the decision not to allow health authorities in Wales to appoint W. S. Atkins and Partners to major new commissions without prior reference to the Department related exclusively to the out-of-court settlement in cognisance of design faults at Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor or was additional to the out-of-court settlement in relation to faults in the design of the University hospital in Wales, Cardiff.

Mr. Redwood: The decision not to allow W. S. Atkins and Partners to be appointed to major new contracts without prior agreement was made in the light of the out-of-court settlement involving design faults at Ysbyty Gwynedd.

Pupil Teacher Ratios

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement explaining the calculations made to assess pupil-teacher ratios in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools, with particular reference to the method used for evaluating part-time pupils and part-time teachers.

Mr. Richards: The same method of calculation applies to both primary and secondary maintained schools. Pupil-teacher ratios within schools are calculated by dividing the number of full-time equivalent pupils by the number of full-time equivalent qualified teachers.

The number of full-time pupils is calculated by adding half of the number of part-time pupils to the number of full-time pupils.

The number of full-time qualified teachers is calculated by dividing the total hours worked per week by part-time teachers by 32.5—the assumed number of hours in a full week in maintained schools—and adding the number of full-time teachers.

The schools census held in January each year is the source of all information used in the calculations for PTRs within schools.

In the calculation of PTRs, teachers temporarily absent on census day are included; relief teachers taking their place are excluded. Teachers absent for long periods or seconded for other duties are excluded but their replacements are included. Peripatetic teachers are excluded.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will happen to local education authority schools when the county councils disappear in 1996.

Mr. Richards: Responsibility for their maintenance will pass from county councils to unitary authorities.

WDA

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *903*, if he will give details of the further legal and administrative consideration given to the issue of the propriety of participation of the Welsh Development Agency in the underwriting and sub-underwriting of share issues.

Mr. Redwood: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave the hon. Member on 19 December, *Official Report*, column *903*. I have already said that my Department's legal advisers are considering the issue.

Intensive Care Beds

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *708*, what representations he has had from the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority concerning the staffing requirement of incremental intensive care unit beds at the University hospital of Wales, Cardiff.

Mr. Redwood: None, although the South Glamorgan health authority is currently looking into this issue.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the non-departmental public bodies he sponsors have introduce new logos and corporate identities in the last three years; and what consultations he has had with non-departmental public bodies about any future proposals to introduce new corporate identities.

Mr. Redwood: Three non-departmental public bodies have introduced new logos in the last three years—the Cardiff Bay development corporation, the Land Authority for Wales and the Sports Council for Wales. I have had no discussions with NDPBs about proposals for new corporate identities, but I do not favour spending much money on this type of activity. I have asked the WDA to do less corporate advertising and more marketing of Wales as a good investment location.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Weapons Testing

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many computer modelled tests have been carried out under the Anglo-American mutual defence agreement, to nuclear weapons or major parts of such weapons by the United States of America for the United Kingdom and vice versa.

Mr. Freeman: Computer modelling is a tool used extensively as part of the design, development and qualification of United Kingdom nuclear weapons. Under the auspices of the US-UK 1958 mutual defence agreement, there is an on-going exchange on techniques and data associated with computer modelling. The Ministry of Defence does not hold a database of every individual computer simulation which has been conducted or discussed with the United States and such information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Anglo-French Aero-engine Agreement

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for City of Chester of 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *869*, if the cost-sharing arrangements are based on juste retour principles; what is expected to be the expenditure under the memorandum in the next financial year; and if the memorandum excludes missile or missile engine development.

Mr. Freeman: The memorandum of understanding contains a commitment to equitable share of costs and work between the two nations. It is not MOD policy to release financial information which is commercial by sensitive. The arrangement does not apply to any missile engine development.

IMS Export Finance House

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the IMS export finance house was a profitable commercial operation; which enterprise or agency acted as its auditors; and if the National Audit Office had full powers to investigate the operations of IMS export finance house;

(2) what access IMS export finance had to the full rate export finance scheme; and if the terms offered were limited to the terms of the OECD interest rate consensus.

Mr. Freeman: The export finance house set up by International Military Services Ltd. in 1985 proved unable to secure finance house business and was wound up the following year. Consequently, no audit requirement arose.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how the existence and financial performance, of IMS export finance house was reported to Parliament.

Mr. Freeman: There was no requirement to report this commercial initiative to Parliament.

Mr. Roy Ricks

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what employment, duties or services were carried out for, or on behalf of, his Department or its agencies by Mr. Roy Ricks and over which periods of time.

Mr. Freeman: So far as can be ascertained, none.

Official Residences

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were *(a)* the amounts spent on domestic and household staff costs, *(b)* the number of domestic and household staff and the nature of their duties and *(c)* the cost of food and drink provided at each residence in each of the last five years in the official service residences in Gibraltar and the United States of America.

Mr. Soames: There is currently one official service residence in Gibraltar and one in the United States of America.

Twelve staff are currently employed in the Gibraltar residence, and four in the residence in Norfolk, Virginia. The duties of these staff include valeting, cleaning, cooking, waiting at table and gardening. Gardening at the Norfolk residence is carried out under contract. Staffing levels have been the same for the last five years. Based on annual capitation rates, the annual staff costs are £175,000 for the Gibraltar residence and £95,000 for United States residence, plus a £5,000 annual gardening contract. Although there have been other OSRs in Gibraltar in the past five years, information on these is not readily available.

Occupants of OSRs pay for food and drink for themselves and their families, and are provided with an entertainment allowance to fund official entertaining. The current annual rates of entertainment allowance for the two posts are £4,870 for the Gibraltar post and £7,470 for the Norfolk, Virginia post.

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated final cost of the independent investigation into expenditure at Haymes Garth; and what is the estimated cost of the internal audit of expenditure on official service residences generally.

Mr. Soames: The estimated staff cost of the internal audit of expenditure on official service residences is £62,000. The cost of the report by Ms Sheila Masters was some £100,000.

Defence Export Services Organisation

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what was the value of contracts entered into with the assistance of the Defence Export Services Organisation in each year since 1989; and for each year to date giving the three companies entering into contracts with the highest total value.

Mr. Freeman: The Defence Export Services Organisation has played an important part in increasing defence export orders over the period. British defence equipment manufacturers won export orders worth £3.9 billion in 1989, £4.8 billion in 1990, £3.5 billion in 1991, £5.3 billion in 1992 and £7 billion in 1993. Figures for 1994 are not yet available. It is for individual companies to give details of the value of their contracts.

Military Attachés

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* all the overseas posts for military attachés, *(b)* the total cost of maintaining the

posts and *(c)* the date of the most recent review of the value of military attachés.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom currently has 126 attachés in 70 countries. A further 65 countries are covered by non-residential accreditations. The countries in which the UK has attachés are as follows:

Capital	*Country*
Abu Dhabi	UAE
Accra	Ghana
Algiers (currently based Tunis)	Algeria
Amman	Jordan
Ankara	Turkey
Athens	Greece
Bangkok	Thailand
Beirut	Lebanon
Belgrade	Yugoslavia
Berne	Switzerland
Bogota	Colombia
Bonn	Germany
Brasilia	Brazil
Bratislava	Slovakia
Bridgetown	Barbados
Brussels	Belgium
Bucharest	Romania
Budapest	Hungary
Buenos Aires	Argentina
Cairo	Egypt
Canberra	Australia
Caracas	Venezuela
Colombo (post closes in July 1995)	Sri Lanka
Copenhagen	Denmark
Damascus	Syria
Dhaka	Bangladesh
Dublin	Irish Republic
Guatemala City	Guatemala
The Hague	Netherlands
Harare	Zimbabwe
Helsinki	Finland
Islamabad	Pakistan
Jakarta	Indonesia
Kampala	Uganda
Kathmandu	Nepal
Kiev	Ukraine
Kingston	Jamaica
Kuala Lumpur	Malaysia
Kuwait City	Kuwait
Lagos	Nigeria
Lisbon	Portugal
Madrid	Spain
Mexico City	Mexico
Moscow	Russia
Muscat	Oman
Nairobi	Kenya
New Delhi	India
Nicosia	Cyprus
Oslo	Norway
Ottawa	Canada
Paris	France
Peking	China
Prague	Czechoslovakia
Pretoria	South Africa
Rabat	Morocco
Riga	Latvia
Riyadh	Saudi Arabia
Rome	Italy
Santiago	Chile
Seoul	South Korea
Singapore	Singapore
Sofia	Bulgaria
Stockholm	Sweden
Tel Aviv	Israel
Tokyo	Japan
Vienna	Austria
Warsaw	Poland
Washington	USA
Wellington	New Zealand
Zagreb	Croatia

The cost this financial year of pay, allowances and related equipment and support costs for the accredited attachés and their dedicated support staff both overseas and in the UK is £25.7 million. Attaché costs are reviewed annually. The most recent independent review of attachés was the Goddard study, which reported in July 1993.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *743*, if he will set out Hodge and Company's full trading name and address.

Mr. Soames: The information will be provided on completion of the sale.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Charges

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the statutory barriers against water companies using council tax band information for the purposes of developing a charging system.

Mr. Atkins: Local authorities do not have the power to supply information to anyone, other than for council tax purposes. Furthermore, access to the contents of valuation lists may be given only within the terms of section 28 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, that is, to enable a person to establish what is, or has been, the state of a list. Release of such information for any other purpose may be construed as unlawful.

Drigg

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the dates of each seizure and checking of waste consignments to Drigg made by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution since 1990; which of these consignments breached the Drigg authorisation; and if he will give the nature of the breach.

Mr. Atkins: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has seized waste consigned to Drigg on the following occasions: 1991 March, 1992 two in January and one in October; 1993 October; 1994 one in May and one in December.

All the consignments seized, for which full results are available, conform to the conditions specified in the consignor's and the Drigg site's authorisation with the following exception. In several instances, the presence of trivial quantities of free liquids were detected in the form of paint cans, pressurised aerosols and similar residues in containers. I can confirm, however, that none of the consignments seized has breached the consignment limits in the Drigg site authorisation.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment where the large sliding door, referred

to in HMIP's response to Greenpeace's complaint regarding a perceived breach of paragraph 4 of the Drigg authorisation, had been stored between its delivery to Drigg and the Greenpeace entry in July 1994.

Mr. Atkins: The large sliding door in question was delivered directly to trench 7 at Drigg, where it remains today. The item was disposed of as low-level radioactive waste under the provisions of the Drigg site authorisation.

Endangered Birds and Animals

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many birds were listed as *(a)* threatened and *(b)* subject to limited trade imported into the United Kingdom from (i) Spain, (ii) other EC member states and (iii) non-EC member states in each year since 1987;

(2) how many *(a)* Hyacinth macaw, *(b)* Blue-crowned pigeon, *(c)* Palawan peacock-pheasant and *(d)* African grey parrots were imported into the United Kingdom from (i) Spain, (ii) other EC member states and (iii) non-EC member states in each year since 1990;

(3) what assessment he has made of Spanish legislation and its enforcement to stop the import of endangered birds and animals into the EC and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: The import of endangered species to Spain should be controlled by EC regulations 3626/82 and 3418/83 which have direct force in all EC member states. Enforcement of these regulations in Spain is the responsibility of the Spanish authorities. The regulation requires all member states to notify the Commission of the implementation measures they have adopted within their area of jurisdiction.

The regulations do not require records of intra-community movements to be kept. Information on imports to the UK from non-EC countries is as follows:

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Hyacinth macaw	1	5	21	1	2
Blue-crowned pigeon	—	—	—	—	—
Palawan peacock-pheasant	2	9	8	4	2
African grey parrot	7,170	5,643	2,638	2,829	1,391

Imports of birds of all species listed as threatened—that is, listed in appendix I of CITES—or subject to limited trade—that is, listed in appendices II or III of CITES—were:

	Appendix I	*Appendix II/III*
1987	79	39,672
1988	79	108,817
1989	105	90,666
1990	231	96,236
1991	192	79,094
1992	148	49,384
1993	105	24,804
1994	60	21,606

Freedom of the Cities Initiative

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research his Department has undertaken into, and what assessment has been made of, the freedom of the cities initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: We have no plans for a freedom of the cities initiative.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what statutory impediment there is to designating a new unitary authority as a county council where it is conterminous with a county area, in terms of the allocation of district functions to that authority.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Under section 14(5)(a) of the Local Government Act 1992, I may abolish a local authority whose functions would all vest in another as a result of any structural change or whose area would be abolished or otherwise substantially affected by any recommended boundary change. It follows that where there is an existing district council for an area whose boundaries are not recommended to be changed, and it is proposed to establish unitary local government in that area, I cannot abolish the district council and accordingly I cannot establish a unitary county council for the area.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for the levels of *(a)* uncollected rents, *(b)* uncollected community charge and *(c)* uncollected council tax for each local authority in England.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: A table showing information on uncollected rents as at 31 March 1994 was published by the Department on 14 November 1994; a copy of the table is available in the Library of the House.

Information on uncollected community charge and council tax for each local authority is not available centrally. However, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy regularly publishes estimates for individual authorities: figures for 31 March 1994 are available in its revenue collection statistics 1993–94 publication, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much community charge remains uncollected by each local authority.

Mr. Curry: Information on uncollected community charge for each local authority is not available centrally. However, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy regularly publishes estimates for individual authorities: figures for 31 March 1994 are available in its revenue collection statistics 1993–94 publication, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the effect on the north-west regional economy of the revaluation of rateable values on the uniform business rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have received a number of representations from the north-west about the 1995 revaluation of non-domestic property and its effect on businesses. The Government have introduced transitional arrangements to phase in the impact of the revaluation on rate bills; over 180,000 ratepayers in the north-west will benefit from these arrangements.

Urban Programme Funding

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the criteria for deciding which bodies qualify for urban programme funding; if he will place these criteria in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: Since 1 April 1993, urban programme funding has been restricted to meeting commitments on projects approved in 1992–93 and earlier years. The urban programme is one of the 20 programmes which now comprise the single regeneration budget. "A guide to funding under the Single Regeneration Budget", the "Bidding Guidance", was published on 14 April 1994 and copies were placed in the Library.

Dioxin Emissions

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has to reduce greatly dioxin emissions in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Atkins: The Government have already taken action in several areas to reduce dioxin emissions. These include banning stubble burning; encouraging the uptake of unleaded petrol; setting maximum levels of dioxin in pentachlorophenol and limiting its use as a wood preservative; and implementing integrated pollution control and local authority air pollution control for incineration processes. Waste incineration has been a major contributor of dioxins to the environment. Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, however, has set a limit for the emission of dioxins from incinerators of 1 nanogramme per cubic metre, to be achieved by 1 December 1996. This target will reduce releases of dioxins from the incineration plant they control by over 90 per cent.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to complete his assessment of the draft report of the United States Environmental Protection Agency on dioxin pollution; and when he expects to publish his assessment.

Mr. Atkins: An initial study has already been made of the EPA's draft report on dioxins. A copy of the comments sent to the EPA has been placed in the Library of the House. The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment is carrying out an expert review of the health effects of dioxins, including the work referred to in the EPA draft report. This should be completed during the summer and should be published shortly thereafter.

Planning

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue further guidance on expenditure acceptable under section 106 of the Planning Land Compensation Act 1991 and his circular 16/91 on planning gain funds; at what distance from a development a project can be considered to relate to it; and what types of project qualify.

Sir Paul Beresford: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Waste Incineration

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the environmental impact of incinerating *(a)* household and *(b)* industrial waste.

Mr. Atkins: My Department published a report in November 1993 of a study on the environmental externalities from landfill and incineration. The study considers the environmental impacts of the two methods of waste disposal, and discusses the extent to which these impacts are controlled through the regulatory arrangements and reflected in waste disposal prices. Findings from the study suggest that incineration with energy recovery may offer real environmental benefits.

A consultation draft of a waste strategy for England and Wales was published by the Department in January 1995. In discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the various options for waste disposal, it expresses the view that the recovery of energy from waste through incineration offers a number of important environmental advantages. I am arranging for a copy of the draft strategy to be sent to the hon. Member.

Index of Local Conditions

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment if he will publish the index of local conditions on a constituency basis using additional indicators which have been used at local authority level.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Department published the index of local conditions in May 1994 setting out information drawn mainly from the 1991 census at three levels—local authority district, ward and census enumeration district. The index includes a range of indicators at the different levels reflecting the availability and robustness of data at the smaller scales. It is not technically possible to calculate the index of local conditions at parliamentary constituency basis using additional indicators which have been used at local authority level.

Mr. Betts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the index of local conditions on a constituency basis using the seven indicators currently used at ward level.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I refer the hon. Member to my separate answer today. The fuller analysis requested could be done by the Department only at disproportionate cost. However, the Department has an agreement with the London Research Centre to make available the data from the index of local conditions at a charge to cover the costs of any analysis requested. It is open to anyone to approach the London Research Centre to request extra analysis of the data.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to respond to the representations made to him by the Merseyside European liaison unit about *(a)* the additionality requirements for 1995 objective 1 funding, *(b)* its submission concerning the strategic role of local authorities in determining priorities and *(c)* the enhancement of private sector participation in the objective 1 programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State replied to the representations from the Merseyside co-ordinating committee—to which the Merseyside European liaison unit reports—on 6 February.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the extent to which small and medium—sized enterprises are obtaining a proper and adequate response through the objective 1 mechanisms.

Mr. Curry: A major part of the objective 1 programme in Merseyside is focused on the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises. For business advice and support alone, projects approved in principle in the 1994 bidding round will finance a package of assistance worth some £50 million.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence he has that competition rules will be breached if EC funds are matched to private sector funds in an objective 1 area; and what discussions he has had with the EC about this.

Mr. Curry: Private sector funds are being matched in objective 1 areas without breaching competition rules. Issues such as the need for state aid clearance are considered and resolved in advance of aid being granted.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to allow the private sector to apply direct for objective 1 funding for large infrastructure and productive investments.

Mr. Curry: The structural funds are used to support projects which provide economic benefits to the area concerned. This will not generally involve direct support for productive investment. Such support is made available through intermediary bodies. Proposals for facilitating the private sector contribution to infrastructure projects part funded by the structural funds have been put to the Commission and their comments are awaited.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to permit private sector companies to apply direct for objective 1 European regional development fund support for large infrastructure projects.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I have given to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill, (Mr. Alton).

Waste Mercury

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the land fill sites where waste mercury has been disposed of in each of the last five years.

Mr. Atkins: This information is not held centrally. Each waste regulation authority maintains a register which contains information about all landfill sites licenced by that authority under part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the current licensing requirements for the treatment and disposal of waste mercury.

Mr. Atkins: The treatment and disposal of controlled waste is subject to the licensing requirements of part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994—S.I. 1994 1056. Controlled waste which is "special waste" is also subject to the requirements of the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980—S.I. 1980 No. 1709. Mercury is one of the substances listed in part I of schedule I to the 1980 regulations and guidance on the circumstances in which it may meet the criteria for definition as special waste is provided in waste management paper No.23.

Suffolk County Council

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the proportion of staff employed by Suffolk county council which are employed to fulfil statutory functions of the authority.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information necessary to make this assessment is not available.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff per 1,000 head of population are employed by Suffolk county council; what the figures were three year ago; and what comparisons he has made with other similar authorities.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Suffolk county council employed 35.4 staff per thousand head of population in general services in June 1994. The comparable figure for June 1991 was 35.6. Comparable data for all authorities were deposited in the Library following my answer of 14 February 1995 to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), *Official Report*, column *549*.

Lancashire and Gloucestershire County Councils

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff are employed by *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* Gloucestershire county councils; what these figures are as a proportion of the population of the county councils.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Lancashire county council employed 47,162 full-time and part-time staff in general services in June 1993—the latest available data for Lancashire; this represents 33.2 staff per thousand head of population. The comparable figures for Gloucestershire for June 1993 were 12,560 staff and 23.1 staff per thousand head of population; for June 1994 they were 11,417 staff and 21.0 staff per thousand head of population.

Pollution, Docklands

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment his Department has made of the pollutant effects of emissions from the newspaper print works in docklands on the local environment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* The Department, in co-operation with local authorities, monitors nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and black smoke in the Greenwich, Stepney and Woolwich areas. The South East Institute of Public Health and the London borough of Tower Hamlets have just provided the Department with a copy of their report of a survey of volatile organic compounds in the Wapping area.

Regulations were made in May 1994 which clarified the inclusion of larger cold set web offset and sheet feed offset litho printing processes within the local authority air pollution control system established under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. We issued guidance on standards for these printing processes in November last year.

The UK has signed and ratified the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe protocol which

requires a reduction of 30 per cent. in national emissions of VOCs comparing 1988 with 1999. We published a strategy for achieving this reduction in October 1993, which forecasts 49 per cent. reduction in VOCs from all printing processes.

Carbon Emissions

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the policy of Her Majesty's Government at the meeting of the conference of the parties of the climate change convention in respect of targets for reductions of carbon emissions beyond the year 2000 will be.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* The Government will support the position of the European Union, agreed at the meeting of the Environment Council in December.

The conclusions of that Council call, inter alia, for the current commitments in the climate change convention to be strengthened and extended, and for the negotiation of a comprehensive protocol on greenhouse gases to be set in hand at the First Conference of Parties.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the relationship between social equity and sustainable development.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* The Government set out their understanding of sustainable development in the UK's strategy of 25 January 1994—Cm 2426. This emphasised two themes: the need for economic development to secure rising living standards for the whole of society, and the importance of protection and enhancement of the environment for the benefit of this and successive generations.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 21 February 1995

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorism

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the current extent of the threat posed by Irish terrorists by reference to the position before the recent ceasefire.

Sir John Wheeler: While terrorist organisations retain all their munitions and operational structures, the threat of violence remains, as we have seen from the murder of Mr. Kerr in Newry and continuing callous "punishment beatings". Nevertheless, the incidence of violence has diminished and the security forces have responded imaginatively to the ceasefires.

Fur Farms

Mr. Morely: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many arctic fox fur farms there have been, by region, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Ancram: There have never been any arctic fox fur farms in Northern Ireland.

Student Allowances

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many students at universities in Northern Ireland received the mature student's allowance in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what percentage of all mature students in each year these figures represent; what was the administrative cost of operating the mature students' allowance in Northern Ireland for each of the last five years for which information is available.

Mr. Ancram: The number of Northern Ireland students receiving the older students' allowance, payment of which is the responsibility of the education and library boards, is available only for the following three years:

Year	*Number*
1992–93	375
1993–94	439
1994–95	530

Information about the percentage of all mature students that these figures represent and administrative operational costs is not readily available.

DEFENCE

Hong Kong

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to travel to Hong Kong in 1995.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to visit Hong Kong in 1995.

Alcohol Misuse

Mr. Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will introduce an anti-alcohol programme into the armed forces as soon as possible.

Mr. Soames: Drunkenness is an offence under service law, and all personnel are made aware that the services take a very serious view of alcohol misuse. Considerable effort is put into dealing with alcohol-related problems and a comprehensive system of education and treatment, together with deterrent administrative and disciplinary action, has been developed. A series of alcohol education programmes, making use of pamphlets, films and lectures, has been produced to make all personnel aware of the dangers of alcohol misuse. Officers and NCOs are also trained to recognise symptoms so that alcohol misuse can be dealt with promptly.

Western European Union

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about co-operation between the member states of the Western European Union on air transport.

Mr. Soames: WEU members continue to discuss the potential for enhancing co-operation between national forces, including air transport assets, that may be made available for the range of operations that the WEU might undertake.

RAF Chivenor

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he is giving to relocating search and rescue helicopters currently based at RAF Chivenor.

Mr. Soames: None. It remains our intention to maintain a search and rescue flight at RAF Chivenor.

Friendly Fire Incident (Normandy)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that a memorial service is held for the men killed on HMS Hussar, HMS Britomart, HMS Salamander and HMS Colsay in the friendly fire incident off Normandy on 27 August 1944; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: It is for veterans' associations to organise the commemoration of individual actions if they so wish. Official events commemorating the 50th anniversary of the D-day campaign as a whole were held last year. This year will see the commemoration of victory in 1945.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department will give all reasonable assistance to those wishing to organise a reunion for those sailors who survived the friendly fire incident of Normandy on 27 August 1944 involving HMS Hussar, HMS Britomart, HMS Salamander, and HMS Colsay.

Mr. Soames: The editor of "Navy News", the official newspaper of the Royal Navy, will be pleased to publish a request for survivors of this incident to contact the organisers of any reunion.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will lift the embargo on the names of those who died in the friendly fire incident off Normandy on 27 August 1944, involving HMS Hussar, HMS Britomart, HMS Salamander and HMS Colsay, and publish the names of those who survived prior to their dispersal to other units of the Royal Navy.

Mr. Soames: There has never been an embargo on the list of casualties from this incident. Indeed, details of those from the Britomart and the Hussar, the two vessels sunk, were published in *The Times* in October and November 1944. Any casualty details from the other vessels involved may well have been included in more general casualty lists frequently published in the press at the time, but these could now be checked only at disproportionate cost.

The names of those who survived would be scattered among any number of contemporary records, and these also could now be checked only at disproportionate cost.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of alleged Gulf war syndrome.

Mr. Soames: It is my Department's policy to investigate the allegations of a Gulf war syndrome in a scientific and objective manner to establish the full facts. We are concerned to ensure that those who are ill receive proper assessment and diagnosis, and where necessary are referred for treatment to those responsible for their health care. As part of these investigations, we have established a medical assessment programme to build up a soundly based data bank of information resulting from individual clinical examination of those Gulf veterans who are coming forward with concerns about their health in response to repeated ministerial requests. We are also following scientific developments in the United States and elsewhere examining the plausibility of the many postulated causes of the alleged syndrome and making comparisons of the health problems experienced by Gulf veterans against the normal incidence of such symptoms among the rest of the armed forces and the general United Kingdom population. Our investigations to date have found no medical or scientific evidence of a Gulf war syndrome, or of any medical condition peculiar to service in the Gulf.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving service personnel have reported sick claiming to have Gulf war syndrome.

Mr. Soames: To date, a total of 51 serving personnel have come forward, or have been referred, into my Department's medical assessment programme with concerns about their health as a result of Gulf war service. Of the 24 who have so far been examined and diagnosed, none has been found to have a medical condition peculiar to Gulf service.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel from the other allied nations who took part in the Gulf claim to be suffering from Gulf war syndrome.

Mr. Soames: The latest figures available to my Department indicate that approximately 13,000 United States Gulf war veterans have registered with the clinical evaluation programme established by the United States authorities to examine those alleging ill health as a result of Gulf war service. Among other allies, the claims of some 30 to 40 Canadians and 20 Norwegian Gulf personnel to be suffering from the alleged Gulf war syndrome are being investigated by their national authorities.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many non-military supporting staff are claiming to be suffering from Gulf war syndrome.

Mr. Soames: To date, my Department has received notification of 483 potential claims in respect of ill health as a result of service in the Gulf war. The information available shows that 12 are from individuals who were civilians at the time, seven of whom can be identified as non-military supporting staff paid by the MOD.

Contracts

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total value of contracts awarded by his headquarters contracts branches to *(a)* Price Waterhouse, *(b)* EDS Defence Ltd. and EDS Scicon Defence Ltd., *(c)* Coopers and Lybrand, *(d)* Touche Ross Management Consultants and Touche Ross and Company and *(e)* Andersen Consulting for (i) 1992–93 and (ii) 1993–94.

Mr. Freeman: The value of contracts placed with these companies by my Department's central contracts branches is as follows:

1992–93

Company name	*Total value £ million*
Touche Ross Management Consultants and Touche Ross and Company	0.6
Andersen Consulting	0.2
Coopers and Lybrand	9.7
Price Waterhouse	0.2

1993–4

Company name	*Total value £ million*
Touche Ross Management Consultants and Touche Ross and Company	0.05
Andersen Consulting	0.2
Coopers and Lybrand	2.4
Price Waterhouse	1.3

No contracts have been placed by the central contracts branch with EDS Defence Ltd. or EDS Scicon Defence Ltd. over the periods in question.

The figures given relate only to contracts let by my Department's central contracts branches. They exclude lower value contracts placed by individual budget holders, details of which are not held centrally.

Al-Yamamah Deal

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the money transferred to a Saudi by British Aerospace and Rolls Royce in respect of the Al-Yamamah deal was paid for out of his Department's budget; if *(a)* British Aerospace and *(b)* Rolls Royce paid for the use of these funds; and whether the funds have now been repaid.

Mr. Freeman: I know of no such payment.

Surgeon Commander D. W. Sommerville

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what is the barrier to the release of Surgeon Commander D. W. Sommerville from the Royal Navy to allow him to take up the post of consultant orthopaedic surgeon at Raigmore hospital, Inverness.

Mr. Soames: Although we are giving all reasonable consideration to Surgeon Commander Sommerville's request for premature voluntary retirement to take up an appointment at the Raigmore hospital, the timing of his release must accommodate the need to maintain a satisfactory level of orthopaedic expertise to support the requirements of the armed forces.

Army Divisions

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has for the Army's technical equipments division, Donnington, and vehicle spares division, Chilwell.

Mr. Soames: In June last year, the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) accepted, as the basis for consultation, a recommendation that the Army's technical equipments division, Donnington, and vehicle spares division, Chilwell, should be collocated within a leased building in Telford near Donnington, achieving annual savings of some £6,000,000.

During the consultation process, my Department received a number of alternative proposals for the siting of the collocated organisation. All these proposals have received the most careful and sympathetic scrutiny and have been subjected to detailed financial appraisals. However, none of the alternatives would provide a more cost-effective solution than the original recommendation to collocate in Telford.

I therefore have to confirm that we shall now move to implement our plans to amalgamate the two existing divisions to form the Equipment Support Provision and Procurement Authority within a leased building in Telford by late 1995, early 1996.

We will of course continue to consult with staff and the trade unions about the detailed implementation of the collocation.

Export Finance House

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what was the turnover of IMS export finance house in each year it traded.

Mr. Freeman: The export finance house set up by International Military Services Ltd. in 1985 proved unable to secure finance house business and was wound up the following year. Consequently, no audit requirement arose.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Coarse Fishing

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he now expects to announce his decision on the application by the National Rivers Authority for his approval to change the regulations governing the close season for coarse fish.

Mr. Jack: In December, the National Rivers Authority applied for confirmation of new byelaws intended to rationalise the existing rules for the coarse fish close season and to produce a consistent and uniform system for England and Wales. In place of the present widely varying rules, it has proposed that a close season should apply to all rivers, streams and canals from 15 March to 15 June but be dispensed with on all lakes, reservoirs and ponds.

The Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975 specifies a statutory minimum close season for fishing for coarse fish, but current legislation also gives the NRA the power to make byelaws to alter the close season or to dispense with it altogether. This power was available to the former water authorities which, prior to the creation of the NRA in 1989, were responsible for the regulation and management of salmon and freshwater fisheries. Many made use of the power with the result that in Devon, Cornwall and Gwynedd there is now no close season at all; in northern England and Lincolnshire there is a close season on rivers and streams, but not on stillwaters; and in the rest of the country there is a close season on all waters. As a result anglers are often confused about the rules that apply and the fishing opportunities that exist, in different regions.

The NRA advertised the proposed new byelaws last September. Ministers received 256 objections. The NRA wrote to all objectors and, in the light of its explanations, six objections were withdrawn.

In submitting its proposals to Ministers, the NRA stated:

> "there is no clear evidence that angling for freshwater fish during the period of the statutory close season will have a widespread deleterious impact on fish".

Nevertheless, it considers that, in our current state of knowledge, a statutory close season serves a useful purpose on rivers and streams, where fish stocks are rarely discrete and fish move between stretches of river. Fishing rights along a river are often held by a number of different bodies, and, in these circumstances, individual fishery owners are not able to take the steps to protect fish stocks that they feel are necessary. The NRA is therefore proposing that there should be a uniform close season on all rivers and streams. There is widespread support for this idea, and there were few objections to this element of the NRA's proposals. We intend to accept it.

The NRA has proposed that canals should be treated in the same way as rivers. This would entail imposing a statutory close season on canals in northern England and in Devon and Cornwall, which are currently not subject to one. There has been a substantial number of objections to this element of the proposals, both from individuals and angling clubs. We have considered these, together with the case put to me by the NRA, with care. We accept that there are sound reasons for wishing to have the same rules applying to all canals, but we have seen no evidence that the current lack of a close season on the canals in question

has had any adverse effect on these fisheries, or on fish stocks and, we have, on balance, concluded that there is not sufficient justification for extending the close season to these canals.

In other parts of the country, the position may be different. In some areas it may be difficult to make a realistic distinction between rivers and canals, and there may be wider conservation arguments for retaining a close season on some canals. We would not wish to suggest, therefore, that the close season should be removed from canals which are currently subject to it without full consideration being given to all the relevant factors. If anglers or fishing owners feel that the close season should be ended on a particular canal in this category, they should take the matter up with the NRA. It will then be for the NRA to consider each case on its merits and, if it believes that a justified case has been made out, to propose the necessary change.

In contrast to most rivers, the majority of lakes, reservoirs and ponds are under single management with discrete stocks of fish. The NRA argues that, in these circumstances, management of these stillwater fisheries, including decisions on whether to impose a close season, can be left to individual fishery managers and it is proposing that the close season should be removed on all lakes, reservoirs and ponds.

This element of the proposals attracted a large number of objections. There are widespread fears that the removal of the close season would have adverse effects on spawning fish, breeding birds, other wildlife and, more generally, on the waterside environment. Both Ministers and the NRA have a duty, under the Water Resources Act 1991, to exercise their powers in respect of proposals they are formulating or considering so as to further the conservation of flora and fauna of special interest in so far as this is consistent with the NRA's statutory functions. A number of objectors felt that the proposals did not take adequate account of these wider conservation implications.

We have carefully considered the case put to us by the NRA, and the points made by objectors. Our conclusion is that there is no convincing case to be made, from a fisheries management point of view, for the retention of the close season on these waters. We have also concluded that, in general, a statutory close season is not an appropriate instrument for furthering the conservation of flora and fauna. Not all waters are of equal conservation value, nor is angling the only leisure activity to have an impact on the waterside. Boating, walking, riding and cycling, for example, all take place on or close to many waters during the close season and in our view there is no justification for singling out angling as the one activity that must be statutorily suspended.

Nevertheless, we fully accept that anglers and fisheries managers can make an important contribution to conservation, and we very much welcome the NRA's initiative in drawing up, in consultation with English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales, guidelines to assist fisheries managers to manage their fisheries in an environmentally friendly way. We also recognise that ending the statutory close season could have an adverse impact on sensitive sites of particular conservation value, and we have concluded that, on balance, it should be retained for such sites. Accordingly, we are proposing to the NRA that its proposals be modified to retain the statutory close season on sites of special scientific interest which might be adversely affected by its removal. English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales have been asked to provide advice on such sites.

We have also noted an objection from the Broards Authority to the proposed removal of the close season on stillwaters in the Norfolk broads. The authority argues that the broads form a single, and important, ecosystem, and that there are no valid reasons for distinguishing between rivers and stillwaters in the broads. We accept this argument, and are proposing that the proposals be modified to retain the close season on them.

In Yorkshire a byelaw currently prohibits the use of keep nets on stillwaters between 15 March and 15 June. The NRA has noted that such a prohibition does not exist in other regions that permit fishing to take place during the close season, and that this does not appear to lead to any problems. In these circumstances, it is proposing to revoke the bylaw in question. Although there have been objections to this proposal, we accept the NRA's arguments on this point and intend to confirm this proposal.

Under the provisions of the Water Resources Act, modifications to proposed byelaws can be made only with the consent of the NRA. Provided that the authority gives its consent to the amendments I have outlined, I hope that it will be possible to bring the new arrangements into effect before the start of this year's close season on 15 March. Arrangements are in hand to ensure that those directly affected by the amendments we are proposing have the opportunity to comment on them; if necessary, further amendments could then be brought forward before the start of next year's close season.

BSE

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of compensation paid in respect of animals slaughtered as BSE carriers has subsequently been discovered to have been paid in respect of animals which were not infected in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning *[Pursuant to his reply, 15 February 1995, Official Report c. 712–13]:* The figure in the table for 1994 was incorrect, the correct information is as follows:

Year	*Percentage unconfirmed*
1990	15
1991	14
1992	15
1993	16
1994	[1]17

[1] Provisional figure.

A2 Crash

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many sheep were being carried in the truck that crashed on the A2 on 8 February; how many died; and what were the causes of death;

(2) what was the intended destination of the sheep carried in the truck that crashed on the A2 on 8 February; what subsequently happened to the sheep that survived

the accident; and how long they were in transit without food, rest and water.

Mrs. Browning: A total of 417 sheep, intended for export via Brightlingsea, were being carried in the lorry. About half of the sheep died of suffocation and six seriously injured animals were put down by veterinary surgeons called to the scene by the RSPCA. I understand that the RSPCA states that 184 or 186 carcases were removed for disposal. The surviving sheep were taken to a lairage about five miles from the scene of the accident, where they were placed under statutory notice requiring their resting feeding and watering. The sheep were inspected at 09.30 hours on the following day by the veterinary officer who had served the notice. He considered them to be in good condition and fit to travel to the exporter's home premises near Canterbury. So the restrictions were withdrawn and the sheep were permitted to return to their premises of origin.

European Quality Beef Promotion Scheme

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the amount and proportion of funding given to each member state from the European quality beef promotion scheme in each year since its inception.

Mr. Jack: Community funds approved to date under the European quality beef promotion scheme are as follows:

ECUs

Member state	*1993 approvals*	*1994 approvals*
Belgium	1,893,858	0
Spain	984,984	379,855
Germany	2,093,618	675,395
France	4,027,536	0
Ireland	2,574,653	0
Italy	1,421,956	1,787,093
Netherlands	1,119,546	0
Portugal	0	126,618
United Kingdom	2,251,200	1,075,066

In each case, Community financing represents 60 per cent. of the total cost of measures to promote quality beef.

Shoreham Port (Livestock)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what factors led to the turning away of livestock from Shoreham port on the morning of 15 February;

(2) what type of livestock animals were turned away from Shoreham port on the morning of 15 February; how many of them there were; what subsequently happened to them; what overall time they were in transit; what length of time they were travelling before getting rest, food and water breaks; how long these breaks lasted; how many breaks there were; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what information was available as to weather conditions on the morning of 15 February; what consideration was given to not transporting animals to Shoreham docks on that day; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: Taking full account of the weather forecast on the day, the master of the vessel, in consultation with the Ministry veterinary officer on duty, decided not to sail on 15 February. The information was relayed to the police and the drivers of six vehicles that had arrived at the collection point outside Shoreham were informed.

The lorries returned to lairages in Kent and East Sussex—respectively, approximately two hours' and one hour's travelling time from the Shoreham collection point. All journeys would have been well within the 15 hours rest, feeding and watering interval under United Kingdom legislation. The animals involved totalled 400 sheep and 668 calves. Prior to loading, the animals had at least eight hours rest and during that period were fed and watered. The animals remained in lairage overnight and were exported through Shoreham port on the following days sailing.

December Fisheries Council

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 18 January to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), *Official Report*, columns *543-44*, what amount of additional financial aid was provided to Ireland at the December Fisheries Council meeting.

Mr. Jack: The amount of aid to be provided to Ireland was not specified in the agreement reached at the December Fisheries Council.

Specialist Calf Abattoirs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of specialist calf abattoirs in Britain in *(a)* 1971, *(b)* 1974, *(c)* 1984 and *(d)* 1994.

Mrs. Browning: Information about the number of specialist calf abattoirs in the years concerned is not available. However, we believe that in 1994 approximately 45 abattoirs in England, Scotland and Wales handled calves, or had handled them in the recent past.

Veal Calves (Export)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many letters he has received in favour of the banning of the export of veal calves to the EU.

Mrs. Browning: In the past six months we have received more than 20,000 letters on the subject of the transport of live animals for slaughter or further fattening, a high proportion of which call for such a ban.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid Certificates

Mr. Miller: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans has he to suspend legal aid certificates held by prisoners who have absconded.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Decisions in respect of civil legal aid in individual cases are a matter for the Legal Aid Board. It must consider whether, in the light of all the

relevant circumstances, it is reasonable, within the terms of the Legal Aid Act 1988 and the regulations made under it, for an individual to receive, or continue to receive, civil legal aid. The fact that an assisted person is imprisoned and absconds is not, of itself, a specific ground for discharging a civil legal aid certificate.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the use by Roy Higginson of a current legal aid certificate after he absconded from prison.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Mr. Higginson was granted civil legal aid in 1989—before he was imprisoned—in order to pursue a claim in respect of damage caused to his house. That certificate continues in force and will continue for as long as Mr. Higginson continues to meet the criteria for the grant of civil legal aid as laid down in the Legal Aid Act 1988 and the regulations made under it.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many escaped prisoners have current legal aid certificates.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information requested is not available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Consumer Credit

Mr. Riddick: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he proposes to take in respect of the Director General of Fair Trading's recommendation on consumer credit deregulation.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Our consumer credit legislation provides valuable and necessary consumer protection. That does not mean that it is perfect or unalterable. The Government share the director general's view that, while the basic framework has stood the test of time, some aspects of the legislation need to be changed.

The Government are minded to accept the director general's proposals for changes to the consumer credit legislation. However, the Government have not closed their mind to other options and we shall wish to pay particular attention to further information on the costs and benefits of what has been proposed.

The director general also proposed that some provisions of section 104 of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990 should be implemented and the necessary accompanying regulations made. Having considered this carefully, the Government have decided that they should not, at present, bring forward more regulations. However, they will keep the position under review and will reconsider the case for legislation should circumstances change.

The director general also recommended that we should not proceed with previously announced proposals concerned with tightening the rules on the marketing of consumer credit. The Government propose to accept this advice, but in this case we shall keep the need for additional measures under review.

The director general's report contains many proposals on consumer credit. It is not practicable to introduce them all at the same time. We shall given priority to the proposals on excluding lending and hiring to unincorporated businesses from regulation; revising the monetary limits and amounts in the legislation; restricting the statutory obligation to notify the director general about changes in the officers of businesses operating under standard consumer credit licences or among those in a position to control them; achieving greater fairness in the rebates to be paid if credit agreements are settled early; and with repealing the regulations on quotations. Other consumer credit deregulation measures will be brought forward in due course.

The Government wish to reiterate that the intention is to improve the legislation. By providing for consultation on the basis of detailed proposals, they expect that there will be ample opportunity for representatives of consumer interest, enforcement authorities and the credit industry to contribute to this process.

Cable Companies

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cable companies provide a free feed to educational institutions.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I have had several discussions with the cable companies about connections to institutions in communities within their franchise areas. I therefore welcome the Cable Communications Association announcement last week that the United Kingdom cable industry has agreed to offer a free standard connection to every school passed by cable networks. This policy will be co-ordinated by the association, which has said that it will also liaise with cable companies, programme providers and educational authorities with regard to programme content. So far, 350 schools have been connected to cable networks.

I referred to these initiatives when I gave evidence to the Trade and Industry Select Committee on 25 January 1995.

Information Super-highway

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade who has ministerial responsibility for ensuring that the social benefits of the information super-highway in education and training, medicine, the public services and Government are maximised.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I am responsible for co-ordinating the DTI's interests in broadband communications and multimedia for the information society. I aim to encourage the public and private sectors to exploit the technology available and to take full advantage of the opportunities emerging. In doing so, I work closely with colleagues from Departments responsible for the sectors concerned, and with industry through the multi media advisory committee.

I discussed these matters in evidence to the Trade and Industry Select Committee on 25 January 1995.

Information Technology

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on the approach to popularising communications and information technology adopted by Manchester city council with accessible electronic village halls for the local community; and how his Department intends to spread best practice in this area.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My Department supports initiatives to enable local communities to gain access to up-to-date information and telecommunications technology. It is exactly this sort of development which

the Government are encouraging more widely through initiatives of broadband communications, multimedia and the Internet. Indeed, the creation of electronic village halls in Manchester was an initiative pioneered in partnership with the council by the former Government-funded Manchester/Salford city action team, which provided £157,500 towards the scheme. Projects of a similar nature could be considered for funding via the appropriate Government office through the single regeneration budget.

Information Society

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what benefits he expects for the United Kingdom from the European information society initiative in the social and economic spheres.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government agree with the European Commission in its White Paper on growth, competitiveness and employment that the enormous potential for new services relating to production, consumption, culture and leisure activities will create large numbers of new jobs and new patterns of working. As a result of our successful policy of telecommunications liberalisation, the UK is very well placed to gain the maximum benefit from this process in both social and economic spheres.

We are taking forward proposals arising out of the Bangemann report on the information society.

N. M. Rothschild and Son Ltd.

Mr. Byers: To ask the President of the Board of Trade pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *484*, how many hours to date N. M. Rothschild and Son Ltd. has worked on the contract on the future of the coal industry; and if he will make a statement on the advice received by the then Secretary of State for Energy from officials.

Mr. Eggar: N. M. Rothschild has, to date, worked approximately 37,000 hours since the contract was awarded in May 1991. The content of advice from officials to Ministers is confidential.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the cost of the fixed rate export finance scheme of the Export Credits Guarantee Department from 1989–90 to the present.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The cost of ECGD's fixed-rate export finance scheme depends on the prevailing levels of short term interest rates. From 1989–90 the costs have been:

Year	*£ millions (Rounded)*
1989–90	349
1990–91	413
1991–92	237
1992–93	111
1993–94	minus 53
1994–95	minus 11 (Estimated)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what staff have been seconded to the Export Credits Guarantee Department, however briefly, since 1992; in what capacities they served ECGD; and from which enterprises or companies they came.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* Since the beginning of 1992, there have been the following two secondments into ECGD:

A Divisional Director from British Aerospace for 15 working days in 1993, under the auspices of the Whitehall Industry Group.

An Economist from Barclays Bank plc, for just over three years, working as part of a team responsible for the provision of economic advice and forecasts for country risk assessments.

Mine Closures

Mr. Devlin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the dates and reasons for closure of coal mines in the Northumblerand and Durham coal fields since 1963.

Mr. Page: I am advised by British Coal that the collieries listed in the table have closed in those areas since 1963, in each case through exhaustion of economically viable or technically exploitable reserves.

Colliery closures in Northumberland and Durham since 1963

Year	*Area*	*Colliery*
1963–64 (15 months)	Northumberland	Loughbridge
		Seaton Burn
	North Durham	Addison
		Crookhall
		Fenhall Heworth
		High Marley Hill
		South Pelaw
		Stargate
	South Durham	Haggs Lane
		Lanchester Townley
		Roddymoor
1964–65	North Durham	Derwent
		East Tanfield
		Lambton 'D'
		Pelton
		Phoenix Drift
		Stanley Burn
		Watergate
	South Durham	Hole in the Wall
		Tudhoe Mill
1965–66	Northumberland	Algernon
		Bedlington 'F'
		Choppington 'B'
		Isabella
		Stobswood
	North Durham	Beamish Mary
		Bradley Drift
		Clara Vale
		Harraton
		Lumley Sixth
		Witton
	South Durham	Dean and Chapter
		New Shildon
		North Tees
		Sherburn Hill
		West Thornley
1966–67	Northumberland	Choppington 'A'
		East Walbottle
		Hauxley
		Weetslade

Colliery closures in Northumberland and Durham since 1963

Year	Area	Colliery
1966-67 *continued*	North Durham	Barcus Close
		Chopwell
		Greenside
	South Durham	Deaf Hill
		Middridge
		Ryhope
		Thrislington
		Waterhouses
1967–68	Northumberland	Bedlington 'D'
		Newbiggin
		North Walbottle
	North Durham	Byermoor
		Chester South Moor
		Hamsterley
		Handen Hold
		Ravensworth Park
	South Durham	Brancepeth
		Brandon Pit House
		Bowburn
		Kimblesworth
		Staindrop Field House
		Trimdon Grange
		West Auckland
1968–69	Northumberland	Cambois
		Linton
		Longhirst
		Pegswood
	North Durham	Burnopfield
		Emma
		Washington 'F'
		Whitburn
	South Durham	Brusselton
		Esh
		Mainsforth
		Stanley Cottage
		Wheatley Hill
1969–70	Northumberland	Rising Sun Mill
	North Durham	Craghead
		Harton
	South Durham	Tudhoe Park
		Thornley
1970–71	Nil	—
1971–72	Northumberland	Bedlington 'A'
	North Durham	Silksworth
1972–73	North Durham	Washington Glebe
		Medomsley
	South Durham	Shotton
1973–74	Northumberland	Bardon Mill
		Fenwick
		Netherton
	North Durham	Morrison Busty
	South Durham	Fishburn

Colliery closures in Northumberland and Durham since 1963

Year	Area	Colliery
1974–75	North East	Kibblesworth
		Nettlesworth
		Usworth
		Whitworth Park
1975–76	North East	Burradon
		Langley Park
1976–77	North East	Havannah
1977–78	North East	Dudley
1978–79	North East	Metal Bridge
		Rainton Adventure
1979–80	North East	Hylton
1980–81	North East	Eccles
		Eden
		Woodhorn
1981–82	North East	Blackhall
		Houghton
1982–83	North East	Boldon
		Marley Hill
1983–84	North East	East Hetton
1984–85	North East	Bearpark
1985–86	North East	Brenkley
		Sacriston
		Herrington
		Bates
		Horden
1986–87	North East	Whittle
1987–88	North East	Ashington
1988–89	Nil	—
1989–90	Nil	—
1990–91	Nil	—
1991–92	North East	Dawdon
		Murton
1992–93	Nil	—
1993–94	North East	Vane Tempest
		Westoe
		Easington
		Wearmouth
		Ellington

Nuclear Review

Miss Lestor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to publish his Department's review of the future prospects for nuclear power.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Tipping) on 19 October 1994, *Official Report*, column 239.

Business Link Wirral

Ms. Eagle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the projected losses by Wirral Business Link in its first year of operation.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* No. Business Link Wirral is a private sector company, and the financial management of the company is a commercial matter for the board.

Pacific Crane

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of the radioactive waste from the Pacific Crane and the reprocessing of its cargo at THORP will be *(a)* returned to Japan and *(b)* retained in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* The Pacific Crane is one of the five ships used to transport spent fuel from Japan to be reprocessed in Europe. Since 1976, BNFL's contracts for the reprocessing of overseas spent fuel have contained options for the return of wastes. The Government intend that reprocessing contracts with overseas customers shall continue to contain such options, that the options should be exercised and that wastes should be returned.

Objective 1 Programme

Mr. Alton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment Her Majesty's Government have made of the impact of DTI co-financed schemes in 1994 in Merseyside; when this will be available to the objective 1 partnership; and what improvements Her Majesty's Government are planning to introduce in the current year.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* No separate assessment of the impact of DTI co-financed schemes has been undertaken at this early stage of the objective 1 programme, although a progress report will be submitted to the monitoring committee in due course. There are no current plans for an enhancement of the additional support available through co-financing. DTI schemes are subject to on-going evaluation to ensure value for money.

Regional Electricity Companies

Mr. Cummings: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what matters of public interest he will take into account in the event of a foreign conglomerate proposing to take over one of the regional electricity companies.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In the event of such a takeover qualifying for investigation under the Fair Trading Act 1973, my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade would be advised on the matter by the Director General of Fair Trading. In giving his advice, the DGFT would take account of all relevant factors, as would the President in making his decision.

Mr. Cummings : To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he intends to meet the Director General of Offer to discuss proposals for the regulation of foreign-owned regional electricity companies.

Mr. Charles Wardle: I and my colleagues discuss a wide range of issues with the Director General of the Office of Electricity Regulation from time to time.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Retirement Pension

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what was the value of the basic state pension as a proportion of gross average earnings in the United Kingdom for each year since 1978.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The information is in the table.

Standard weekly rate of Category A Retirement Pension expressed as a percentage of all adults average earnings

	Date	*Weekly rate £*	*Percentage of average earnings*
November	1978	19.50	23.2
November	1979	23.30	23.2
November	1980	27.15	22.6
November	1981	29.60	22.4
November	1982	32.85	23.1
November	1983	34.05	21.7
November	1984	35.08	21.4
November	1985	38.30	21.4
July	1986	38.70	20.5
April	1987	39.50	19.9
April	1988	41.15	18.8
April	1989	43.60	18.2
April	1990	46.90	17.8
April	1991	52.00	18.3
April	1992	54.15	17.8
April	1993	56.10	17.7
April	1994	57.60	17.7

Notes:

The date shown is that from which the applicable rate became payable.

Average earnings are based on the Employment Department's new earnings survey estimates of all adults earnings as at the relevant dates.

Figures for 1978 to 1993 are taken from the "Abstract of Statistics" published by the Department of Social Security, analytical services division.

Social Fund

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what grounds unsuccessful applications to the social fund for a payment for rent in advance are refused.

Mr. Roger Evans: The social fund can help with requests for rent in advance in the form of budgeting and crisis loans. The social fund officer, when using his discretion in reaching a decision, has to take account of all the circumstances surrounding each application, as well as the guidance provided by Secretary of State on priorities. There will inevitably be some variations between decisions in a flexible, discretionary scheme.

Public Bodies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Hague: None of those bodies listed in "Public Bodies 1994" will pursue separate pay arrangements from April 1995 or April 1996.

Single payments

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the total expenditure on single payments for *(a)* the Greenock and Port Glasgow district offices and *(b)* the Lothian central district office for (i) 1985–86, (ii) 1986–87 and (iii) 1987–88.

(2) what was the total expenditure on single payments for *(a)* Strathclyde and *(b)* Scotland in (i) 1985–86, (ii) 1986–87 and (iii) 1987–88.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

National Insurance

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of those gaining national insurance credits in the 1992–93 year were previously in employment or approved self-employment; and what would be the cost to public funds to contribute the sums which employers would have paid in national insurance contributions; assuming earnings at *(a)* two thirds average earnings and *(b)* average earnings.

Mr. Arbuthnot: In 1992–93, some 7.2 million employed earners and 0.6 million self-employed earners were awarded an average of 35 credits. If the employed earners were receiving earnings of two thirds average earnings[1] for each of the 35 weeks they were awarded a credit, their employers would have paid £871.15[2] in contributions at current rates; on average earnings[1] employers would have paid £1,306.55[2].

Notes:

[1] Calculations based on weekly male average earnings of £366 (New Earnings Survey April 1994).

[2] Calculations assume that contributions were paid at the not contracted out rate of 10.2 per cent.

Cold Weather Payments

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on how many days in the last five years cold weather payments have been paid to people in Inverclyde; and which weather station covers this area.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the cold weather payments scheme is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 20 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about Cold Weather Payments.

The Inverclyde region broadly corresponds to the geographical area covered by the Benefits Agency District of Clyde Coast and Cowal. Postcodes in that area are linked to the weather station at Glasgow Airport.

Cold weather periods are forecast or recorded on a weekly basis and, if appropriate, a payment is made for the same period. Including this year to date, Cold Weather Payments have been made to people living in the area covered by the Benefits Agency's Clyde Coast and Cowal District on six occasions over the last five years.

I have provided a table showing the number of weeks for which Cold Weather Payments were made in each year for the area in question.

	Number of weeks
1990–91	3
1991–92	0
1992–93	0
1993–94	3
1994–95	0

I hope you find my reply helpful.

SCOTLAND

River Clyde (Dredging)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements are made for the waste dredged from the bed of the Clyde by Clydeport to be inspected by public agency to see if it bears any toxic substances.

Sir Hector Monro: The disposal of dredge spoil at sea is licensed by the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department under part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. It is a condition of licensing that samples are provided to the Department's marine laboratory at Aberdeen. These are analysed for a range of substances to enable the Department to check that the spoil being disposed of conforms to agreed international standards with respect to the levels of contamination.

Water (Discharges)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what differences exist in the right of the public to know about substances discharged into a river, estuarial or coastal waters by pipe and by boat.

Sir Hector Monro: Under the Control of Pollution Act 1974, discharges from pipes to rivers, estuaries and coastal waters require the consent of the relevant river purification authority. The Act also requires the river purification authorities to maintain public registers containing particulars of all consents, the conditions set and monitoring results. In the case of the deposit of substances or articles from ships, similar registers are maintained by the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department which grants licences under part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 relating to deposits in the sea.

Other discharges from boats and ships are controlled by local byelaws, by the Prevention of Pollution Act 1986 or the international convention on the prevention of pollution—MARPOL—but none have associated public registers. However, certain permitted discharge levels are available for public scrutiny.

Local Government Finance

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the effect on local

authority investment of the ending of the provisions whereby notional capital receipts can be generated from 21-year leases of capital assets.

Mr. Lang: Outturn information for the latest available year, 1993–94, shows authorities raised £34.8 million of notional capital receipts. This represented 3.5 per cent. of their total expenditure in that year on non-housing programmes. Local authorities' financial plans for 1995–96 indicate that authorities expected to raise £27.9 million of notional capital receipts in 1995–96, representing just over 2 per cent. of their total planned expenditure of around £1,200 million on their non-housing programmes.

National Heritage Designations

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to review the system of area designations and to include the national parks model in the review; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: A review of natural heritage designations, including consideration of national parks, is part of the work programme of Scottish Natural Heritage.

Fur Farms

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many arctic fox fur farms there have been, by region, in each of the last five years.

Sir Hector Monro: There has only been one Arctic fox farm operating in Scotland during the past five years. This was in Strathclyde region. It was depopulated in 1992 and has not been restocked.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average annual cost of caring for a person with learning difficulties in *(a)* the community and *(b)* hospital.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The average annual cost of caring for a person with learning difficulties in a national health service hospital in 1993–94 was £34,675. The cost of providing services for people with learning difficulties in the community varies greatly depending on their level of learning difficulty and need for support. Figures are not available centrally which would allow a meaningful average figure to be prepared.

European Funds

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the schemes approved for European funding in Scotland by *(a)* name, *(b)* region and *(c)* level of funding for the first year of the (i) Urban, (ii) Pesca, (iii) Leader II, (iv) SME, (v) Konver, (vi) Resider II, (vii) RECHAR II and (viii) ADAPT European funds for industrial change.

Mr. Kynoch: No schemes have yet been approved under these Community initiatives. Operational programmes were submitted to the European Commission in early November and we await the Commission's response. Programmes must be approved by the Commission before projects can be considered.

Strathclyde Passenger Transport Authority

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, columns *358–59*, when he expects to be able to give the total responses received and from his analysis list those organisations which supported *(a)* map 1 in his consultative document, *(b)* map 2 in his consultative document and *(c)* the whole of the present Strathclyde region.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We will announce the outcome of the consultation exercise on the boundary and constitution of the proposed Starthclyde passenger transport authority after detailed and thorough consideration of the responses received.

Student Allowances

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the administrative cost of operating the mature students' allowance in Scotland for each of the last five years for which information is available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The mature students' allowance is administered as an integral part of the students' allowances scheme and it is not possible to identify the administrative costs separately.

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students received the mature students' allowance in each of the last five years for which figures are available at universities in Scotland; and what percentage of all mature students in each year these figures represent.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is not available in the form requested.

The table shows the number of Scottish domiciled award holders under the students' allowances scheme who were in receipt of a mature students' allowance in each of the academic years 1989–90 to 1993–94, the latest year for which complete figures are available. The figures distinguish between award holders attending higher education institutions, including universities, in Scotland; other institutions in Scotland; and institutions outwith Scotland. The number of award holders in receipt of the mature students' allowance is expressed as a percentage of the total number of mature award holders in that academic year.

The responsibility for the provision of student support for students domiciled in England and Wales and Northern Ireland who may be attending institutions in Scotland rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, respectively.

Table 1—Number of Scottish domiciled award holders in receipt of the mature students' allowance by category of institution

Academic year	Higher education institutions, Scotland Number	Other institutions, Scotland Number	Institutions outwith Scotland Number	Total Number	Percentage of mature award holders Percentage
1989–90	1,895	355	150	2,400	40
1990–91	2,331	440	158	2,929	42
1991–92	2,878	1,099	191	4,168	43
1992–93	3,644	1,716	211	5,571	47
1993–94	4,440	2,540	292	7,272	49

Notes:
1. The mature students' allowance is means tested and not all holders will necessarily have received the full amount.
2. For this purpose "mature award holder" is one who was aged 26 or over on entry to full-time higher education.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Chisholm: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what funding was allocated to each further education college in Scotland in *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The funding allocated to further education colleges in Scotland and Islands councils in respect of the provision of further education in Orkney and Shetland in 1994–95 and 1995–96 is as follows:

	1994–95 Recurrent £	1994–95 Capital £	1995–96 Recurrent £	1995–96 Capital £
Aberdeen College	12,622,000	386,766	13,348,100	199,750
Angus College	2,779,200	151,512	3,176,700	140,883
Anniesland College	3,659,100	836,310	3,938,900	161,093
Ayr College	4,389,700	157,738	4,591,600	290,425
Banff and Buchan College of Further Education	2,921,500	39,147	3,379,900	0
The Barony College	1,018,100	35,582	1,252,600	317,250
Bell College of Technology	5,287,900	146,840	5,304,500	565,727
The Borders College	3,746,000	121,461	3,899,400	146,053
Cambusland College	3,982,300	46,607	4,112,700	55,930
Cardonald College	5,782,700	444,129	6,124,000	917,675
Central College of Commerce	3,905,595	384,940	4,392,200	356,378
Clackmannan College	2,304,900	182,080	2,399,500	100,815
Clydebank College	6,595,700	415,356	6,801,600	474,818
Coatbridge College	3,697,000	684,230	3,768,500	24,881
Cumbernauld College	2,468,800	34,304	2,683,600	173,066
Dumfries and Galloway College	4,933,400	230,272	4,916,000	418,952
Dundee College	10,711,800	628,813	10,501,600	285,643
Elmwood College	3,000,900	134,551	3,106,800	63,333
Falkirk College	8,063,700	161,293	7,885,400	458,838
Fife College of Further and Higher Education	6,918,700	140,361	7,464,700	193,875
Glasgow College of Building And Printing	5,351,500	907,688	5,495,000	477,191
Glasgow College of Food Technology	3,324,500	242,966	3,374,300	323,125
Glasgow College of Nautical Studies	3,862,300	284,994	3,821,200	208,927
Glenrothes College	4,643,800	105,249	5,018,200	51,935
Inverness College	6,467,900	396,102	6,287,000	291,400
James Watt College of Further and Higher Education	6,034,100	158,032	7,372,900	470,588
Jewel and Esk Valley College	7,689,000	356,766	7,336,300	246,868
John Wheatley College	2,836,600	449,017	3,241,000	426,525
Kilmarnock College	4,311,100	516,955	4,859,600	576,455
Langside College	5,121,300	813,210	5,705,300	1,136,813
Lauder College	4,844,700	378,590	5,126,100	203,275
Lews Castle College	1,964,100	183,452	2,063,500	417,889
Moray College	4,561,000	105,869	4,826,700	252,038
Motherwell College	6,484,700	215,329	6,944,100	379,103
North Glasgow College	5,881,900	1,174,397	5,695,900	765,806
Oatridge Agricultural College	1,803,600	484,353	1,888,900	369,126
Perth College	5,431,200	45,008	5,573,600	239,113
Reid Kerr College	7,205,700	717,745	7,685,100	737,313
Stevenson College	10,054,900	394,472	9,827,900	378,938
Stow College	3,694,500	603,760	4,182,800	338,635
Telford College	12,491,900	938,441	12,543,600	646,250
Thurso College	2,444,500	67,364	2,660,300	474,348
West Lothian College	5,047,300	285,539	4,825,500	396,927
Orkney Islands Council	410,600	0	444,800	0
Shetland Islands Council	1,154,600	0	1,203,800	0

Access Funds

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish details of the level of access funds provision in Scotland for Session 1995–96.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A total of £4.33 million will be available for the access funds at higher and further education institutions in Scotland in academic year 1995–96. This compares with a total of £4.14 million in 1994–95, and the provision for 1995–96 thus represents an increase of about 4.6 per cent. over the current session.

The sum has been allocated between the three funds as shown:

	£ million
Higher Education fund	2.61
Postgraduate fund	0.83
Further education fund	0.89

The detailed 1995–96 allocations will be notified to the individual academic institutions in late summer.

Pollok Estate

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much it cost to provide police officers in Pollok estate on 14 February to supervise tree felling in preparation for the building of the M77; how many police officers were involved; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* No separate record is kept by Strathclyde police of the costs incurred in providing police officers to mount this operation. Some 267 officers were deployed in and around the Pollok estate during the course of that day, leading to a total overtime payment estimated by the force to be approximately £5,000.

Public Bodies

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the outturn figures for 1993–94 and the expected outturn figures for 1994–95 for the management running costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 February 1995]:* The information for executive non-departmental public bodies receiving Government funding is shown in the table. There are differences between bodies in the precise definition of "management running costs".

£000

Executive NDPBs	*1993–94 Outturn*	*1994–95 Estimated outturn*
Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments for Scotland	2,855	2,947
Scottish Natural Heritage	16,934	19,561
Scottish Film Council	300	300
Scottish Further Education Unit	611	623
Scottish Council for Educational Technology	1,488	1,442
Scottish Community Education Council	595	600
National Museums of Scotland	8,962	8,912
National Galleries of Scotland	5,293	5,255
Scottish Sports Council	3,034	3,004
National Library of Scotland[1]	7,518	7,754
Scottish Higher Education Funding Council	3,600	3,350
Scottish Arts Council[2]	0	1,934
Scottish Enterprise[3]	55,501	49,950
New Town Development Corporations[4]		
Cumbernauld Development Corporation	4,536	4,445
East Kilbride Development Corporation	6,942	5,014
Glenrothes Development Corporation	6,001	5,568
Irvine Development Corporation	5,137	4,510
Livingston Development Corporation	6,164	6,149
Highlands and Islands Enterprise[3,5]	10,644	10,092
Scottish Homes[6]	42,000	42,400
Scottish Tourist Board[3,5]	3,546	3,810
Scottish Conveyancing and Executory Services Board[7]	22	17
Police (Scotland) Examination Board	4	4
Scottish Legal Aid Board[8]	5,366	5,422
National Board for Scotland (Nursing and Midwifery)[9]	1,896	2,082
Crofters Commission	1,397	1,559
The Scottish Agricultural and Biological Research Institutes		
Hannah Research Institute	2,902	2,878
Macaulay Land Use Research Institute	5,947	5,911
Moredun Research Institute	3,447	3,420
Rowett Research Institute	5,941	5,892
Scottish Crop Research Institute	7,428	7,366
Scottish Agricultural Wages board[9]	26	28
Red Deer Commission	517	630
Royal Botanic Garden	5,083	4,636
Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee[10]	153	144

[1] National Library costs increased in 1994–95 to take account of additional staffing requirements for the new building at Causewayside.

[2] Scottish Arts Council previously funded by Arts Council, Great Britain. Separate figures for 1993–94 unavailable.

[3] Includes expenditure on the management of the programme activities of the Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise networks, including running costs of the local enterprise companies.

[4] Management running costs have been taken to be the total gross administration costs of the Development Corporations including the costs of managing their industrial and commercial portfolios and housing which are revenue generating activities.

[5] Takes account of a transfer from Highlands and Islands Enterprise to the Scottish tourist board for restructuring costs arising from the tourism review.

[6] This includes the costs of salaries, general running costs of the Office and accommodation including rent and rates, etc.

[7] Includes a retainer for the members and for the rent of the board's premises.

[8] Includes the running costs of the staff, board members and reporters, accommodation costs and general expenditure—postage, telecommunication, stationery and audit fees.

[9] The only expenditure of this body is payments of fees and travel subsistence.

[10] This represents the Secretary of State's share of funding. Other funding is provided by Edinburgh district council.

Pilmuir Quarry

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will implement, in the case of the construction of a landfill site at Pilmuir quarry, Newton Mearns, the European Union directives 85/337 on environmental impact assessment, 80/68 on ground waste, 75/442 EEC on waste, and 78/339 on toxic and dangerous waste; and if he will publish his response to the European Commission's article 169 infringement proceedings.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* The Government have fully carried out their obligations under directives 85/337, 80/68, 75/442 and 78/339 in connection with the development of Pilmuir quarry as a landfill site.

Correspondence between member states and the European Commission on infraction proceedings is regarded as confidential between the parties and it would not be appropriate to publish it. We consider that we can provide a full and satisfactory answer to all the points contained in the Commission's article 169 letter.

WALES

Cardiff Bay Opera House

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in what way he intends to make his views concerning the design of the Cardiff Bay opera trust known to the Millennium Commission.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage made clear on 20 December 1994, neither Ministers nor Departments will comment on the merits of applications to the millennium fund.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he issued guidelines to the Welsh Health Common Services Authority for the purposes of preparation of different segments of the organisation for sale or market testing; if he will place a copy in the Library of the letter of instruction; and if he will give the appropriate section of Statutory Instrument 1985 No. 996 under which the instruction was issued.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The letter was issued on 28 March 1994 on a management in confidence basis. It was not necessary to refer to any particular section of Statutory Instrument 1985 No. 996. The current relevant statutory instrument is the WHCSA Constitution Order 1990 (SI 1990/2647).

Local Authority Finance

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each district council in Wales and for Wales as a whole *(a)* the total amount of community charge collected in respect of 1992–93, *(b)* the total amount of council tax collected in respect of 1993–94 and *(c)* the corresponding proportions of *(a)* and *(b)* as a percentage of the total collective amounts.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The information requested is given in the following table. Around £800 million of community charge for the period 1990–91 to 1992–93 had been received by 31 March 1994, 95 per cent. of the total amount collectable. It is not possible to estimate what proportion of this relates to 1992–93. Some authorities have estimated 1992–93 collection rates because of difficulty in separating receipts for 1992–93 from receipts for earlier years.

Community charge/council tax collection, by authority

	Estimated receipts of 1992–93 Community charge [1] *at 31 March 1993*		*Receipts of 1993–94 Council tax* [2] *at 31 March 1994*	
	£000	*As a percentage of the full amount to be collected*	*£000*	*As a percentage of the full amount to be collected*
Alyn and Deeside	6,820	88	8,033	93
Colwyn	4,965	87	5,998	89
Delyn	6,319	92	7,535	96
Glyndwr[3]	3,207	88	4,215	83
Rhuddlan	5,267	89	5,778	95
Wrexham Maelor	8,944	84	11,309	94
Carmarthen	4,205	91	5,891	93
Ceredigion	5,426	85	7,560	93
Dinefwr	2,539	87	3,674	88
Llanelli	6,348	91	6,976	93
Preseli Pembrokeshire	5,847	94	7,070	96
South Pembrokeshire	3,275	88	4,243	91
Blaenau Gwent	4,104	84	4,695	92
Islwyn	4,418	87	4,731	93
Monmouth	7,603	96	8,586	94
Newport	10,446	85	10,687	93
Torfaen	7,360	96	7,008	96
Aberconwy	5,173	91	5,820	96
Arfon	3,917	92	4,348	95
Dwyfor	2,700	96	3,310	98
Meirionnydd	3,542	90	4,067	96
Ynys Mon	5,792	89	6,750	94
Cynon Valley	3,808	89	4,008	95
Merthyr Tydfil	3,724	85	3,350	94
Ogwr	9,499	90	10,373	94

Community charge/council tax collection, by authority

	Estimated receipts of 1992–93 Community charge [1] *at 31 March 1993*		*Receipts of 1993–94 Council tax* [2] *at 31 March 1994*	
	£000	*As a percentage of the full amount to be collected*	*£000*	*As a percentage of the full amount to be collected*
Rhondda	3,531	88	4,260	95
Rhymney Valley	7,335	88	6,403	94
Taff Ely	7,842	87	7,728	95
Brecknock	3,528	95	4,551	98
Montgomeryshire	4,213	93	5,335	96
Radnorshire	2,082	95	2,490	96
Cardiff	21,093	85	22,663	92
Vale of Glamorgan	9,667	92	11,097	96
Lliw Valley	4,699	93	5,949	96
Neath	4,708	89	6,125	95
Port Talbot	3,425	89	4,091	94
Swansea	15,526	90	17,312	95
Wales	222,897	89	254,019	94

Source:
Local Authority returns
[1] Net of all deductions on Community Charge bills including Community Charge Reduction Scheme and Community Charge Benefit.
[2] Net of all deductions on Council Tax bills including Council Tax Benefit.
[3] Council Tax bills were not issued until May 1993, which may have affected the overall collection rate for the year.

Chippenham Mead Village Green

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he intends to announce his decision on the holding of fairs at the Chippenham Mead village green, Monmouth.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The decision will be issued shortly.

Learning Disability

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average annual cost of caring for a person with learning difficulties in *(a)* the community *(b)* hospital.

Mr. Richards: In 1992–93, local authorities in Wales spent a total of £80 million to support a total of 10,410 individuals with a learning disability living in the community, an average cost of £7,700 per individual. More recent information from local authorities is that the average revenue cost to them of an individual with a learning disability receiving accommodation in the community, including day services, is around £34,000 per annum.

In 1992–93, expenditure by health authorities on services for individuals with a learning disability was £61 million. This represents the cost of hospital care for some 1,058 individuals and all community health services.

Zoos

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those zoos which are owned by local authorities.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Phantasia, Swansea.

Training

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the funding plans for *(a)* investors in people, *(b)* business enterprise training, *(c)* skills choice and *(d)* open learning credit for 1995–96.

Mr. Redwood: Planned expenditure by Welsh TECS in 1995–96 on business growth and start-up activities, including support for investors in people, is £13.175 million. Both the skillchoice and the open learning credits pilots will end this financial year, although residual expenditure of £70,000 on skillchoice is anticipated in 1995–96.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will list the estimated outturn for TECs in Wales (a) youth training, (b) training credit and (c) modern apprenticeships with respect to training weeks used by those in on-the-job training.

Mr. Redwood: The information is not available in the form requested. TECs do, however, collect information for youth training and youth credits on the number of "employed status" training weeks delivered—that is, those trainees with a contract of employment. These trainees undergo both on and off-the-job training. Some 350,000 YT/YC employed status training weeks are expected to be delivered by TECs in Wales during 1994-95, which represents 43 per cent. of total YT/YC provision.

As modern apprenticeships are in a development phase in the current financial year, TECs have not been requested to provide a planned figure for employed status trainees.

Independent Public Inquiries

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make arrangements for independent public inquiries to be established in relation to (a) the Glan Clwyd baby theft and (b) issues arising from the internal inquiry into the transportation of a stillborn baby for pathological examination from Wrexham Maelor hospital to the University hospital of Wales on 15 November 1994.

Mr. Redwood: Glan Clwyd Hospital NHS trust is holding an internal inquiry and I shall consider whether any further action is required in the light of its findings, which will be available in March.

The report of the internal inquiry is under consideration in my Department and I shall decide whether any further action is required in due course.

TRANSPORT

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *560–61*, when he expects the inquiry into breaches of the Air Navigation Order 1989 of flights containing calves from Coventry airport in November and December 1994 to reach its conclusions; who is participating in the inquiry and whom they represent; and whether he will make the proceedings and conclusions of the inquiry available to the public.

Mr. Norris: The inquiry is expected to reach its conclusions shortly. It is an internal inquiry which is being conducted by the Department to seek to determine whether there has been any breach of the Air Navigation Order 1989. The Department is being assisted by the Civil Aviation Authority. All relevant parties involved in the operation of the flights will be interviewed.

The question of publication of the proceedings or any other part of the inquiry's conclusions will be considered once the inquiry has been completed and the findings assessed.

Wind Forces

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the maximum permissable wind force for merchant ships to set sail when *(a)* unladen, *(b)* laden and *(c)* laden with livestock.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Marine Safety Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Elliot Morley, dated 21 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about maximum permissable wind forces for merchant ships.

Ships on international voyages are designed generally to operate in all weather conditions and their construction is approved on that basis. The decision to set sail is a matter for the professional judgement of a ship's Master, taking account of the weather and other factors, including the safety of the ship's crew and cargo.

Consultants

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) of 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *724-27*, to show for all consultants and other outside organisations or individuals currently or previously employed by his Department for advice or assistance in rail privatisation *(a)* the name of the consultancy, organisation or individual *(b)* the length of the contract offered to each consultancy, organisation or individual, *(c)* the total amount inclusive of VAT paid to date to each consultancy, organisation or individual, *(d)* the total amount inclusive of VAT expected to be paid to each consultancy, organisation or individual, and *(e)* the services required by his Department from each consultancy, organisation or individual; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: Information about payments to individual contractors is commercially confidential.

Payments made to consultants currently or previously employed by the Department total £22.5 million.

Consultants currently employed by the Department are:

Organisation	
Linklaters and Paines	Legal advice
Freshfields	Legal advice
Samuel Montagu	Merchant banking
Hambros	Merchant banking
SG Warburg	Merchant banking
KPMG Peat Marwick	Accountancy and taxation
Ernst and Young	Accountancy
Price Waterhouse	Accountancy
Shandwick	Marketing
Gresham	Marketing
Ernst and Young	Information systems
Richard Ellis	Property matters
Sedgwick	Insurance
Brodies	Advice on Scots law
Travers Morgan	Advice on BR/Railtrack infrastructure contracts
Ernst and Young	Advice on BR infrastructure contracts and sales

Consultants previously employed by the Department are:

Organisation	
Arthur D Little	Research
Coopers and Lybrand	Access and access charging
Mercer Management	Freight and Franchising
Norman Broadbent	Recruitment
Putnam Hayes and Bartlett	Access and access charging
Debenham Tewson and Chinnocks	Property matters
NERA	Regulatory matters
Deloitte Haskins and Sells	Industry structure
Dewe Rogerson	Marketing

Contracts for consultancy advice are normally offered on an on-going basis with provision for the Department to terminate the contract.

Bus Services, Greater Manchester

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he holds about the quality of bus services in greater Manchester; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The quality of bus services is primarily a matter for the commercial judgment of bus operators. The passenger transport executive is responsible for securing the provision of non-commercial services under subsidy. All local bus services in Greater Manchester are registered with the traffic commissioner for the north-west traffic area office, who has powers to act against bus operators who fail to run their services to their registered timetables. The commissioner will also act where buses fail to meet the Department's rigorously enforced safety standards.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Lebanon

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's contribution to the international aid effort in the camps of Lebanon.

Mr. Baldry: UK assistance to the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is mainly channelled through the UN Relief and Works Agency, the organisation with prime responsibility for assistance to all Palestinian refugees in the near east, including those in Lebanon.

In the last three financial years, Britain has made bilateral contributions to UNRWA's core budget totalling £18 million.

In addition, Britain pays a share, currently approximately 16 per cent. of the EC contribution to UNRWA's regular programmes. The current convention covering the years 1993–95 is for 80 million ecu, plus food in kind.

Since 1993, we have also provided grants worth £95,400 to Medical Aid for Palestinians for project work in the camps of Lebanon, and £119,600 as emergency aid through MAP, the British Red Cross and Y Care International.

South Africa

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the attainment of better educational standards in South Africa is being encouraged by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. Baldry: Education is an agreed priority area for our aid programme to South Africa. We focus our assistance on support for policy reform at both the national and provincial level; the improvement of maths, science and English teaching in schools; and the provision of training for disadvantaged groups, including bursaries for tertiary education in both the United Kingdom and South Africa.

Slovakia

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding is provided from the United Kingdom via the European bank for reconstruction and development for the Slovakian Mochovce nuclear reactor; and what financial liability the Government will have to assume in the event of an accident at the plant.

Mr. Baldry: The UK Government would not provide any funding specifically for the Mochovce project.

We would not assume any financial liability in the event of an accident. Once Slovakia fulfils its undertaking to accede to the Vienna convention—which would be a condition of disbursement of the bank's proposed loan—all liability for damages resulting from a nuclear incident would be channelled to the operating organisation, Slovenske Elektarne, the Slovak power utility. In addition, the bank would receive an indemnity from the Slovak Government against liability for nuclear incidents.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what position the United Kingdom has taken on the European bank for reconstruction and development loan for the completion of the Slovakian Mochovce reactor; and what assessment he has made of the compliance of a plant if this nature with the standards which would be required in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: We have not yet taken a position on this project but are examining the project documentation, particularly the least-cost analysis study, safety report, and environmental impact assessment report, and will also need to consider the outcome of the public participation programme currently being carried out in Slovakia and neighbouring countries.

No assessment against United Kingdom licensing requirements has been made, but the bank has required that the safety assessment be based on an approach demonstrably equivalent to good western practices and the safety improvement programme at Mochovce has been reviewed by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Liberia

Mr. Worthington : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries have contributed to the United Nation's Liberian trust funds; how much they have contributed; and on what the British contribution has been spent.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* The following information on contributions has been received from the United Nations' Secretariat: United States $16.5 million, essentially from the ECOWAS monitoring group; Norway—$290,000; Denmark—$295,000; The Netherlands—$262,000; United Kingdom—$1 million.

The British contribution has been spent as follows:

$250,900 for public information;
$50,000 for a hospital generator;
$15,000 for a university library generator.

Most of the remainder has been earmarked for the following:

$300,000 for emergency assistance for war-affected populations;
$200,000 for demobilisation;
$100,000 for public information;
$50,000 for treatment of trauma victims.

The earmarked funds have not yet been spent because of the decline in the security situation in recent months. The funds will be used as soon as conditions permit.

The remaining $34,100 has not yet been earmarked for any specific purpose, but can be made available as and when needed.

Sierra Leone

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people have been displaced and made homeless in Sierra Leone since 1991.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* A World Food Council/United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees joint food assessment mission which took place in November 1994 reported 500,000 displaced and homeless Sierra Leoneans in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia since ethnic clashes began in 1991.

Mozambique

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those aid projects in Mozambique supported by his Department in the last five years, indicating those which will provide sustainable development.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* Bilateral aid projects supported over the last five years are as follows:

Rural Development

Workshop to facilitate better co-ordination between NGOs, Mozambican Government authorities and ODA

Save the Children Fund: Rehabilitation and construction of secondary and tertiary bridges in Zambezia province

Fisheries

Angoche jetty and Emepesca trawler rehabilitation prawn by-catch project

Power

Maputo power station rehabilitation of brush steam generators training of electricians in the electricidade de Mozambique

Roads

Mechanical engineering assistance

Technical assistance to the planning department of the national directorate of roads

Bus rehabilitation study

Study to develop a programme for the rehabilitation of secondary and tertiary roads in Zambezia province

Air Transport

Aeronautical equipment and telecommunications provision

Water Transport

Matola jetties rehabilitation and construction

Public Administration

Social dimensions of adjustment contributions to the World bank study

Institutional strengthening of GCPI (Office for co-ordinating import support programmes)

Study to assist in the institutional development of free trade zones

Elections

Multi-party elections seminar

Finance

Assistance to the banking sector

Contribution to the World bank finance sector adjustment project

Education

Assistance to pre-university training

Assistance to the National Institute for Development in Education (INDE)

Assistance to the Institute of Languages

Development of the secondary English department in Eduardo Mondlane university

Development of the teacher training initiatives in Mozambique

Multi-sectoral Rehabilitation Grants funded through Non-Governmental Organisations

Concern: Education and water programmes in Nampula province

Co-operation for development: support small farmers co-operatives

Vet Aid: Paravet training Inhassunge District

Christian Aid: Rehabilitation of educational medical and agricultural activities in Namorroi and Inhassunge districts.

Action Aid: Rehabilitation and provision of resources for the development of the primary education and agricultural sectors in Pebane district

In addition Mozambique has benefitted from UK assistance provided to the Southern Africa Development Community as follows:

Railways

Rehabilitation of the Limpopo railway and a technical assistance to develop the institutional capacity of the managing Mozambican authority

Rehabilitation of the Nacala railway and transport corridor.

Water Transport

Rehabilitation and institutional development of Maputo port

We regard all these projects as contributing to sustainable development

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the level of aid provided for Mozambique in each of the last five financial years.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* The figures for our bilateral aid to Mozambique are as follows:

	£000
1989–90	19,589
1990–91	25,059
1991–92	17,086
1992–93	31,441
1993–94	29,930

In addition, Mozambique has benefited from United Kingdom assistance provided to the Southern Africa development community as follows:

	£000
1989–90	2,935
1990–91	5,903
1991–92	6,900
1992–93	3,340
1993–94	1,398

Children (Commercial Exploitation)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures his Department undertakes to combat the commercial exploitation of children overseas.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* We seek to promote growth and to reduce poverty through our aid programmes in order to eliminate the pressures which result in the commercial exploitation of children. The ODA is attempting to assist developing country Governments to recognise and address the needs and problems of economically active children by providing them with improved health, education and employment opportunities.

Rwanda

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposals he has to increase efforts to alleviate the suffering in Rwanda.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* We continue to work with the international community and the Rwandan Government to rehabilitate Rwanda, to encourage the safe return of the refugees and to promote reconciliation between the parties. The significant donor response at the January round table of nearly $583 million underlines the serious efforts being made to improve conditions inside Rwanda and in the region.

OECD Development Centre

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries in the OECD do not now financially support the OECD development centre in Paris.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* At present, Australia, New Zealand and Turkey do not financially support the OECD development centre.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what have been the

membership costs of the OECD development centre for the United Kingdom over the past five years.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The United Kingdom has contributed about 6 per cent. of the total costs of the budget of the OECD development centre. Over the past five years this has been:

	£
1990–91	231,125
1991–92	268,000
1992–93	368,000
1993–94	388,000
1994–95	406,000

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the role of the OECD development centre in Paris, and what is its relationship with they United kingdom Government.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The OECD development centre is an autonomous research institute under OECD auspices. Its main activities are research, contacts with research and training institutions around the world and the organisation of informal meetings to discuss economic issues.

The United Kingdom Government contribute to the budget of the centre and are represented on its advisory board. We have announced our intention to withdraw from membership at the end of 1995.

ENVIRONMENT

MFI Warehouse, Great Stukely

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to make a decision in respect of the planning application by the MFI chain to build a warehouse at Great Stukely, Huntingdonshire, on a site of specific scientific interest; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: There is no planning application currently before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for a MFI warehouse at Great Stukely, Huntingdonshire.

Sellafield

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library the interim arrangements for the handling of wastes prior to the introduction of the super-compaction facility at Sellafield, referred to in Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's response to the Greenpeace complaint regarding a perceived breach of the Drigg authorisation.

Mr. Atkins: The information requested by the hon. Member is an operational matter for BNF plc.

However, the interim arrangements referred to are briefly mentioned in BNF plc's application for a variation to the authorisation for the transfer of solid low-level waste from Sellafield to the Drigg disposal site. I will be placing a copy of this document in the Library of the House.

North Yorkshire and Humberside

Mr. Morely: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how long he will allow for consultation on his announcement of 20 January regarding the future of strategic planning in North Yorkshire and Humberside.

Sir Paul Beresford: The announcement on 20 January, by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, about strategic planning for North Yorkshire and Humberside took account of representations already received from local authorities and other bodies following the announcement of his decision on 25 October about the future local government structure for the area. The draft North Yorkshire (District of York) (Structural Change) Order and the draft Humberside (Structural Change) Order, both published and circulated to local authorities on 8 February, included provisions that reflected modifications made in light of representations received. Final comments on the orders were invited by 14 February.

Waste Incinerators

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new measures he is taking to ensure that Britain's waste incinerators comply with European Union regulations.

Mr. Atkins: EC legislation concerning polluting emissions from waste incinerators is implemented by means of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and directions made under it. The 1990 Act gives the enforcing authorities strong enforcement powers and provides for transparency of compliance by requiring a range of information to be placed on the public register.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *508*, when he expects to publish the results of the survey of polychlorinated biphenyls, polychlorinated dibenzo-para-dioxins and polychlorinated dibenzofurens in soil in the vicinity of incinerators which is referred to in the November 1989 report of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* I expect the report to be published in the spring.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many incinerators have been closed because of dioxin emissions in each of the last five years, giving in each case the site of the plant and the level of dioxins being emitted.

Mr. Atkins: The Department does not have information about which if any incinerator closures in the last five years were the result of dioxin emissions. Many incinerators have ceased operating since the Environmental Protection Act 1990 came into force because they were unable to meet the relevant BATNEEC—best available techniques not entailing excessive costs—standards.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the incinerators which have been investigated by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution because of concerns over dioxin emissions giving in each case the site of the plant, the date and nature of the investigation and the outcome;

(2) if he will list in nanograms per cubic metre the level of dioxins being emitted from each waste incinerator in England and Wales;

(3) what action HMIP *(a)* has taken and *(b)* proposes to take to reduce levels of dioxin emissions.

Mr. Atkins: HMIP has issued authorisations under the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, that require operators of incinerators to report, among other things, the release of dioxins to atmosphere. These are recorded on the public register. HMIP also routinely inspects the operation of incinerators against the terms of each authorisation and, from time to time, carries out its own measurements of the dioxin releases. HMIP carries out detailed investigations if it has reasons to believe there

has been a serious breach of the conditions of the authorisation. Thus, for example, HMIP has carried out an investigation of the operation of the incinerator owned by Coalite Ltd. and has subsequently instituted proceedings.

Through the authorisations it has issued, HMIP is requiring operators to improve operating conditions and the controls of particulates to reduce the release of dioxins. In addition, it is requiring by the 1 December 1996 that no incinerator shall operate unless the concentration of dioxin in its gaseous releases does not exceed 1 nanogram per cubic metre. This constitutes HMIP's view of what ought to be achievable using the best available techniques not entailing excessive costs, as required by the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

The table shows all the available measurements of dioxin concentrations in the releases from all municipal and chemical waste incinerators regulated by HMIP.

Dioxin emissions from incinerators (HMIP) = Results by HMIP—all others by the operator

HMIP region	*Location*	*Type**	*Each result ng/m³*	*Date of test*
ANG	Nottingham	MSW	5, 20, 71, 23	January 1993 (HMIP)
			26	December 1993
			94.1, 50	November 1994
ANG	Edmonton	MSW	5.1, 8.6	January 1993 (HMIP)
			7.1, 14	March 1993 (HMIP)
			11.2, 6, 9.9, 16.3	January and March 1993
				January 1993
MID	Derby	MSW	12	1992
MID	Malvern	MSW	46.4, 50, 73.6	1994 (now closed)
MID	Stoke on Trent	MSW (Two units)	No. 1=64, 118	1993/94
			No. 2=208,306	
MID	Tyseley–1	MSW	19, 85	April 1994 (HMIP)
	Tyseley–2		18, 87	1993–94
MID	Wolverhampton	MSW	8, 10, 21, 17	1993–94
MID	Coventry	MSW	25, 18.6	1993–94
MID	Dudley	MSW	Closed	
MID	Killamarsh	Chemical	0.84	November 1991
			1.05	August 1993
			0.3	September 1993 (HMIP)
			0.53	September 1993 (HMIP)
			0.37	March 1994
NE	Stockton on Tees	MSW	6.1, 2.3	1994
NE	North Shields	MSW	Closed	
NE	Sheffield	MSW	4.1, 9.9	March 1994
NE	Huddersfield	MSW	178, 182, 187,	May and
			43, 39, 73	September 1994
NE	Meltham	MSW	Now closed	
NW	Rochdale	MSW	6.8	1993
NW	Bolton	MSW	5.8	1993
NW	Ellesmere Port	Chemical	0.19, 0.17, 0.1,	August 1993 (HMIP)
			0.12, 0.05, 0.28	August 1993 (HMIP)
			0.02	August 1993 (HMIP)
			0.023	April–June 1994
			0.014	July–September 1994
				October–December 1994
SW	Exeter	MSW	0.3	1994
SW	Avonmouth	MSW	13.6	1994
South	Havent	MSW	5.5, 13, 18, 36,	1991
			2.6	1993
				April 1994

Dioxin emissions from incinerators (HMIP) = Results by HMIP—all others by the operator

HMIP region	Location	Type*	Each result ng/m³	Date of test
South	Basingstoke	MSW	51, 29,	1992
			99,	May 1993
			1.23	April 1994
			0.3, 0.2	August 1994
South	Winchester	MSW	210, 103, 58,	1992
			3	May 1993
				April 1994
South	Marchwood	MSW	7.6, 4.5, 3.8,	1991
			4	
			1.2,	May 1993
			1.7	April 1994
				October 1994
South	SELCHP	MSW	Unit 1=0.4	March 1994
		(Two units)	Unit 2=0.12	March 1994
			Unit1=0.04	December 1994
			Unit 2=0.03	December 1994
South	MAFF Addlestone	Clinical	43, 32.6	October 1993
South	Fareham	Sludge	0.12	October 1993
			0.24	August 1994
South	Fawley	Chemical	0.2	June 1993
			0.19	July 1993
			0.15	September 1993
			0.08	October 1993
			4.6	November 1993
			0.64, 0.64	January 1994
			0.71, 0.68, 0.67	February 1994
			0.44	February 1994
			0.65, 0.41	March 1994
			0.7, 0.8	May 1994
			0.4, 0.57	June 1994
			0.8	February 1994 (HMIP)
			0.02	March 1994 (HMIP)
South	Grundon	Clinical	8.87	January 1994
South	Southwick Park	Clinical (Two units)	Unit 1=2.63	January 1994
			Unit 2=3.8	January 1994
NE	Sheffield	Clinical	2.4	June 1994
NE	York Water	Sludge	0.02	November 1994
Wales	Pontypool	Chemical	1, 0.77	July 1992
			0.35	January 1994
			0.5	March 1994
			0.61	April 1994
			0.78	May 1994
			0.39	June 1994
			0.41	July 1994
			0.6	August 1994
			0.47	September 1994
			0.41	October 1994

*MSW = Municipal Waste Incinerator.
1 ng/m³ = One billionth of a gram.

Businesses (Crime Prevention)

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what representations he has received from the Small Business Federation on the disregarding of crime prevention measures in the new rate revaluation; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make it his policy to amend regulations to take additional costs for protection of business premises against crime out of the formula used for assessing new rateable values; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I have received a number of representations from the Small Business Federation on the rating of certain security equipment. The Government agree with the recommendation of the Wood committee on the rating of plant and machinery that equipment installed to protect property from vandalism enhances the

value of that property and thus should attract rates. We have no plans to amend the regulations.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much uniform business rate has been collected in Liverpool for each of the last five years; and how much the city has received back from this tax.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The receipts of business rates and the share for Liverpool of the amount distributable from the non-domestic rates pool are as follows:

£000

	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Receipts of non-domestic rates net of refunds	65,046	79,114	88,093	58,961	[1]50,548
Share of distributable amount	95,702	117,961	117,736	100,968	93,650

[1] Receipts of non-domestic rates collected from April 1994 to December 1994 only.

The figures for Liverpool's share of the distributable amount for the years 1990–91, 1991–92 and 1992–93—but not for subsequent years—include the amounts in respect of its preceptors, Merseyside police and Merseyside fire and civil defence authorities.

The distributable amount includes rates paid by occupiers of property on the Crown and central rating lists, whereas the receipt figures are based only on amounts received from ratepayers on the local list. The figures are therefore not comparable.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the cost to the Exchequer of enterprise zones in the north-east region of England since 1979; and what has been the cost of each enterprise zone.

Sir Paul Beresford: The table shows the costs to the Exchequer of rates revenue forgone and infrastructure costs attributable to the enterprise zone scheme since 1979—1994–95 prices.

	Rates forgone £ million	*Infrastructure EZ costs £ million*
Tyneside	110.8	16.4
Hartlepool	9.7	1.0
Middlesbrough	10.2	1.6
Sunderland	1.6	7.2
Total	132.3	26.2

The costs to the Exchequer of the accelerated capital allowances available on enterprise zones are estimated by an indirect method and are not reliable below national level. The estimated cost of these allowances for all enterprise zones in Great Britain up to October 1993 is £655 million.

River Humber

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he has now identified a single less-sensitive area high natural dispersion area for the River Humber for the purposes of the directive—91/271/EEC—on urban waste water treatment;

(2) if he has classified the waters to the east of the Humber bridge as coastal waters for the purposes of articles 6.2 and 8.5 of the directive—91/271/EEC—on urban waste water treatment;

(3) what plans he has to use the special procedure in article 8.5 of the directive—91/271/EEC—on urban waste water treatment in respect of waste water discharges at any of the remaining locations referred to in his Department's announcement on 18 May 1994; if he will specify the locations where this will apply; and what assessment he has made of the extent to which the waste water discharges at all such locations fall within the maximum permitted population equivalent levels for the purposes of article 6.2 of the directive;

(4) what assessment he has made of the extent to which the area identified as a less sensitive area for high natural dispersion area for the River Humber meets the criteria set out in annexe IIB of the directive—91/271/EEC;

(5) if he will make it his policy that in the event that the comprehensive studies currently being carried out in relation to waste water discharges from Hull into the River Humber demonstrate that advanced treatment will not produce any environmental benefit, question as to whether such advanced treatment should be provided as an exceptional circumstance will be referred to the European Commission under the special procedure in article 8.5 of the directive—91/271/EEC—on urban waste water treatment.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* As I announced on 18 May last year, the Humber has been identified as a combined high natural dispersion area. The extent of the HNDA is as shown on the map in the Library of the House. The identification was made in the light of advice by the National Rivers Authority that the area qualifies as an HNDA in the context of the urban waste water treatment directive including in particular annexe IIB of the directive. The seaward boundary of the estuary has been drawn at the Humber bridge in accordance with the requirements of article 2, for the purposes of the whole of the urban waste water treatment directive.

The procedures set out in article 8.5 of the directive will be applied in respect of any discharge into an identified HNDA from an area with a population equivalent greater than 150,000, where a comprehensive study as required by article 6.2 indicates that the less stringent treatment provided for in that article will not adversely affect the environment. Comprehensive studies will have to be carried out before the relevant deadlines in the directive.

If the comprehensive study being undertaken in relation to the discharge into the Humber at Hull indicate that more advanced treatment will not produce any environmental benefit, the Government will seek an article 8.5 derogation. If successful, this will ensure that the environment is protected while being of significant

benefit to water charge payers and to local trade effluent discharges.

Micropollutants

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment pursuant to his answer of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *508*, (1) when the further study of micropollutants including dioxins and furans in five towns and cities was completed;

(2) when he intends to publish the further study of micropollutants, including dioxins and furans, in five towns and cities, and if he will name the towns and cities involved.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The Department of the Environment set up its toxic micropollutants survey in 1991. When the study began, sites were located in London, Manchester, Cardiff and Stevenage. In 1992, the site at Stevenage was moved to Middlesborough and a new site was established at Hazelrigg in Lancashire. Since 1994, monitoring has continued at four sites in London, Manchester, Middlesborough and Hazelrigg.

Details of the study are given in laboratory reports, a copy of which have been placed in the Library of the House. Further copies of these can be obtained from the national environmental technology centre, Culham, Oxfordshire. Future reports from the study will be available from the Department's contractors.

In addition, a summary of the data from the study has been published in the Department of the Environment's "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistic", which is also available in the Library.

Marine Aggregates

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the tonnages of marine aggregates he expects to be extracted from the North sea for road and house building until 2000; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* We have made no estimate of tonnages to be extracted. However, minerals planning guidance note 6, issued by the Department in April last year, contains the Government's guidance on aggregates provision in England up to 2006. It advises minerals planning authorities to assume that a total of 315 million tonnes of marine dredged aggregates will be contributed to construction industry needs, mainly in cement manufacture, over the period.

The extraction of marine aggregates is licensed by the Crown Estate and I understand that there are 57 current licences for dredging in the North sea, including the Thames estuary, permitting the extraction of up to 23.7 million tonnes per annum. The amount actually dredged depends of course on the market.

Waste Mercury

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what notification is required to be given to local authorities of the arrival of a consignment of waste mercury for treatment and disposal; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what notification is required to be given to local authorities prior to the arrival of a consignment of waste mercury for treatment; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what are the current licensing requirements for transportation of waste mercury in the United kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* Mercury-bearing waste, depending on its concentration and chemical form, is normally a special waste and subject to the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980, which apply to movements taking place wholly within the United kingdom. These require waste producers, before the waste is removed, to prenotify the waste regulation authority for the area in which the waste is to be disposed, using a consignment note. A copy is sent to the producer's waste regulation authority, if different, as soon as the waste is removed by the carrier. When the waste is received by the disposer, a copy is sent to the waste regulation authority in whose area the waste was produced. No licence is required for transporting waste but carriers, unless exempt, must be registered by a waste regulation authority.

Transfrontier shipments of waste for treatment and disposal must be notified in accordance with the provisions of the EC Waste Shipments Regulation—259/93—and the UK's Transfrontier Shipment of Waste Regulations 1994. Advance notification of an intended shipment must be made to the relevant authorities, using a consignment note. Within a prescribed period, the authorities must give their agreement or raise objections to the shipment. Shipments may take place only in the absence of objections and with the prior consent of the authorities concerned. Where consent has been given to a shipment, the person exporting the waste—the "notifier"—must send a copy of the completed consignment note to the authorities concerned three days before the actual date of shipment. The consignee must send confirmation of receipt of the waste within three days of its arrival, again using the consignment note.

Transport, packaging and labelling, and health and safety legislation also apply in all cases.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment what tonnage of waste mercury has been imported into the United Kingdom for treatment and disposal since 1979; what proportion has been treated and disposed of in Thurrock; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The collation of statistics on transfrontier shipment of waste into and out of the United Kingdom began with the implementation of the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations 1988. Statistics on transfrontier shipments before 1989 are not therefore available.

Imports of waste mercury into the UK for treatment and disposal between 1991 and 1994 are as follows:

Year	Tonnes
1991–92	>0.5
1992–93	0.0
1993–94	20.4

[1] Figures may be subject to slight revision, as a result of validation exercises carried out by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Data showing imports of mercury wastes between 1989 and 1991, and relating specifically to sites in Thurrock, are not readily available. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly with further information.

Water Companies

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider expanding the powers of the regulator to ensure the salary, share options and remuneration package of all chairmen and directors of privatised water companies are revealed at the time of their appointment.

Mr. Atkins: Remuneration of water company board members is a matter for each company and its shareholders, not for the Government or the regulator. Companies already publish information on directors' emoluments and share interests in their annual reports and accounts.

Housing

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the relationship between capital and renovation grant programmes in relation to *(a)* local authority housing and *(b)* community care.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local housing authorities are expected to formulate strategies and capital programmes to meet the housing needs of their areas, including those arising from community care, in conjunction with other interested parties locally. These plans cover expenditure on the authorities' own housing stock and on renovation grants to the private sector. The Government provide support for capital programmes through credit approvals and grants, including specified capital grants towards renovation grant costs. Authorities also finance expenditure from their own resources.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that training in housing management includes specific provision relating to *(a)* housing needs and *(b)* community care.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Department encourages local housing authorities to formulate comprehensive training strategies capable of developing the skill necessary to deliver an effective housing service. We would expect training provision to address issues such as housing needs and community care.

Bristol Channel

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects work to begin on a comprehensive study of all mineral deposits in the Bristol channel; and what specific instructions will be given to those carrying out the study.

Sir Paul Beresford: A research project designed to examine the aggregates resources of the Bristol channel is in the Department's geological and minerals research programme. It is expected that work will start in 1995-96. The specific aims of the project will be to make a comprehensive appraisal of the existing data to provide a clear indication of the physical processes, marine ecology and marine aggregate resources of the Bristol channel. This will provide essential information for the development of coastal protection policy and the determination of applications for marine aggregates extraction in the area.

Packaging Standards Council

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what consideration his Department is giving to funding the Packaging Standards Council; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what *(a)* financial and *(b)* other support his Department has provided to the Packaging Standards Council in each of the last two years; and what support his Department intends to give in the future.

Mr. Atkins: The Packaging Standards Council is an advisory body set up by industry to promote good practice and seek continuous improvement in all aspects of the packaging offered to consumers. The Government welcome the valuable work done in this area by the council. In May 1994, the council approached the Government for support towards its operating costs. We took the view that a body of this type should be independent of the Government and that, in addressing consumer's concerns, its support is properly a matter for businesses in the packaging chain.

Youth Service

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the total public spending on the youth service by each local education authority in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* as a proportion of the total local authority budget for each year since 1979; and what figures are projected for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I will write to the hon. Member.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much has been spent in each year from 1979–80 to 1994–95; and what the planned spending is in 1995–96, in *(a)* Greater London *(b)* the metropolitan district areas and *c)* elsewhere, under (i) the revenue support grant (ii) the proceeds of the national non-domestic rate (iii) special grants and (iv) specific grants.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: I will write to the hon. Member.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Mark Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conclusions have been reached by review of radioactive waste management policy about the siting of drystores for spent nuclear fuel.

Mr. Gummer: Consideration has now been given to the responses to the preliminary conclusions of the review, published in August, in relation to the siting of drystores for spent nuclear fuel. An appraisal of the implications of a multi-store strategy compared with the potential benefits of a single-store strategy has also been

carried out with particular regard to the question of safety. That appraisal does not point to conclusive benefits deriving from a central store or stores compared with one or more stores sited beside nuclear generating stations. The Government have therefore confirmed their preliminary conclusion that decisions on the siting of drystores for spent nuclear fuel should be a matter for the commercial judgment of the operators, subject to the necessary planning and regulatory requirements being satisfied.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

England-Ireland Football Match

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what communications he had with the Irish Government prior to the Ireland-English football match regarding *(a)* the provision of tickets and *(b)* the arrangements in respect of English supporters;

(2) which Minister in his Department was responsible for liaising with the Home Office on security matters affecting the Ireland-England international football match.

(3) what discussions took place prior to the Ireland-England football match with the Football Association in relation to the attendance of English supporters.

Mr. Sproat: None. These are not matters for this Department.

National Lottery

Mrs Ann Winterton: To asks the Secretary of State for National Heritage on how many occasions a presenter of "National Lottery Live" has appeared on a children's television programme; what assessment he has made as to the consistency of such appearances with the provisions of the code of practice for national lottery advertising; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* The appearance by celebrities on children's programmes on the BBC is a matter for the BBC, and does not fall within the provisions of the national lottery advertising code of practice.

Television Licensing

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received on television licensing's monthly budget plan in respect of the requirement to pay six months in advance before the licence is valid.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* Any such representations would be transferred to the BBC, which is responsible for the administration of the television licensing system, including easy payment schemes, and deals with correspondence on this subject. It is not possible to identify from the Department's records the number of representations transferred to the BBC, which related to the monthly budget plan.

BBC (Transmission)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the status of the reports conducted by Hill Samuel, Nera and Smith Systems Engineering; what conclusions they reached on the privatisation of the BBC's transmission service; and if he will place them in the Library.

Mr. Dorrell: The consultants have provided me with an initial appraisal of the options for the future of the BBC's transmission service. The matters considered are commercially sensitive, and I do not intend to publish their report.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he has taken to ensure that the British broadcasting industry benefits from the increasing channels for distributing programming, from digital transmission to the information super-highway, in *European and international* markets.

Mr. Dorrell: The White Paper on the Future of the BBC made it clear that the development of an international multi-media market would provide unprecedented commercial opportunities for United Kingdom broadcasters and programme makers over the next few years. The White Paper set out the part that the BBC should play in expanding international markets.

Our current review of media ownership regulation is considering, among other things, how far current controls are consistent with promoting internationally competitive UK media industries. My predecessor announced on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *706–7*, the basis on which we intend that frequencies will be made available for new digital television services, and we hope to set out later this year the framework we propose for the operation of such services.

Discovery Channel

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many educational institutions in the United Kingdom have access to the Discovery Channel carried by cable television operators.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally. The Government welcome diversity of provision of educational broadcasting to schools and other educational institutions.

Educational Channel

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to reserve any of the new channels facilitated by digital television transmission, as a dedicated educational channel.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government hope to set out later this year the framework that they propose for the operation of new digital television services.

Millenium Commission

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, column *477*, (1) what proposals he has for measuring the degree of public support for the proposed *(a)* Zaha Hadid design for the Cardiff Bay opera house and *(b)* the competing designs of (i) Sir Norman Foster, (ii) Professor Manfredi Nicoletti and (iii) Ms Itsuko Hasegawa; what assessment he has made of the probability factors pertaining to the raising of the private capital required to fund the residual share of the project

cost for each of the above four designs; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if it is a condition of an application for funding from the Millennium Commission that it should contain firm undertakings in relation to the availability of the private funding of the residual share of the cost of the project.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* These are matters for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what inquiries he has received in relation to his work as chairman of the Millennium Commission concerning the construction *(a)* of a new home for the national stadium of the Welsh Rugby Union at Bridgend and *(b)* extending the existing national stadium at Cardiff Arms park; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what form of representations seeking expressions of support have been received by the Millennium Commission from the Cardiff Bay opera trust; and what response the commission has made.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* These are matters for the Millennium Commission. I shall reply to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission and place a copy of my letter in the library of the House.

PRIME MINISTER

Minister Without Portfolio

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the responsibilities of the Minister Without Portfolio; and what salary is paid to him for these responsibilities.

The Prime Minister: The Minister Without Portfolio works with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to help co-ordinate and formulate Government policy and its delivery. He is a member of the ministerial committees: economic and domestic policy; industrial, commercial and consumer affairs, home and social affairs, local government; regeneration; the Queen's Speeches and future legislation; and the ministerial sub-committees on European questions; and on London—EDL(L).

The Minister Without Portfolio does not receive a ministerial salary.

Security Vetting

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 15 December to the hon. Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant), *Official Report*, columns *764-66*, what factors led to the exclusion of the involvement in, or association with, activities of export control guidelines, UN sanctions or the missile technology control regime from the revised vetting procedures.

The Prime Minister: Officials involved in these areas of work are not excluded from the revised vetting regime.

Community Care Housing

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Prime Minister which Government Department has responsibility for community care housing.

The Prime Minister: The Department of the Environment has responsibility for housing issues in England, including housing for people with community care needs. The DOE works closely with the Department of Health, which is the lead Department on community care. In Wales and in Scotland, responsibility for community care and for housing rests respectively with the Welsh Office and the Scottish Office.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

World Summit Conference for Children

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the progress made towards satisfying the goals of the 1990 world summit conference for children.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are responding positively to the summit's goals. The United Kingdom published in July 1992 Command Paper number 1984 entitled, "Report on the United Kingdom Implementation of the Goals agreed by the World Summit for Children". A copy was placed in the House.

The report noted a parallel initiative in the UN convention on the rights of the child, to which the UK Government have agreed to be bound. A report on the application of the convention to the UK was published in February 1994. A copy was placed in the Library of the House.

The summit's goals are also priority goals for the British aid programme which contributes in a variety of ways through our poverty alleviation and human development programmes.

El Salvador

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he will take, *(a)* bilaterally and *(b)* through the EU to ensure the implementation of (i) the land transfer programme and (ii) outstanding judicial reforms in El Salvador prior to the ending of the ONUSAL mandate in April.

Mr. Baldry: We have been consistent supporters on ONUSAL's mandate at the United Nations and have contributed substantially to its work of monitoring the implementation of the peace accords, including the land transfer programme and judicial reform. The expected outturn of UK expenditure in the financial year 1994–95 is nearly £905,000. Through the EU, we are supporting the strengthening of the democratic institutions needed to maintain law and order in El Salvador and are contributing to the resettlement of refugees. We also

support the UN Secretary–General's proposal to send a small team of professionals to El Salvador to complete the work following the expiry of ONUSAL's mandate on 30 April.

Georgian Christian Refugees

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government will take to press for the long-term right to settlement of the Georgian Christian refugees currently in Istanbul.

Mr. Hogg: The UNHCR has interviewed a group of Georgian Christians in Istanbul. We understand that they found no evidence of persecution or entitlement to refugee status.

Nicaragua

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he will take to condemn violations of human rights in Nicaragua, identified by the Tripartite Commission; and if he will support the establishment of a human rights ombudsman in Nicaragua at the San Jose XI talks.

Mr. Hogg: We make clear our concern over human rights violations, wherever they occur. We welcome the idea of a human rights ombudsman in Nicaragua and will take any opportunity at the San Jose XI conference to encourage it.

Bosnia-Croat Federation

Mr.Mcloughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support has the United Kingdom given the Bosnia-Croat Federation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We support the federation generously because we consider that its success is necessary for an overall settlement in Bosnia.

We have provided more than 3,000 troops to UNPROFOR in Bosnia. Their presence has helped underpin the ceasefire between Bosnia and Croat forces since March 1994. Their work with local committees and with local commanders through a system of joint commissions has been a major contribution to peacebuilding.

The Royal Engineers, together with the Overseas Development Administration, constructed the important bailey bridge which now connects east and west Mostar. ODA engineers have already completed 350 reconstruction projects and provided winter shelters for 20,000 people throughout the federation. In Sarajevo, which is dependent on gas for winter heating, ODA-sponsored engineers, despite sniper fire, have laid over 14 km of gas pipes and replaced 2,000 illegal and dangerous connections. Fifty-five ODA lorries form 25 per cent. of the UNHCR humanitarian convoy fleet, and the ODA-leased aircraft carries 20 per cent. of the airlift into Sarajevo. We are providing senior officials in support of the EU administration of Mostar and also police and good government training.

No other country has provided such a range of support at all levels for the federation.

Ferdinand Nahimana

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is being taken by the international authorities to detain in Cameroon, Ferdinand Nahimana, former director of Radio Mille Collines in Rwanda, and to charge him with genocide.

Mr. Baldry: The International Tribunal for Rwanda, as established by Security Council resolution 955 of 8 November 1994, is in the process of being set up. It will be for the prosecutor to decide whom to bring to trial. We expect all states to comply with their obligations under SCR 955 to surrender suspects at the tribunal's request.

TREASURY

Privatisation Advertising Campaign

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost of the current National Power and PowerGen privatisation advertising campaign *(a)* in newspapers and *(b)* on television.

Sir George Young: The cost of the National Power and PowerGen share sale, including the costs of the marketing campaign will be reported to Parliament in the usual way after the end of the sale.

Electronic Data Interchange

Mr Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which Government Departments have used the electronic data interchange for procurements.

Sir George Young: The following Departments have used electronic data interchange for the procurement to some extent:

The Buying Agency
Cabinet Office
Crown Prosecution Service
HM Customs and Excise
Ministry of Defence
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Department of Health
Home Office
Board of Inland Revenue
HM Land Registry
Office of Population Censuses and Surveys
Department of Transport

Resource Accounting and Budgeting

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to publish the results of the consultation on the resource accounting and budget Green Paper.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* There have been more than 40 responses to the Green Paper on resource accounting and budgeting, including the National Audit Office, a large part of the United Kingdom accounting profession and academic interest as well as individuals. So far, the Green Paper has received almost unanimous support in principle, although there is a variety of views on the particular policies it proposes. Responses are still coming in. The Government will publish details of these responses when they

announce decisions on the proposals set out in the Green Paper.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Dr. Julian Lewis

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether any information from police sources about wholesalers and distributors of the magazine "Scallywag" has been made available to Dr. Julian Lewis.

Mr. Maclean: I have no information about this matter. Any release of information from police sources would be a matter for the chief officer of the force concerned.

Research Expenditure

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number and grades of personnel currently employed within his Department's emergency planning division research group; what is the total expenditure for the research group for each of the years, 1988–89 to 1993–94, and the planned and projected expenditure in *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97; and if he will list the projects on which the research group is currently engaged.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Following the end of the cold war, civil defence planning primarily for a major nuclear attack has been replaced by a more broadly based approach to improving the national response to a disaster of whatever cause. The current programme of the emergency planning research group reflects that change. Its focus is on defining and evaluating new arrangements for responding to a wide range of disasters. The programme includes work on the development of a national air attack warning system based on the media, a review of options for radiation monitoring, investigations of the consequences of disasters and public protection measures, and the archiving of wartime civil defence related material.

The number and grades of personnel currently employed within EPRG are as follows:

Grades	*Numbers*
Scientific staff	
Grade 7	2
Senior scientific officer	2
Higher scientific officer	1
Scientific officer	1
Assistant scientific officer	1
Student (sandwich course)	1
Total	8
Support staff	
Personal secretary	1

The emergency planning research group was formed in 1990 when the scientific research and development branch was divided into its constituent groups. Expenditure data from that date are as follows:

Financial year	*Actuals*			*Estimated*		
1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
423	559	799	521	433	630	663

French Nationals

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many nationals from each French dependent territory entered the United Kingdom from France in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is not available.

South Yorkshire Probation Service

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many court reports were completed by the South Yorkshire probation service during 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many court reports were completed by the South Yorkshire probation service during *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1993.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many court reports were completed by the South Yorkshire probation service during *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1993 and *(c)* 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: South Yorkshire probation service completed 8,752 pre-sentence reports, social inquiry reports, family court reports and other reports from courts in 1992 and 7,082 such reports in 1993. The information for 1994 is not yet available.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders were supervised by the South Yorkshire probation service on 30 June 1994.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders were supervised by the South Yorkshire probation service on 30 June 1994.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders were supervised by the South Yorkshire probation service on 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The latest available information is for December 1993, when the number of offenders supervised by South Yorkshire probation service was 5,743.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed and at what grade by the South Yorkshire probation service, on 30 June 1992, 30 June 1993 and 30 June 1994.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed and at what grade, by the South Yorkshire probation service on *(a)* 30 June 1992 *(b)* 30 June 1993 and *(c)* 30 June 1994.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed, and at what grade, by the South Yorkshire probation service on *(a)* 30 June 1992, *(b)* 30 June 1993 and *(c)* 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information is given in the table.

Staff employed by the South Yorkshire probation service, in post at 30 June, whole-time equivalent[1], by grade and type.

	Number of staff, whole time equivalent		
Probation Officers	*30 June 1992*	*30 June 1993*	*30 June 1994*
Probation Officers			
Chief	1	1	1
Deputy Chief	2	2	2
Assistant Chief	6	7	7
Senior	37	40	42
Main grade	176	178	180
Total probation officers	222	228	232
Non-probation grade staff			
Probation Services' Officers[2]	81	78	78
Clerical/secretarial	109	120	114
Administrative	34	37	40
Other non-probation grade staff, excluding hostel staff[3]	42	40	31
Hostel staff	64	62	46
Total non-probation grade staff	330	336	308
Total probation staff	553	565	541

[1] Whole-time staff plus whole-time equivalent of part time staff. Figures rounded to the nearest whole number. Components and totals are rounded independently and so components may not add precisely to totals.
[2] Formerly ancillaries
[3] Figures include sessional supervisors on community service schemes, staff employed in student training units and on miscellaneous functions.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the effect of the November 1993 Budget statement on the budget of South Yorkshire probation service.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The 1993 Budget statement resulted in a specific grant cash limit for 1994–95 for South Yorkshire probation service of £9.6 million, 6.1 per cent. higher than for 1993–94. It was for the South Yorkshire probation service to decide how these resources are best used and to determine what specific changes within the service should be undertaken on the basis of the total expenditure limit implied by this level of grant support. The committee's report covering the current financial year will be available from the secretary in due course.

Mr. Quddus Ali

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *37*, if he will make a statement about what he has learnt from the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis about the police investigation into the assault upon Mr. Quddus Ali; what admissions to the police to taking part in the attack were discovered by that investigation; what the police did with such an admission; and if he will summarise the representations he has received and how he has responded.

Mr. Maclean: The commissioner has kept my right hon. and learned Friend informed of the progress of the police investigation into the assault upon Mr. Quddus Ali. I understand that 25 police officers were assigned to the investigation and that a special incident room was set up. Appeals for witnesses produced a good response. Nine people were arrested. One was brought to trial on a charge of affray and was acquitted. I understand that no admissions to having taken part in the assault were received by the police from any person during the course of the investigation.

On 4 November 1994, my right hon. and learned Friend received a letter from the parents of Mr. Ali raising a number of issues, some concerning the handling of racial attacks in general, others specific to the case of their son. This letter was also signed by some 900 local residents. My noble Friend Baroness Blatch responded to the points which were made. A letter was also received through the Prime Minister's office from Mr. Ali, to which my noble Friend replied. A letter was received from a member of the public which was replied to at official level.

Greater Manchester Probation Service

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the effect of the November 1993 statement on the budget of Greater Manchester probation service; and what will be the impact of the November 1994 Budget statement;

(2) what will be the impact of the 1994 probation budget reduction on *(a)* hostel provision and *(b)* probation centre provision in the Greater Manchester probation service;

(3) what will be the impact of the 1994 probation budget reduction on the implementation of national standards for the supervision of offenders in the Greater Manchester probation service;

(4) what will be the impact of the 1994 probation budget reduction on staff terms and conditions of service, liaison with victim support and work with victims in the Greater Manchester probation service;

(5) what will be the impact of the 1994 probation budget reduction on staffing levels within each grade of staff, and the likelihood of redundancies within each grade of staff in the Greater Manchester probation service.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The 1993 Budget statement resulted in a specific grant cash limit for 1994–95 for the Greater Manchester probation service of £18.9 million, 6.3 per cent. higher than for 1993–94. The 1994 Budget statement resulted in a specific grant cash limit for 1995–96 of £18.8 million, plus a further £0.9 million to support probation service partnerships with the independent sector previously funded separately by the Home Office.

It is for Greater Manchester probation service to decide how these resources are best used and to determine what specific changes within the service, including staffing levels, should be undertaken within the total expenditure limit implied by this level of grant support and within the terms and conditions of service of probation officers as determined by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Grant support should be sufficient to enable the Greater Manchester service to carry out its responsibilities in relation to the enforcement of national standards and working with victims.

Approved hostels are separately funded by the Home Office; and no changes in hostel provision in the Greater Manchester area are planned as a result of the last Budget.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed and at what grade by the Greater Manchester probation service on 30 June 1992, 30 June 1993 and 30 June 1994.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed, and at what grade, by the Greater Manchester probation service on *(a)* 30 June 1992, *(b)* 30 June 1993 and *(c)* 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information is given in the table.

Staff employed by the Greater Manchester probation service, in post at 30 June, whole-time equivalent[1], by grade and type

Number of staff, whole time equivalent

	30 June 1992	*30 June 1993*	*30 June 1994*
Probation Officers			
Chief	1	1	1
Deputy Chief	3	3	3
Assistant Chief	12	12	12
Senior	66	76	73
Main grade	360	380	396
Total probation officers	442	472	486
Non-probation grade staff			
Probation Services' Officers[2]	136	136	148
Clerical/secretarial	218	227	228
Administrative	47	54	56
Other non-probation grade staff, excluding hostel staff[3]	40	44	32
Hostel staff	61	77	85
Total non-probation grade staff	502	537	548
Total probation staff	944	1,008	1,024

[1] Whole-time staff plus whole-time equivalent of part time staff. Figures rounded to the nearest whole number. Components and totals are rounded independently and so components may not add precisely to totals.
[2] Formerly ancillaries.
[3] Figures include sessional supervisors on community service schemes, staff employed in student training units and on miscellaneous functions.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders were supervised by the Greater Manchester probation service on 30 June 1994.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders were supervised by the Greater Manchester probation service on 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The latest available information is for December 1993, when the number of offenders supervised by the Greater Manchester probation service was 11,452.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many court reports were completed by the Greater Manchester probation service during 1992 and 1993.

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many court reports were completed by the Greater Manchester probation service during *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Greater Manchester probation service completed 18,375 pre-sentence reports, social inquiry reports, family court reports and other reports for courts in 1992 and 18,201 such reports in 1993.

Police Operation, Shoreham

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of the police operation to escort lorries of livestock to the dock area of Shoreham on the morning of 15 February.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that the estimated cost was £36,000. Fifty-one per cent. of this expenditure will be met by Home Office grant.

Electronic Monitoring Equipment

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been undertaken in respect of the unlawful use of electronic monitoring equipment *(a)* within organisations or *(b)* against individuals in each of the last five years.

Mr. Maclean: Court proceedings data held centrally by my Department do not identify this type of information.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the operation and enforcement of current legislation in relation to the unlawful use of electronic monitoring equipment;

(2) what are the legislative protections currently in place for employees in the workplace who may be subject to electronic surveillance without their prior authorisation or consent;

(3) what proposals he has for changes in legislation relating to the utilisation of electronic monitoring equipment in the workplace against employees of the organisation.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: A number of provisions may be relevant to the use of electronic monitoring equipment. These include the Interception of Telecommunications Act 1985, the Data Protection Act 1984 and the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949. The Government are considering what, if any, changes may be needed to the law as it relates to privacy in the light of the report on privacy and media intrusion by the National Heritage Select Committee and of the report of Sir David Calcutt's review of press self-regulation.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals there are within the European Community to combat the unlawful use of electronic monitoring equipment within organisations or against individuals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I am aware of no specific proposals for the regulation of electronic monitoring equipment.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he is taking to proscribe the services of those companies who operate private surveillance facilities which may be made available to other organisations and individuals without reference to the subjects involved;

(2) what complaints he has received about the operation and practices of any company providing electronic surveillance services to commercial organisations; what steps he is taking to ensure that these practices are wholly lawful; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: We have received a number of complaints about advertising material produced by organisations offering information-gathering services, which may include electronic surveillance. A recent amendment to the Data Protection Act 1984 makes it an offence for a person to procure the disclosure of personal data in breach of the 1984 Act, and to offer for sale the data so procured. We are looking again at policies on the whole of the private security industry, and we await with interest the outcome of the Home Affairs Select Committee's inquiry into the industry.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if an investigation has been ordered into the circumstances surrounding recent allegations of the electronic bugging of office premises occupied by Mr. Michael Moore in his former employment as advertising director of Express Newspapers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend has ordered no such investigation.

Ticket Allocations

Ms Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he has taken to ensure that those people listed as potential trouble makers by the football intelligence unit do not receive tickets for the 1996 European championship.

Mr. Maclean: Arrangements concerning the ticket allocation for the 1996 European championships are for the Football Association to consider. If requested, the football unit of the national criminal intelligence service would be prepared to offer advice to the FA on applications for the purchase of tickets by English fans. It is a matter for the football associations of other countries which qualify for the tournament to consider their own arrangements, I understand that the Football Association has every reason to believe that they will do so responsibly.

Exclusion Orders

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many exclusion orders from football grounds have been made under part IV of the Public Order Act 1986; and what has been the duration of such orders.

Mr. Maclean: There are 449 exclusion orders extant under part IV of the 1986 Act. I understand from the Football Association that there have been 5,939 orders, including those that are extant, since the Act came into force. Information concerning the duration of such orders could be gathered only at disproportionate cost. The duration of such orders is at the discretion of the courts, but the Act provides that this cannot be for less than a period of three months.

EMPLOYMENT

Modern Apprenticeship Schemes

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the contract signed by the apprentice and the employer on modern apprenticeship schemes is legally binding.

Mr. Paice: Modern apprenticeships call for a training agreement recording commitment of all parties to pursue the training to a successful outcome. There is, however, no prescription by the Department as to the form or content of an agreement. This is left to the parties with the support of the industry training organisations and training and enterprise councils. For this reason, I cannot answer for the legal status of training agreements as a class of document. I can say that the possibility that an agreement will be legally binding is not precluded.

Training, Northern Region

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much will be spent on training and retaining in the northern region in the current year by training and enterprise council; and how much was spent on training and re-training overall in 1978 at current prices.

Mr. Paice: The total sums available for training in northern region in 1994–95 for each of the training and enterprise councils are shown in the following table:

TEC	*£ million*
Tyneside	41
County Durham	27.2
Sunderland City	18
Teesside	30
Northumberland	13.8
Total	130

Information which identifies spend on training in 1978 is not available at regional level.

Estimated Outturns

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the estimated outturn for *(a)* business enterprise training, *(b)* skills choice and *(c)* open learning credits for 1994–95.

Mr. Paice: The business start up scheme, which includes an element of business enterprise training, is now part of the single regeneration budget. The estimated outturn in 1994–95 for BSUS is £70.1 million. Estimated outturn for skill choice in 1994–95 is £11.1 million. Open learning credits was a pilot scheme in 1993–94; there is no provision for it in 1994–95.

Restart Interviews

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take steps to ensure that the introduction of positive outcome targets for staff conducting restart interviews will not result in individual claimants being forced off programmes or benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Jim Cunningham, dated 21 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about whether the introduction of positive outcome targets for my

people conducting advisory interviews will result in clients being forced off programmes or benefits.

It may help if I explain that one of the main tasks of our local Jobcentres is to advise unemployed people in the best possible way and help them to find a job, or appropriate training, as soon as possible. This is done by having regular interviews, where the client is able to discuss their situation with an adviser, consider the options available and agree a course of action which, if taken, will offer the best prospects of finding a job.

As part of our objective to offer unemployed people, particularly the longer term unemployed and others at a disadvantage in the labour market, we offer help and advice in finding work or appropriate training. Since April 1994 we have had targets for positive outcomes from advisory interviews. We aim for a positive outcome of 50% of those clients invited to a 12 month advisory interview and 35% of those invited to a 24 month interview. These targets reaffirm our commitment to interviews which are effective in meeting the needs of each individual.

Far from encouraging our people to force clients off programmes or benefits, the targets reinforce the importance we place on ensuring we provide positive advice helping people back to work. This is the message that the guidance we give our people in delivering advisory interviews is designed to reinforce.

I hope this is helpful and assures you of our intent to provide unemployed people with practical advice and information which is geared to their individual requirements.

Jobcentres, Scotland

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of jobcentres that have been closed in the past 15 years in Scotland, by region.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M.E.G. Fogden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 21 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of Jobcentres that have been closed down in the past 15 years in Scotland, by region.

Unfortunately this information is not fully available. Figures can only be provided from 1989/90, the year in which the Employment Service became an Agency.

Since that date, one Jobcentre has closed in the regional authority area of Strathclyde. This office was Dalmellington.

Mobile Jobcentres

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to extend the use of mobile jobcentres, as currently used in Fife into other regions of Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 21 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about his plans to extend the use of mobile Jobcentres as currently in Fife into other regions of Scotland.

There are no plans at this time to extend the use of mobile Jobcentres into other regions in Scotland.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, columns *468–69*, when mobile jobcentres in Fife began.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 21 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the date mobile Jobcentres in Fife began.

The mobile Jobcentre in Fife began in February 1994.

I hope this is helpful.

Job Vacancy Boards

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, columns *471–72*, (1) if he will list by region *(a)* libraries, *(b)* community centres and *(c)* post offices which, by way of a local agreement, display job vacancy boards in Scotland;

(2) what is the cost of maintaining job vacancy boards in libraries, community centres and post offices in Scotland.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 21 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the locations of job vacancy display boards in libraries, community centres and post offices in Scotland and the cost of maintaining these boards.

The information required is listed by Regional and Island Council Authorities in the enclosed table.

The costs (where quoted) include only postage, telephone and fax charges. They do not include any amount for staff time either in the Jobcentres or at the vacancy board locations. Where costs are not shown nil costs apply.

I hope this is helpful.

Vacancy Display Boards in Libraries, Community Centres and Post Offices

Regional authority	*Location of library*	*Cost of maintenance (per week)*	*Location of Community Centre*	*Cost of maintenance (per week)*	*Location of Post Office*	*Cost of maintenance (per week)*
Strathclyde	Strathaven	£1.00	Auchinleck	25p	Dundonald	25p
	Bargarran		Muirkirk	25p	New Cumnock	25p
	Bridgewater		Strone		Port Bannatyne	
	Whitletts	25p	Mauchinhill		Ardbeg	
	Mossblown	25p	Stewarton		Kilchattan Bay	
	Coylton	25p	Riccarton		Inverary	£1.50
	Tarbolton	25p	West Kilbride		Mull	25p
	Maybole	25p	Lamlash		Colonsay	25p

Vacancy Display Boards in Libraries, Community Centres and Post Offices

Regional authority	*Location of library*	*Cost of maintenance (per week)*	*Location of Community Centre*	*Cost of maintenance (per week)*	*Location of Post Office*	*Cost of maintenance (per week)*
	Dalmellington	25p				
	Patna	25p			Dunlop	
	Forth				Kilmaurs	
	Lesmahagow				Fenwick	
	3 Mobile libraries					
	in Clydesdale				Dalry	
	Tarbert				Symington	
	Beith				Dundonald	
	Kilmaurs				Darvel	
	Crosshouse				Newmilns	£1.25
	Hurlford				Port Ellen	
	Crosshouse					
	Hurlford					
	Galston	£1.25				
	Dalry					
	Bridge of Weir					
Highland	Wick	£1.50	Kinlochleven		Broadford	
	Aviemore		Helmsdale		Tongue	
			Lairg		Durness	
			Dornoch			
			Bonar Bridge			
			Brora			
			Golspie			
			Bettyhill			
			Kinlochbervie			
			Merkinch	£1.50		
			Alness	25p		
			Ballintore	25p		
Western Isles Island Council			Benbecula			
			South Uist			
			Harris			
			Tarbert			
			Barra			
Dumfries and Galloway			Eastriggs	19p	Eastriggs	19p
			Gretna	19p	Kelloholm	19p
			Langholm	19p	Kirkconnel	19p
			Whithorn	19p	Wanlockhead	19p
					Leadhills	19p
					Kirkcolm	19p
					Drummore	19p
					Glenluce	19p
					Portpatrick	19p
					Sandhead	19p
					Garlieston	19p
					Whithorn	19p
					Isle of Whithorn	19p
					Whauphill	19p
					Wigtown	19p
Lothian	Fauldhouse		Craigmillar	£1		
			Broomhouse			
	Blackburn		South	£1		
	Whitburn					
	Dunbar		Queensferry			
	Tranent					
	Prestonpans					
	North Berwick					
	Mayfield					
	Newtongrange					
	Danderhall					
	Gorebridge					
Grampian	Keith	38p	Aberlour	25p	Rhynie	38p
	Huntly	38p	Lossiemouth	25p	Insch	38p
	Insch	38p	Ellon	£1.25	Portsoy	£1.25
			Stonehaven	£1.25	Cornhill	£1.25

Vacancy Display Boards in Libraries, Community Centres and Post Offices

Regional authority	*Location of library*	*Cost of maintenance (per week)*	*Location of Community Centre*	*Cost of maintenance (per week)*	*Location of Post Office*	*Cost of maintenance (per week)*
			Macduff	£1.25	Aberchirder	£1.25
					Gardenstoun	£1.25
					Rhynie	£1.00
					Insch	£1.00
					Cruden Bay	
					Mintlaw	
					New Deer	
					St Fergus	
Tayside	Whitfield		Crieff		Laurencekirk	£10 pa
	Crieff					
	Auchterarder					
	Carnoustie	£20				
	Kirriemuir	£20 pa				
	Brechin					
Central	Linlithgow					

Training Budget

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has for increasing the training budget for young people.

Mr. Paice: In 1997–98, planned expenditure by the Department on training for young people, through youth training, modern apprenticeships and accelerated modern apprenticeships will be £174 million more than forecast expenditure in the current year.

Training Loan

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimates he has made of *(a)* the percentage and *(b)* the amount in cash terms constituted by the take-up in Wales of (i) career development loans and (ii) small firms training loans for 1994–95.

Mr. Paice: At 31 January 1995, 491 career development loans, with a total value of £1.783 million, had been approved in Wales during the current financial year. This represented nearly 4 per cent. of the total approved throughout Great Britain. Total outturn for career development loans in Wales over 1994–95 is estimated at approximately 500 loans, with a total value of some £1.82 million.

Small firms training loans is a new programme, serious promotion of which did not start until the end of 1994. At 31 January 1995, one small firms training loan had been approved in Wales. Further applications for loans are being processed by the participating banks.

General National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to allow local authorities to submit the classroom costs of delivery of general national vocational qualifications in schools for support from the European social fund; on what grounds the same rule is not applied to similar qualifications delivered by the further education sector, via the Further Education Funding Council; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The Department is currently reviewing the eligibility of GNVQ courses for European social fund support.

Training, Merseyside

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the cost of Government training and other initiatives delivered by TECs and other organisations in Merseyside in 1993 and the contribution made to that cost by the European social fund; and what are the estimated equivalent figures for 1994.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The cost of the three main Government training and other initiatives delivered by training and enterprise councils in Merseyside in 1993–94 was £78,306,927, which included a contribution of some £14,000,000 from the European social fund. In 1994–95, the corresponding budget figures are £73,252,333 and £12,900,000 respectively.

Mrs. Jane Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total cost of training initiatives delivered by TECs and other organisations in Merseyside in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* 1994–95; and what was the contribution made to these costs by the European social fund.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The cost of the three main Government training and other initiatives delivered by training and enterprise councils in Merseyside in 1993–94 was £78,306,927, which included a contribution of some £14,000,000 from the European social fund. In 1994–95, the corresponding budget figures are £73,252,333 and £12,900,000 respectively.

South Thames TEC

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the amount owed by South Thames TEC to his Department.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* I estimate that the Department is owed at least £2 million but the final figure could be substantially higher. This represents principally the cost of training for which the Department has paid South Thames training and enterprise council but which the TEC cannot at present substantiate with evidence.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment who will be responsible for the financial liability in respect of the South Thames TEC employees when Central London training and enterprise council takes over the STTEC responsibilities for Southwark and Lambeth; and who will meet the cost of their redundancies and pensions.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* This will depend on the circumstances when successor arrangements to South Thames training and enterprise council are eventually agreed.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the budget allotted by his Department to South Thames TEC for 1995–96.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The Government office for London has yet to reach agreement with training and enterprise councils over the size of budgets for 1995–96.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what will be the contract price for CENTEC to take over STTEC's responsibilities in Southwark and Lambeth.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* I am not in a position to answer at present. Negotiations about this have yet to be concluded.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what proportions the full amount of the proposed budget for STTEC for 1995–96 will be divided between South London TEC and Central London TEC.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The Government office for London is developing proposals for the appropriate division of the budget between SOLOTEC and CENTEC. When these are available they will be subject to further discussion between the Government office for London and the two training and enterprise councils before being finalised.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he will sign the contract for CENTEC to take over the responsibilities of STTEC in relation to Southwark and Lambeth.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* I am unable to specify a date. Discussions between the Government office for London and CENTEC are still continuing on this matter.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the position of providers providing training in Southwark and Lambeth formerly contracted to STTEC in respect of contracts which expire on 1 April.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* It is normal for providers' contracts with training and enterprise councils to expire at the end of the contract year. Providers then have to negotiate new contracts for the following year. No provider can be guaranteed renewal of its contract. The position will be the same in the South Thames TEC area, except that providers will seek to contract with one or both successor TECs. It is a commercial decision for TECs about which providers they wish to contract with.

Because of the particular circumstances in the South Thames TEC area, the Department has laid a minute before the House seeking parliamentary approval to extend the letter of comfort already issued to providers contracted with South Thames TEC to deliver the Government's youth training credits and training for work programmes. For those YT/credits and TfW providers whose existing contracts with South Thames TEC are not renewed by a successor to South Thames TEC, this would give a guarantee of payment for:

(i) outputs achieved in relation to training completed prior to 26 March under the existing contract with South Thames TEC;

(ii) training for up to a further 3 months in respect of TfW and a further 6 months in respect of YT/Credits that commenced prior to 26 March in accordance with their existing contracts, and outputs achieved in relation to training completed within the periods stated above.

Central London TEC

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the contract between his Department and CENTEC in respect of Southwark and Lambeth will take account of the unfunded commitments normally paid out of surplus.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The contract to be negotiated between the Department and CENTEC will relate only to Government-funded training and business support programmes.

Southern Derbyshire TEC

Mrs Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress Southern Derbyshire TEC is making in meeting the criteria for the award of a three-year licence.

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce that Southern Derbyshire training and enterprise council has now completed the process of meeting the rigorous standard we set for the award of the new three-year licences. Its licence will be effective from April 1995.

HEALTH

General Medical Council

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how she seeks nominations for lay members of the General Medical Council.

Mr. Malone: A wide range of bodies and organisations are invited, in writing, to nominate suitable people who would be willing to serve as lay members on the General Medical Council.

John Walsh

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the timing involved in the case of the Eltham boy shot with an arrow and on the referrals made between the hospitals.

Mr. Sackville: The patient was injured in a south London park and taken by helicopter ambulance to Moorfields Eye hospital. The doctor there thought neurosurgery might be necessary and referred him to the Royal London for a brain scan.

Following the scan, the neurosurgical consultant decided that the injury was primarily ophthalmic and it was not felt that there was any requirement for neurosurgical treatment beyond regular CT scan monitoring. At all times, the patient was conscious with no neurological signs.

He was then taken to the Smithfield site—Bart's—where the Royal Hospitals Trust bases its ophthalmology

services and where the injury was successfully treated. At no time was any life-saving procedure required or performed.

NHS Staff

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many staff were employed in each category in the national health service in the Northern region in the last year for which figures are available; and how many were so employed in 1978.

Mr. Malone: This information is shown in the table.

Directly-employed staff in the National Health Service, Northern Region as at 30 September 1978 and 1993—whole-time equivalents[a]

Total hospital community health service staff	*1978* *49180*	*1993* *48560*
Medical and dental[1]	2,380	3,010
Nursing and Midwifery[2] (excluding agency)	22,960	24,580
Professions allied to medicine[3]	—	2,470
Professional and technical	3,240	2,100
Scientific and professional[3]	—	720
Works Professional	370	300
Maintenance	1,360	1,050
General and Senior Managers[3]	—	830
Administrative and clerical	5,700	7,030
Ambulance	1,420	1,250
Ancillary	11,740	5,190
Others[4]	—	50

Source:

Department of Health of Medical and Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Notes:

[1] Medical and dental staff exclude locum staff.

[2] Nursing and midwifery figures exclude agency staff. The 1993 figures also exclude students or Project 2000 training courses. Project 2000 students are regarded as supernumerary and are not included in workforce numbers. (In September 1993 there were about 28,000 Project 2000 students). By contrast traditional learners are counted as part of the workforce. In 1980–81 the contracted hours for nurses changed from 40 hours per week to 37.5 hours. Figures for nursing and midwifery are therefore not strictly comparable for the years shown.

[3] A new management class introduced in phases from 1984 following the Griffiths report (1983). There was one general manager in each health authority and HCHS unit. Senior managers were introduced in 1987 with up to 7 senior posts at Board level in each health authority, from 1989 senior management posts extended below Board level and to hospital Units. Most of these posts replaced those formerly counted within the administrative and clerical groups.

[4] A change in data collection procedures in September 1991 resulted in the creation of an 'other staff' category. This category comprises health care assistants and other staff on locally determined rates of pay.

[5] In 1978 Professional and Technical staff group included Professions Allied to Medicine and Scientific and Professional staff.

[6] All data are rounded to the nearest ten whole-time equivalents.

Dioxins

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations she has received concerning the impact of dioxins on public health.

Mr. Sackville: Since 1 March 1994, two hon. Members have tabled questions to the Department about dioxins, six hon. Members have written to Ministers and five letters were received from members of the public. In addition, the Department was asked to comment on two petitions from constituents of the hon. Members for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) and for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), although the latter petition was more appropriate for the Health and Safety Executives to which it was transferred.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she is taking to ensure that the public are alerted to the danger of exposure to dioxins.

Mr. Sackville: Dioxins are present all over the world and occur from natural sources as well as from the combustion processes in industry, and cigarette smoke. The Government are advised on the toxicity of dioxins by the Committee on Toxicity of Food, the Environment and Consumer Products, and the tolerable daily intake recommended by the committee exceeds the estimated intakes for the general population in the United Kingdom.

The toxicology of dioxins is kept under review by the committee. It is at present undertaking an evaluation of the draft United States Environmental Protection Agency report on dioxins.

Drugs Services

Mr. Jim Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what grants, apart from the drug and alcohol specific grant, local authorities can apply for in order to provide services to help combat drug abuse and its effects.

Mr. Bowis: In addition to the drug and alcohol specific grant local authorities may apply for the following:

AIDS Support Grant

The Department of Health administers an AIDS Support Grant (the specific grant for people with HIV infection or AIDS) which provides grant funds for social services for drug misusers affected by HIV or by AIDS.

The Department for Education—Grants for Education Support and Training

This grant is to train teachers with responsibility for drugs education and to develop innovative drug education projects in 16 local education authorities.

The Home Office Drug Prevention Initiative

There are twenty local drug prevention teams administered by the Home Office Drugs Prevention Initiative. Statutory and voluntary sector agencies and individuals may apply to them for funding.

The Drug Prevention Measures in Great Britain Fund

This Home Office fund makes small financial contributions in support of measures to reduce drug misuse. Preference is given to projects, services or schemes which are innovative and may be of national or regional significance. They are not eligible if they properly fall against an existing source of Government funding.

The Seized Assets Fund

This represents the proceeds of drugs trafficking seized under international confiscation agreements. Because of the uncertain source of the funding, the Home Office is unable to fund recurrent expenditure. There have been no resources available from this fund since 1991–92.

The Commission of the European Communities

The Commission administers a grant programme to support efforts made by Member States in the field of public health in order to contribute to maintaining a high level of health protection in the Member States.

Mr. Dowd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much each local authority has bid for the drug and alcohol specific grant for 1995–96; and how much they were awarded.

Mr. Bowis: Grants for 1995–96 have not yet been awarded.

Heart Disease

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has on the causes of acquired heart disease among children *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in other countries.

Mr. Sackville: Acquired heart disease in childhood is uncommon in the United Kingdom, especially since acute rheumatic fever—historically, the main cause—has become a rare and relatively mild disease. The causes of acquired heart disease among children in other countries vary, especially in developing countries where rheumatic heart disease remains a common and significant cause of paediatric heart disease.

Polonium 210

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action her Department is taking to measure the correlation between the presence of polonium-210 in children's teeth and atmospheric lead from vehicle exhaust emissions; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 10 February, *Official Report*, column *442*, which explained that the Government are considering the options for further research in this area.

Child Care

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her latest estimate of the number of children under the age of five years who are in the care of *(a)* private child minders or nannies and *(b)* private and voluntary playgroups.

Mr. Bowis: Using information from the survey conducted by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys of day care for children, it is estimated that in 1990 the figures for England were 180,000 attending child minders on a paid basis, 50,000 cared for by nannies and 560,000 attending private or voluntary playgroups.

NHS Prescriptions

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the administration costs of the NHS prescription system.

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table.

Administration costs of the NHS prescription system[1] in England in 1993–94

Item	*Cost (£ million)*
Purchase of prescription forms for supply to doctors and dentists[2]	1.2
Pricing of prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors and doctors[3]	26.7
Total	27.9

Notes:

[1] Excludes fees paid to doctors, dentists and pharmacists for professional services, expenditure on the drugs bill and the costs of operating the prescription charge exemption and remission arrangements.

[2] Expenditure by Family Health Services Authorities. Other FHSA administration costs associated with the NHS prescription system are not separately identified.

[3] Expenditure by the Prescription Pricing Authority.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what circumstances chairmen of NHS trusts are brought into direct contact with NHS psychiatric patients in Scarborough.

Mr. Malone: I would expect all national health service trust chairmen to come into regular contact with the patients using the services provided by their trust.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial arrangements are being made for the NHS trusts dissolved on 1 April 1994.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Pursuant to the dissolution of 16 national health service trusts on 1 April 1994, and their reconfiguration with parts, or all, of other trusts or directly managed units, I propose to create new originating debt for the 14 new trusts equal to the net assets transferred to them and therefore to remit the outstanding debt of the 16 dissolved trusts.

These operations involve no loss to the Exchequer. Her Majesty's Treasury has today presented a minute to the House giving the particulars and circumstances of the proposed remission which it has approved in principle.

Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who has been appointed chief executive of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS trust; and what posts the individual held over the last 10 years.

Mr. Malone: Mr. Robert Creighton has been appointed chief executive of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children national health service trust, as from the beginning of April 1995. Mr. Creighton joined the Department of Health in 1988 and for four years held a series of posts concerned with national health service planning and the management of special health authorities. He was Principal Private Secretary to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health from 1992–1994, and is currently head of the NHS executive's change management team.

NHS Trusts, Doncaster

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the chairmen of the Doncaster Royal Infirmary NHS trust and Doncaster Healthcare trust were told of their expected time commitments in their appointment letters.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 14 February, *Official Report*, column *642*.

Dementia

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response she has given to the report "Services, for Younger People with Dementia", published by the Alzheimer's Disease Society, a copy of which has been sent to her; what action she is taking; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: I met representatives of the Alzheimer's Disease Society earlier this month to discuss its report. In "The Health of the Nation" key area handbook for mental health, we have advised purchasers to take account of the needs of people with pre-senile dementia.

Community Care

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what inflationary element has been built into the special transitional grant for community care for *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96.

Mr. Bowis: Various components are taken into account in the assessment of resources for local authorities' new community care responsibilities, including the Government's forecast of inflation.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects the special transitional grant for community care to be incorporated within the standard spending assessment.

Mr. Bowis: It is already being incorporated each year within the standard spending assessment.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account has been taken in the calculation of the 1994–95 and 1995–96 special transitional grants of increased costs on the infrastructure for administering the community care changes.

Mr. Bowis: Local authorities' additional costs, which include, but are not limited to, administration costs, have been taken into account each year in the assessment of the additional resources needed for their new community care responsibilities. Not all elements of the additional costs initially incurred by local authorities have been increasing since the special transitional grant was introduced.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is held in her Department on the numbers of ME sufferers who are *(a)* bed-ridden and *(b)* otherwise housebound; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: None. The nature of what is increasingly being referred to as chronic fatigue syndrome is not fully understood or defined. Until this is resolved it will not be possible to determine the true incidence or prevalence of chronic fatigue syndrome.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to GP fundholders in respect of their relationship with agencies other than the NHS.

Mr. Malone: Recent guidance, EL(94)79, and the consultative document "An Accountability Framework for GP Fundholding" provide the framework within which general practitioners and local health authorities should work together in partnership. It is health authorities who, working with GPs in developing local health and service strategies, have responsibility to consult widely on their plans. Copies of the guidance and consultative document are available in the Library.

EDUCATION

Class Sizes

15. **Mr. Byers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many primary age children are being taught in classes larger than 30 by a single teacher.

Mr. Robin Squire: At January 1994, nearly 1.1 million or a little over one in four pupils.

21. **Mr. Benton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate she has made of the effect of the budget settlement for local authorities on class sizes.

27. **Ms Jowell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what estimate she has made of the effect of the budget settlement for local authorities on class sizes.

Mr. Robin Squire: The effect of the settlement on class sizes will depend on decisions yet to be made by individual LEAs and schools.

Student Loans

16. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received regarding delays in payment of student loans.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has received some 50 representations on delays in the processing of loans. The Department has also received a number of telephone calls from both students and higher education institutions.

Books and Equipment (Expenditure)

18. **Mr. Legg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what has been the change in real and cash terms in spending on books and equipment in schools since 1979.

Mr. Robin Squire: Spending on books and equipment in LEA-maintained schools in England is estimated to have increased by 23 per cent. in real terms, and by 23 per cent. in cash terms, between 1979–80 and 1993–94. Figures for 1993–94 are provisional. On a per pupil basis, spending is estimated to have increased by 55 per cent. in real terms, and 280 per cent. in cash terms, over the same period. Equivalent information is not available for grant-maintained or independent schools.

Pre-fours Education Provision

19. **Ms Hodge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to extend education provision for children before the age of four.

Mr. Forth: The Prime Minister's commitment is to provide, over time, good quality pre-school places for all four-year-olds whose parents wish them to it take up. There are no plans as yet to extend the commitment to younger children.

Disability

22. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to amend section 21 of the Education Act 1993 to extend the range of disability covered.

Mr. Forth: None. Information on wheelchair access, which is required under regulations made under section 21, will be collected for the first time from May this year. We will keep the regulations under review thereafter.

A-level Students

23. **Mr. Ainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received concerning competition for A-level students between further education colleges and schools.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend receives many reports of greater responsiveness by schools and colleges to the needs of young people. We welcome that. Informed choice and a diverse education system are fundamental to higher participation and attainment.

Capital Investment

24. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her assessment of the need for additional capital investment in schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: The condition of school buildings is the responsibility of local education authorities and governors. It is for them to assess their capital needs and bid accordingly.

I should mention, however, that a National Audit Office report on school buildings in 1991 suggested that some £2 billion—at 1990 prices—was required for outstanding capital needs. In the four years from 1991–92, Government support for capital work at maintained schools has amounted to some £2.5 billion. Moreover, a total of £621 million is being made available for 1995–96—£21 million above the current year—and a further increase of £50 million is planned for 1996–97. Further resources are available to LEAs and voluntary-aided schools and I am encouraging schools to explore the scope for private sector finance.

Grant-maintained Schools (Accessibility)

25. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what steps she is taking to improve the accessibility to all parents of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools with grant-maintained status.

Mr. Robin Squire: The continuing expansion of the GM sector—from 20 schools five years ago to well over 1,000 today—gives growing numbers of parents the opportunity to send their children to grant-maintained schools, both primary and secondary. We shall continue to foster that expansion, including through the distribution of factual information about grant-maintained status and how to attain it.

Universities (Governing Bodies)

26. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals she has to reform the governing bodies of universities.

Mr. Boswell: My right hon. Friend has no such proposals. However, the Committee of Chairmen of University Councils and Boards issued guidance on governance arrangements to its members, including those in Northern Ireland, in December. We endorse the broad approach taken by the committee.

Teachers' Salaries

28. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the average teacher salary in 1979; what it is today; and how much of a real terms change this represents.

Mr. Robin Squire: The average teacher's salary in April 1979 was £5,100. In April 1994, it was £21,600. This represents a real-terms increase of 59 per cent.

Pupil Numbers

29. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she last met the chairs of local education authorities to discuss the increase in pupil numbers.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend and other Ministers and I regularly meet representatives of local education authorities; discussions cover a range of issues, including the forecast increase in pupil numbers.

Sixth Forms

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what criteria are normally employed by her Department when considering applications by secondary schools for the re-instatement of sixth forms; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: When deciding proposals for the addition of sixth forms, my right hon. Friend has regard to the criteria published in the circular on the supply of school places issued last November. These criteria address issues of choice, and diversity, need, quality and cost-effectiveness.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what criteria are normally employed by her Department when considering applications by secondary schools for the re-instatement of sixth forms; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: When deciding proposals for the addition of sixth forms, my right hon. Friend has regard to the criteria published in the circular on the supply of school places issued last November. These criteria address issues of choice, and diversity, need, quality and cost-effectiveness.

Chalfont Community College

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received concerning access to Chalfont community college.

Mr. Robin Squire: None. This matter is being considered by the Education Assets Board.

Nursery School Staffing

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what is the level of staff turnover in private day nursery schools;

(2) what information she has on the ratio of staff to children in private day nursery schools; and if she will list the available data by geographical area.

Mr. Bowis: I have been asked to reply.

Information on staffing of private day nursery schools is not available centrally.

Day Care (Children)

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what is the number of private nursery school places in each local education authority area:

(2) how many registered child minders there are by local education authority area.

Mr. Bowis: I have been asked to reply.

Day care facilities for children aged under eight are registered by local authority social services departments.

Figures for child minders are published in "Children's Day Care Facilities at 31 March 1993, England", copies of which are available in the Library.

Information held centrally does not separately identify nursery schools registered under the Children Act 1989. Where nursery facilities are part of schools with five or more children of compulsory school age, information on pupil numbers is published by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will name the schools, together with their local education authorities with *(a)* the highest and *(b)* the lowest percentage of the education budget assigned to school governors; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on the overall proportion of the potential schools budget retained by local education authorities, rather than that delegated to schools, is contained in the answer which I gave on 17 October 1994 to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), *Official Report*, columns *27–36*. This proportion depends on the local management of schools scheme for the LEA concerned. The total call made be each school on the general schools budget of an LEA depends on the use a school makes of centrally funded services as well as the size of its delegated budget, and data on this are not collected by the Department.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent per *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary pupil in each LEA in England and on average in England as a whole in the most recent year for which figures are available in cash terms and in 1992–93 prices.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows LEA expenditure per pupil on pre-primary and primary pupils combined, and on secondary pupils in 1992–93, the latest year for which outturn figures are available. Equivalent information on grant-maintained schools is not available.

Unit cost net institutional expenditure 1992–93 at 1992–93 prices (includes LMS balances)

	Nursery/primary £	*Secondary* £
Corporation of London	3,063	0
Camden	2,067	2,726
Greenwich	2,058	2,497
Hackney	2,144	3,014
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,335	3,105
Islington	2,377	n/a
Kensington and Chelsea	2,230	3,061
Lambeth	2,183	2,800
Lewisham	1,896	2,534
Southwark	1,846	2,506
Tower Hamlets	2,398	3,352
Wandsworth	2,141	3,212
City of Westminster	2,292	2,486
Barking	1,730	2,347
Barnet	1,841	2,615
Bexley	1,415	2,121
Brent	1,740	2,425
Bromley	1,578	2,377
Croydon	1,728	2,369
Ealing	1,855	2,784
Enfield	1,577	2,267
Haringey	2,102	2,897
Harrow	1,870	2,614
Havering	1,563	2,364
Hillingdon	1,714	2,686
Hounslow	1,973	2,419
Kingston upon Thames	1,748	2,663
Merton	1,907	2,679
Newham	1,709	2,629
Redbridge	1,663	2,337
Richmond upon Thames	1,863	2,285
Sutton	1,522	2,036
Waltham Forest	1,626	2,454
Birmingham	1,457	2,341
Coventry	1,435	2,382
Dudley	1,489	2,072
Sandwell	1,645	2,340
Solihull	1,599	2,223
Walsall	1,468	2,216
Wolverhampton	1,589	2,407
Knowsley	1,487	2,298
Liverpool	1,489	2,375
St. Helens	1,557	2,357
Sefton	1,499	2,232
Wirral	1,448	2,418
Bolton	1,526	2,280
Bury	1,408	1,970
Manchester	1,555	2,426
Oldham	1,774	2,474
Rochdale	1,384	2,182
Salford	1,339	2,113
Stockport	1,510	2,288
Tameside	1,469	2,170
Trafford	1,416	2,279
Wigan	1,375	2,286
Barnsley	1,525	2,151
Doncaster	1,437	2,182
Rotherham	1,631	2,285
Sheffield	1,636	2,212
Bradford	1,828	1,822
Calderdale	1,549	2,163
Kirklees	1,523	2,200
Leeds	1,420	2,397
Wakefield	1,482	2,073
Gateshead	1,668	2,283
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,737	2,133
North Tyneside	1,513	2,219
South Tyneside	1,477	2,197
Sunderland	1,495	2,137
Isles of Scilly	2,345	5,040
Avon	1,523	2,277
Bedfordshire	1,603	2,170
Berkshire	1,589	2,227
Buckinghamshire	1,429	2,118
Cambridgeshire	1,579	2,243
Cheshire	1,321	2,072
Cleveland	1,574	2,515
Cornwall	1,507	2,132
Cumbria	1,637	2,306
Derbyshire	1,576	2,310
Devon	1,529	2,164
Dorset	1,507	2,097
Durham	1,535	2,064
East Sussex	1,558	2,233
Essex	1,610	2,138
Gloucestershire	1,687	2,203
Hampshire	1,578	2,248
Hereford and Worcester	1,609	2,116
Hertfordshire	1,616	2,263
Humberside	1,522	2,228
Isle of Wight	1,584	2,081
Kent	1,380	1,999
Lancashire	1,632	2,320
Leicestershire	1,443	2,219
Lincolnshire	1,429	2,174
Norfolk	1,555	2,177

Unit cost net institutional expenditure 1992–93 at 1992–93 prices (includes LMS balances)

	Nursery/primary £	Secondary £
North Yorkshire	1,581	2,260
Northamptonshire	1,384	2,093
Northumberland	1,394	1,871
Nottinghamshire	1,575	2,346
Oxfordshire	1,776	2,212
Shropshire	1,590	2,509
Somerset	1,506	2,220
Staffordshire	1,463	2,088
Suffolk	1,944	2,393
Surrey	1,577	2,293
Warwickshire	1,517	2,126
West Sussex	1,468	2,125
Wiltshire	1,593	2,268
Total	1,583	2,256

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list local education authorities in England in rank order by the proportion of the potential schools budget held back in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on the percentage of the potential schools budget retained centrally for 1994–95 by each English LEA was included in the answer which I gave on 17 October 1994 to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) *Official Report*, columns *27–36*. The figures there given are rearranged in rank order in the table.

Percentage of PSB not delegated 1994–95 (in rank order)

Local Education Authority	1994–95 Per cent.	Rank Number
Dudley	7.5	1.
Islington*	7.5	2.
Hertfordshire	8.7	3.
Solihull	9.6	4.
Croydon	9.9	5.
Berkshire	10.0	6.
Brent	10.0	7.
Leeds	10.1	8.
Waltham Forest	10.2	9.
Stockport	10.7	10.
Northamptonshire	10.7	11.
Greenwich*	10.8	12.
Knowsley	10.9	13.
Manchester	11.0	14.
Bedfordshire	11.0	15.
Richmond	11.1	16.
Northumberland	11.1	17.
Harrow	11.2	18.
Wolverhampton	11.3	19.
Oxfordhisre	11.3	20.
Cheshire	11.3	21.
Rochdale	11.3	22.
Westminster	11.5	23.
Merton	11.7	24.
Havering	11.7	25.
Hereford/Worcester	11.7	26.
Bury	11.7	27.
Staffordshire	12.1	28.
Sunderland	12.1	29.
Enfield	12.1	30.
Norfolk	12.2	31.
Devon	12.2	32.
Salford	12.2	33.

Percentage of PSB not delegated 1994–95 (in rank order)

Local Education Authority	1994–95 Per cent.	Rank Number
Calderdale	12.3	34.
Walsall	12.3	35.
Bexley	12.4	36.
Suffolk	12.4	37.
West Sussex	12.9	38.
Cornwall	12.9	39.
Coventry	12.9	40.
Redbridge	13.0	41.
Sefton	13.0	42.
City of London*	13.0	43.
Hammersmith/Fulham*	13.0	44.
Wigan	13.1	45.
North Yorkshire	13.1	46.
Surrey	13.1	47.
Isle of Wight	13.1	48.
Lincolnshire	13.2	49.
Birmingham	13.2	50.
Oldham	13.2	51.
Nottinghamshire	13.3	52.
Hillingdon	13.4	53.
Dorset	13.4	54.
Trafford	13.4	55.
Barnet	13.4	56.
Hampshire	13.4	57.
Bradford	13.5	58.
Cumbria	13.5	59.
Liverpool	13.5	60.
Sandwell	13.5	61.
South Tyneside	13.5	62.
Bromley	13.6	63.
Gloucestershire	13.6	64.
Leicestershire	13.6	65.
Wirral	13.7	66.
Isles of Scilly	13.7	67.
East Sussex	13.8	68.
Cambridgeshire	13.8	69.
Rotherham	13.8	70.
Somerset	13.8	71.
Tower Hamlets	13.8	72.
Ealing	13.9	73.
Southwark*	13.9	74.
Gateshead	13.9	75.
Wiltshire	14.0	76.
Durham	14.0	77.
Sutton	14.0	78.
Hounslow	14.0	79.
Tameside	14.1	80.
Essex	14.1	81.
North Tyneside	14.1	82.
Humberside	14.1	83.
Kensington/Chelsea*	14.2	84.
Warwickshire	14.3	85.
Avon	14.4	86.
Cleveland	14.4	87.
St. Helens	14.5	88.
Kingston	14.5	89.
Newcastle	14.6	90.
Shropshire	14.6	91.
Wakefield	14.6	92.
Barking/Dagenham	14.7	93.
Lancashire	14.7	94.
Kent	14.8	95.
Buckinghamshire	14.9	96.
Haringey	14.9	97.
Sheffield	15.0	98.
Barnsley	15.0	99.
Bolton	15.0	100.
Derbyshire	15.0	101.
Doncaster	15.0	102.
Newham	15.0	103.

Percentage of PSB not delegated 1994–95 (in rank order)

Local Education Authority	1994–95 Per cent.	Rank Number
Lewisham*	15.4	104.
Lambeth*	15.8	105.
Kirklees	15.8	106.
Hackney*	16.5	107.
Camden*	17.0	108.
Wandsworth*	17.7	109.

Notes:
1. The figures have been derived from budget statements published by local education authorities under section 42 of the Education Reform Act in respect of the financial year 1994–95, and received by the Department prior to 17 October 1994. The percentages have been rounded in the the Table to one decimal place.
2. In the case of the inner London authorities (other than Westminster), the introduction of Local Management of Schools was deferred until April 1992, and the delegation requirements applicable to these authorities (marked * in the Table) differ from those applicable elsewhere.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* teachers and *(b)* administrators are employed by local education authorities in England according to the latest figures; and if he will list in rank order the ratio of teachers to administrators for each local education authority in England.

Mr. Robin Squire: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

Nursery Provision

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the qualifications required for staff working in state nursery schools.

Mr. Forth: The Education (Teachers) Regulations 1993, as amended, require that those employed as teachers at maintained schools shall be qualified teachers as defined in those regulations. There are certain limited exceptions to this rule, also set out in the regulations. There are no statutory requirements governing the qualifications of staff employed in other roles in maintained nursery schools.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of registered disabled children get a place at a nursery school or in a nursery class in a primary school.

Mr. Forth: This information is not available centrally.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of children with special educational needs as defined by the Children Act 1989 get a place at *(a)* nursery school and *(b)* nursery class in a primary school.

Mr. Forth: Figures for children in need as defined under section 17(10) of the Children Act 1989 are not collected centrally.

In 1994, 319 children with a statement of special educational need maintained by the local education authority under section 168 of the Education Act 1993 attended a maintained nursery school, representing 0.6 per cent. of the total maintained nursery population.

The numbers of children with statements of special educational needs attending a nursery class in a primary school are not available.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the total level of public expenditure on education for children under school age in *(a)* Denmark, *(b)* France and *(c)* the United Kingdom; what this sum is in each country per child under school age; what this sum is as a percentage of the national gross domestic product; and what this sum is as a percentage of public spending overall in the country concerned.

Mr. Forth: International comparisons of public expenditure on pre-primary education are difficult to make because of the need to ensure consistent definitions across countries. The latest available estimates based on information published by UNESCO and OECD are shown in the table.

Expenditure on pre-primary education: 1991

	Public current expenditure[1] on pre-primary education (US $Million[3])	Public expenditure[2] per pupil in pre-primary education (US $[3])	Public current expenditure[1] on pre-primary education as a percentage of gross domestic product	Public current expenditure[1] on pre-primary education as a percentage of total public expenditure
Denmark	144	4,736	0.2	0.3
France	5,619	2,163	0.5	1.1
United Kingdom	1,754	2,223	0.2	0.4

Sources
Education at a Glance, OECD, December 1993.
UNESCO Statistical Yearbooks 1993 and 1994 editions.
Notes
[1] Excludes capital expenditure and loan charges.
[2] Includes capital expenditure and loan charges.
[3] Adjusted to US dollars using Purchasing Power Parities published by OECD.

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment she has made of the level of staff turnover in public day nursery schools.

Mr. Forth: In maintained nursery schools in England in 1991–92, the turnover of full-time qualified teachers was 14.4 per cent. Information on turnover rates of other staff is not collected centrally.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of the standard spending assessment is

being spent and what proportion of the education budget is being retained for administration, in rank order, in each English county, accordingly to the latest figures.

Mr. Robin Squire: There is no separate allowance within standard spending assessments for administration; it is for each local education authority to decide what proportion of its education budget to use for administration costs. The table shows, for each LEA in England, expenditure on service strategy and regulation, management and administration and the inspection and advisory service, as a proportion of total LEA expenditure, in 1992–93, the latest year for which outturn figures are available.

LEA expenditure on administration[1] as a proportion of total expenditure, 1992–93

LEA Rank number	*Percentage of total expenditure on administration*
1 Corporation of London	15.4
2 Lewisham	13.4
3 Bexley	10.9
4 Hammersmith and Fulham	9.2
5 Greenwich	9.0
6 Croydon	8.8
7 Kensington and Chelsea	8.6
8 Kent	8.0
9 Waltham Forest	7.9
10 Southwark	7.9
11 Lambeth	7.9
12 Sutton	7.9
13 Northamptonshire	7.8
14 Salford	7.6
15 Coventry	7.6
16 Tower Hamlets	7.4
17 Isle of Wight	7.2
18 City of Westminster	7.2
19 South Tyneside	7.1
20 Wandsworth	7.0
21 Buckinghamshire	6.9
22 Enfield	6.7
23 Barking	6.6
24 Camden	6.4
25 Somerset	6.3
26 Merton	5.9
27 Knowsley	5.9
28 Islington	5.9
29 Kirklees	5.7
30 Northumberland	5.7
31 Oldham	5.6
32 Ealing	5.6
33 Redbridge	5.6
34 Hackney	5.5
35 Haringey	5.5
36 Warwickshire	5.4
37 Kingston upon Thames	5.4
38 Cumbria	5.4
39 Wiltshire	5.2
40 Cornwall	5.2
41 Hillingdon	5.1
42 Barnsley	5.1
43 Solihull	5.1
44 Bromley	5.1
45 Suffolk	5.0
46 Dudley	5.0
47 Berkshire	4.8
48 Bury	4.8
49 Gateshead	4.6
50 Harrow	4.6
51 Dorset	4.5
52 Hampshire	4.5
53 Lincolnshire	4.4
54 Leeds	4.4
55 Manchester	4.4
56 Newham	4.3
57 Avon	4.3
58 East Sussex	4.3
59 Newcastle upon Tyne	4.3
60 Barnet	4.2
61 Calderdale	4.2
62 Hertfordshire	4.2
63 Birmingham	4.2
64 Norfolk	4.2
65 Sefton	4.1
66 Sandwell	4.1
67 Cheshire	3.9
68 Bedfordshire	3.9
69 Essex	3.9
70 Sheffield	3.9
71 Nottinghamshire	3.9
72 West Sussex	3.8
73 Bolton	3.8
74 Wirral	3.8
75 Shropshire	3.8
76 Cambridgeshire	3.7
77 Derbyshire	3.7
78 Gloucestershire	3.6
79 Havering	3.6
80 Rotherham	3.6
81 Sunderland	3.6
82 Richmond upon Thames	3.4
83 Wolverhampton	3.4
84 Rochdale	3.3
85 Liverpool	3.3
86 Hounslow	3.3
87 Wakefield	3.3
88 Tameside	3.3
89 Brent	3.3
90 Stockport	3.3
91 Hereford and Worcester	3.1
92 North Yorkshire	3.0
93 Surrey	3.0
94 Durham	3.0
95 Bradford	3.0
96 Doncaster	3.0
97 Devon	3.0
98 Isles of Scilly	2.8
99 Staffordshire	2.7
100 St. Helens	2.7
101 Wigan	2.7
102 Oxfordshire	2.6
103 Walsall	2.5
104 Humberside	2.4
105 Leicestershire	2.4
106 Cleveland	2.2
107 Trafford	2.1
108 North Tyneside	1.8
109 Lancashire	1.7
Total	4.5

[1] Administration covers Service Strategy and Regulation, Management and Administration and the Inspection and Advisory Service.

Staffordshire Local Education Authority

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what would have been the increase required to remove the effect of inflation from central Government payments to Staffordshire local education authority in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Robin Squire: The annual rate of inflation for the last 10 years is set out in the table, but it is not possible to state what would be the increase required to remove the effect of inflation from central Government payments to Staffordshire local education authority because of

annual changes in authorities' relative need to spend. The underlying increases in inflation rates are:

	Inflation percentage
1984–85 to 1985–86	5.5
1985–86 to 1986–87	3.0
1986–87 to 1987–88	5.3
1987–88 to 1988–89	6.7
1988–89 to 1989–90	7.0
1989–90 to 1990–91	8.0
1990–91 to 1991–92	6.3
1991–92 to 1992–93	4.0
1992–93 to 1993–94	3.1
1993–94 to 1994–95	2.0
1994–95 to 1995–96	3.3

Under-five Provision

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the most recent percentage available of under fives in maintained nursery and primary schools in the north-east of England by individual local authority area; and what the percentages were in 1978.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on pupils under five being taught in maintained nursery schools in each local education authority in north-east England in 1978 and 1994 is shown in the table.

Percentage of children under five in maintained nursery and primary schools for each LEA in North East England[1]

Position at January

Local Education Authority	1978	1994
Cleveland	55	90
Durham	58	77

Percentage of children under five in maintained nursery and primary schools for each LEA in North East England[1]

Position at January

Local Education Authority	1978	1994
Gateshead	51	68
Newcastle upon Tyne	61	72
North Tyneside	62	87
Northumberland	41	71
South Tyneside	64	86
Sunderland	58	74

[1] Excludes pupils who became 5 years of age by 1 January.

School Reserves

Mr Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the value of reserves held on deposit on current account by state schools in England and Wales.

Mr. Robin Squire: In respect of England, information on the cumulative net balances recorded in local education authorities' LMS outturn statements for the financial year 1993–94 is contained in the answers which I gave to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 19 and 27 January, *Official Report*, columns *641–43* and *410–11* respectively. The Department does not collect information which would indicate the extent to which these balances are held in schools' own current bank accounts.

Information regarding the financial balances held by grant-maintained schools in England is held by the Funding Agency for Schools, and I have asked its chairman to write to the hon. Member. The funding of LEA and grant-maintained schools in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 22 February 1995

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. David Hunt: A total of 67 letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. David Hunt: I sent a total of 89 letters to hon. Members last month while my colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary, sent a total of 40.

TRANSPORT

Nuclear Material (Sea Transport)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the International Maritime Organisation code of practice on the sea transport of nuclear material of November 1993 was incorporated into United Kingdom law.

Mr. Norris: The International Maritime Organisation's code for the safe carriage of irradiated nuclear fuel, plutonium and high level radioactive wastes in flasks on board ships, agreed in November 1993, has not been incorporated into United Kingdom law. The code is voluntary and few states have incorporated it into law. Ships carrying such cargoes to or from United Kingdom ports will be expected to comply with the code's requirement. In the case of United Kingdom-registered ships carrying such cargoes, letters of compliance with the code would be issued by the Marine Safety Agency if it was satisfied that the ships so complied. Foreign flagged ships are required to have letters of compliance issued by their marine administrations.

MOT

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what estimate he has made of the number of lives which have been saved by the MOT system during the last 30 years;

(2) what estimate he has made of how much it has cost, and how much extra mileage has been travelled to carry out MOTs in the last 30 years;

(3) how many people have been employed by the MOT system during the last 30 years.

Mr. Norris: The information requested can be provided, if available, only at disproportionate cost.

Bus Operations, Greater Manchester

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he holds about the number of occasions on which bus operators in Greater Manchester have been *(a)* warned about safety defects on their buses and *(b)* ordered to cease operation of buses because of safety reasons for each year since 1990.

Mr. Norris: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Non-departmental Public Bodies (Pay)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Norris: Four NDPBs sponsored by my Department have paid staff. The pay arrangements for all of these will be unchanged in April 1995.

For April 1996 the Trinity House Lighthouse Service, the Northern Lighthouse board and the London Regional passenger committee intend to follow the Department's central pay arrangements, or other existing analogues where appropriate; the traffic director for London has not yet decided his future arrangements.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reasons the Minister of State cancelled his presentation to the west coast main line all-party committee; what is the current position regarding the west coast main line feasibility study; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: I am currently awaiting advice from Railtrack on the implementation strategy for the project. Once I have that advice, I will be in a better position to discuss the way forward with the committee.

The planned meeting was cancelled after I had consulted with the joint chairmen of the committee. I have written to all members of the committee who attended the cancelled meeting.

P-plate

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he has given to introducing a system by which newly qualified drivers are required by law to display a P-plate on their vehicle to identify to other drivers that they are still inexperienced; what representations he has received on this subject; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: The introduction of probationary plates—P-plates—was one of the options included for comment in the new driver safety consultation paper of August 1993. This option received a mixed response from consultees and it was decided to consider it further when the full results were available of a study into the use of "Restricted" plates in Northern Ireland. This study has recently been completed; it concluded that "Restricted" plates did not have a discernible effect on accident reduction.

Railways

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of railway track are in areas of the country where train drivers are unable to communicate with signal boxes by telephone.

Mr. John Watts: At present, no more than 500 miles of the rail network—representing approximately 5 per cent. of the route mileage—are in areas not covered by the national radio network which enables these communications to take place. Within the next 12 months, as a result of a substantial investment programme, this will be reduced to 200 miles—representing approximately 2 per cent. of the route mileage—excluding tunnels and deep cuttings. Complete coverage by the national radio network is not reasonably practicable.

Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce proposals for the future of the taxi and private hire vehicle trades.

Mr. Norris: The Government have today published their response to the Transport Select Committee's fourth report on taxi and private hire vehicles. The response, Command Paper 2715, forms the Government's official statement on the outcome of the taxi review.

The most important features of the response are:

Taxis will continue to have the exclusive right to ply for hire—that is, be hailed—in the street and at ranks. Private hire vehicles, including minicabs, will not be allowed to ply for hire in the street. They will have to be booked in advance as now.

For reasons of public safety, particularly of vulnerable passengers, private hire vehicles, minicabs, in London will be subject to a form of control similar to that operating outside London. This will include criminal record checks for drivers, and may include a test to ensure they have an adequate knowledge of the roads in the area whey they are based.

A requirement will be introduced that all taxis shall be accessible to people who are wheelchair users. However, this requirement will be phased in over a period of several years, to give taxi owners time to replace their vehicles. In those places where there are existing target dates for taxis to become wheelchair accessible, they will still be expected to meet them. This requirement will not mean that all taxis will have to be London "black cabs"; local authorities will be able to license any vehicle which is wheelchair accessible and which meets such additional requirements as are considered necessary to meet local conditions.

The power of district councils to restrict taxi numbers will be phased out over a number of years to give some protection to those who have made considerable investment in taxi plates—licences. However, there will be no reduction in quality control. Licensing authorities will be able to apply for a derogation from abolition of number control from the Department of Transport in exceptional circumstances.

The aim is to replace the existing legislation in due course.

Copies of the response are available from the Vote Office.

Aircraft Noise Levels

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the noise levels on take-off created by *(a)* the Ilyushin 76 and *(b)* the Antonov 12.

Mr. Norris: Noise certification data provided by the Russian Civil Aviation Authority show that at a certificated take-off weight of 170 tonnes, the IL-76TD with D-30KP engines has a noise level of 102.7 EPNdB—sideline—and 103.1 EPNdB—flyover. Equivalent data do not exist for the AN-12 but its estimated performance is within the range 93 to 95.9 EPNdB at a take-off weight of 61 tonnes.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. Norris: In January this year, 1,290 letters were received in the Department of Transport from hon. Members.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Norris: In January this year, 1,935 letters were sent to hon. Members by Ministers in the Department of Transport. This breaks down by Minister as follows:

Ministers	*Number of letters sent to hon. Members in January*
Dr. Brian Mawhinney	109
John Watts	1,045
Steven Norris	679
Viscount Goschen	102
Total	1,935

Rail Projects

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the details of the rail and light rail projects to be given capital financial assistance by his Department in 1995–96; and what proportion of total expenditure on such projects will be spent in Scotland.

Mr. Watts: Financial provision for the national railways in 1995–96 is expected to provide for some £1 billion of investment, of which about three quarters will be publicly funded. It is for the railway operators to allocate resources across the rail network in Great Britain.

On light rail we will continue to fund the South Yorkshire supertram project, and we have set aside funding for two new schemes—Croydon Tramlink and Midland Metro line 1—subject to satisfactory financing arrangements being agreed. The Secretary of State for Transport is not responsible for light rail schemes in Scotland.

Rail Privatisation (Fees)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what date, and for what reason, information concerning fees paid to companies and partnerships employed by his Department to provide advice or assistance with rail privatisation became commercially confidential.

Mr. Watts: Information about specific fees paid on individual commissions has always been commercially confidential.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations his Department has received from *(a)* consultants, *(b)* other outside organisations or *(c)* individuals concerning the publication of information detailing fees paid to companies and partnerships employed by his Department to provide advice or assistance with rail privatisation.

Mr. Watts: None.

Driving Test

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will be able to offer guidance on the nature and content of the theory test element of the new driving test.

Mr. Norris: Soon.

WALES

Grant-Maintained Schools

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what accumulated balances are currently held by each of the grant-maintained schools in Wales.

Mr. Redwood *[pursuant to his reply, 14 February c.610]:* Two of the schools listed should have shown deficits in the accumulated balances. The schools are as follow:

Schools	£
Pen-Y-Bryn, Clwyd	1,546
Cwmcarn, Gwent	18,510

Council House Receipts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will release the receipts from the sale of council housing on to Deeside to Alyn and Deeside district council to build homes for rent and repair council houses, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Councils in Wales can use some or all of their new right-to-buy receipts depending on their indebtedness. If they are still in debt, they have to use only 75 per cent. of right-to-buy receipts to reduce debt. The balance is available for new capital spending. When they are debt free, councils can use the full amount of new right-to-buy receipts for capital spending. There are no plans to change section 64 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 as it applies to the reserved part of capital receipts.

At 31 March last year, Alyn and Deeside district council had usable capital receipts of £1,000,000 and council housing debt of £23,000,000. Welsh district councils had total council housing debt of £1,203,000,000.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. Redwood: A total of 257.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Redwood: During January 1995, I sent 102 letters to individual Members and one letter to Welsh Opposition leaders. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) sent 190 letters to individual members and my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) sent 143 letters to individual members and two letters to all Welsh members.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Sweeny: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will make an announcement about the reorganisation of community health councils in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to all those who responded to our consultation paper last year regarding the reorganisation of community health councils in Wales. Having considered all the responses, I am now able to announce revised proposals.

CHCs have an important role in ensuring that the health service is responsive to patients' needs, and attentive to their complaints.

I am no advocate of reorganisation for its own sake, but changes to health authority boundaries will make some adjustments necessary. Where CHC and local authorities boundaries can be matched up easily it is worthwhile to do this too, but where it would mean redrawing the map completely and disturbing arrangements that work well at present it is not.

I have decided on boundary changes that will be useful but will not cause unnecessary upheaval. I want CHCs to be able to concentrate on their job in the months ahead, not worry about reorganising themselves.

Subject to consideration of any further representations I may receive, I shall therefore propose regulations to bring about, by 1 April 1996, the boundary and name changes listed as follows, and neither to create any wholly new nor merge any existing CHCs.

(a) Minor boundary changes between the following CHCs:
South Clwyd and Montgomery CHCs;
Vale of Glamorgan and Bridgend CHCs;
Swansea-Lliw Valley and Neath-Port Talbot CHCs;
Cardiff and East Glamorgan CHCs;

Following the boundary changes, the CHCs will correspond with the new LA areas.

(b) Transfer the responsibility for representing people in the present Borough of Islwyn from South Gwent CHC to Rhymney Valley CHC to create a new CHC covering all of the new Caerphilly LA area:

(c) Transfer responsibility for most of the present Borough of Colwyn from North Clwyd CHC to Aberconwy CHC to create a new CHC covering all of the new Aberconwy and Colwyn LA area:

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Kenya

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how much United Kingdom funding has been made available for the third

international airport at Eldoret, Kenya; and what is the total cost of the project;

(2) what representations have been made by him to the Kenyan Government concerning a third international airport at Eldoret, Kenya;

(3) if he will make it his policy to suspend British Government donor support to Kenya if the Kenyan Government proceed with the construction of a third international airport in Eldoret, Kenya.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* The total cost of the proposed Eldoret airport is believed to be $85 million. We have no firm information about the source of financing. We, and other donors, have raised with the Government of Kenya the priority of this project. No United Kingdom aid funds have been, or will be, made available.

This project is likely to be one of a range of issues discussed during forthcoming missions of the IMF and World bank, the outcome of which will be an important factor in deciding future aid levels.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1) how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month;

(2) how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Newton: In the course of January, I received from hon. Members 12 letters, some of which were dealt with informally, and sent seven. I have today replied to the hon. Member's own letter of 20 January.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Waste Paper Recycling

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what is the policy of the House on the recycling of waste paper.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Non-confidential waste paper from the House is sent for recycling under arrangements made by the Serjeant at Arms.

Westminster Hall

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what plans he has to install a large television screen in Westminster Hall for any future debates on disablement for those disabled wishing to attend such a debate to follow the proceedings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: None. Although the Administration Committee is the appropriate body to initially consider a proposal of this kind, any extension of the arrangements whereby the use of Westminster Hall is permitted for lobbies of disabled people, and to provide access for those with disabilities attending mass lobbies, is ultimately a matter for the authorities which control the Hall.

Minister Without Portfolio

Sir Harold Walker: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make provisions to enable the Minister Without Portfolio to answer oral questions about the matters for which he is responsible.

Mr. Newton: I have no plans to do so.

TREASURY

Life Insurance (Tax)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what public explanation was given by Ministers at the time that savings through insurance companies accumulated after a 25 per cent. tax charge when PEPs and TESSAs accumulated without tax.

Sir George Young: The fundamentals of the current tax regime for life insurance predate PEPs and TESSAs by a long way. Life insurance companies are taxed year by year on the income and gains accruing for the benefit of their life insurance policyholders. The nominal tax rate is 25 per cent., the same as the basic rate. But a deduction is allowed for the expenses of managing the business, including the costs of commissions to intermediaries and other costs of acquiring business, so the true rate is somewhat less than 25 per cent. The aim is to tax saving through life insurance in the same way as other types of taxed savings.

PEPs and TESSAs are much more recent innovations. Each was introduced to serve a particular need; PEPs to channel more investment into industry and TESSAs to encourage more people to take up the savings habit and to make the deposits of ordinary savers less liquid. A persuasive case has not been made out for altering the tax rules applying to save via life insurance following the introduction of PEPs and TESSAs.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A total of 1,523.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many letters were sent to the hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information requested for January 1995 is as follows:

Minister	*Number*
Chancellor of the Exchequer	116
Chief Secretary	48
Financial Secretary	286
Paymaster General	656
Minister of State	205

Income Tax

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures comparing the income tax threshold for a single-wage married couple with their weekly supplementary benefit/income support allowances at each benefit uprating date since 1979,

including April 1995 and also showing what the figures in April 1995 would be if the married couple's allowance has already been phased out.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 9 February 1994]:* The table shows the annualised supplementary benefit/income support scale rates and the annual income tax thresholds, during the period concerned. There is no logical relationship between the two: the tax threshold reflects allowances which are a mechanism to distribute the tax burden, while supplementary benefit/income support is a payment designed to provide a basic level of subsistence.

The married couple's allowance has not been phased out, so no alternative figure for April 1995 is shown.

Married couple with one income[1] and no children

Uprating dates	*Supplementary Benefit/income Support annual rate* £	*Income Tax Threshold* £
November 1979	1,554.40	1,815
November 1980	1,799.20	2,145
November 1981	1,963.00	2,145
November 1982	2,168.40	2,445
November 1983	2,262.00	2,795
November 1984	2,368.60	3,155
November 1985	2,488.20	3,455
July 1986	2,516.80	3,655
April 1987	2,566.20	3,795
April 1988	2,675.40	4,095
April 1989	2,849.60	4,375
April 1990	2,995.20	4,725
April 1991	3,237.00	5,015
April 1992	3,463.20	5,165
April 1993	3,588.00	5,165
April 1994	3,728.40	5,165
April 1995	3,796.00	4,815

[1] Up to 1990 the assumption is that only the husband has earnings.

Income support replaced supplementary benefit in April 1988. The ordinary annual rate has been used for supplementary benefit and no premiums have been included under income support.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what instructions he has issued to non-executive members of boards of non-departmental public bodies and to the chief accounting officers of those bodies as to whether payment to such board members should be normally classified as self-employment or employment for tax purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 21 February 1995]:* No special instructions have been issued. In common with all individuals, the employment status for tax purposes of non-executive members of boards of non-departmental public bodies and chief accounting officers of those bodies depends on the facts of the case and is determined by applying general law to those facts. Such individuals would normally be regarded as office holders and chargeable to tax under schedule E on the emoluments of that office. Tax under PAYE should be deducted from such emoluments in the normal way.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Raynsford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 13 February, *Official Report*, columns *479–80*, what advice he has received from the Council of Mortgage Lenders as to the likely effect of the proposed changes to income support towards mortgage repayments on the level of repossessions.

Mr. Roger Evans: I have been asked to reply.

The Council of Mortgage Lenders has advised that it expects the number of repossessions to increase as a result of the proposed changes. We are listening carefully to its concerns but believe that these proposals will result in the development of comprehensive quality insurance and will provide better protection for all home owners, not just those who currently get help from income support mortgage interest.

ENVIRONMENT

Opencast Coal Mining, Oxfordshire

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the contractors wishing to development opencast coal mining in Oxfordshire had submitted planning applications up to 31 December 1994.

Sir Paul Beresford: This information is not held centrally.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many bids under the single regeneration budget were received by his Department; and how much money is to be allocated.

Mr. Curry: Some 469 bids for support from the first bidding round of the single regeneration budget were received by my Department, of which 201 were successful. Those 201 bids are expected to receive, subject to satisfactory performance and the availability of resources, some £1.1 billion in SRB resources over their lifetime of up to seven years.

Environmental Pollution

Mr. William O' Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the recommendations contained in the report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution; and if he will list those recommendations he proposes to implement.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment, for Health and for Transport have welcomed the RCEP's report as a major contribution to our work in promoting sustainable development in the transport sector but have pointed out that we would need to look very carefully at the implications of its recommendations for individuals and the economy.

We are currently considering the terms of the Government's response to the report and have sought a broad public debate on the issues raised. We shall consider all these points fully before making a response.

Local Government Reorganisation

Ms Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether under article 21 of the draft Avon (Structural Change) Order the county council will require the agreement of all transferee authorities affected in order to continue with consultation on preparation of any plans effected after 8 May.

Mr. Curry: No. However the county council will need to bear in mind that the duty to consult on plans relating to the exercise of county level functions after the reorganisation date will rest with the successor authorities and that all authorities will have the duty to co-operate.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will issue a statement setting out his intentions for the future of local government structure in the Goole area and the specific powers under the Local Government Act 1992 under which he proposes to implement these.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend intends, under powers in section 131 of the Local Government Act 1992, to direct the Local Government Commission to undertake a review of the boundaries between Selby, Boothferry, Glanford and Doncaster districts with a view to considering a full range of options for the future of local government in Goole. Pending the results of that review the town of Goole, and rural Goole, will remain in that part of Boothferry district which will form part of the new East Riding unitary authority when that is established.

Incineration Installations

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations his Department has received from local authorities for financial assistance to ensure that incineration installations are *(a)* safe and *(b)* comply with European Union regulations regarding emissions.

Mr. Atkins: I am not aware of any such representations having been received.

Fast-stream Entry

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Sir Paul Beresford: The proportion of female fast-streamers accepted over the last four years for which my Department is responsible is as follows:

1991: 5 out of 9 (56 per cent.)
1992: 1 out of 8 (12.5 per cent.)
1993: 4 out of 8 (50 per cent.)
1994: 3 out of 7 (43 per cent.)

Waste

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the volume and the proportion not recycled of *(a)* coal waste, *(b)* domestic waste and *(c)* nuclear waste.

Mr. Atkins: The latest figures we have for coal waste are from Arup's report in 1991, "Occurrence and Utilisation of Mineral and Construction Wastes" which gives a figure of 45 million tonnes of annual arisings of colliery spoil of which around 94 per cent.—42.2 million tonnes—is not recycled.

The consultation paper "A Waste Strategy for England and Wales" published earlier this year, gives a figure of some 20 million tonnes of household waste being produced annually, of which 90 per cent. is landfilled, 5 per cent. is recycled and 5 per cent. is incinerated.

Information on radioactive waste produced in the United Kingdom can be found in the "UK Radioactive Waste Inventory 1991" which is in the Library. There is no separate figure for the proportion or volume of radioactive waste which is not recycled.

"Shopping Centres and their Future"

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the Government's response to the Environment Committee's report, "Shopping Centres and their Future".

Mr. Gummer: The Government's response is published today. Copies have been presented to the Chairman of the Environment Committee and placed in the Libraries of the House.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department's records show that 1,463 letters were received from hon. Members during the last month.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by Ministers in the Department.

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department's records show that the number of letters sent by each Minister in the Department to the hon. Members during the last month, is as follows:

Minister	*Number*
Secretary of State	161
Lord Ullswater	64
Mr. Atkins	215
Mr. Curry	734
Sir P. Beresford	346
Mr. Jones	405

Bathing Water Directive

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if the Department's study into the costs of implementing the European Commission's proposed revision of the bathing water directive has been completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The consultants' cost study commissioned by the Department has now been completed. It shows the estimated costs of meeting the standards in the

Commission's proposed revision of the bathing water directive and a number of other possible outcomes of the forthcoming negotiations. Any such expenditure would be in addition to the estimated costs of implementing the existing bathing water and the urban waste water treatment directives.

Discussion of the Commission's proposal in the Community is still at the initial stages and the United Kingdom's cost study should help to inform future negotiations.

Copies of the cost study will be placed in the House Libraries.

Air Pollution Monitoring

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the nearest air pollution monitoring point to Parliament square; what was the level recorded at the latest date for which figures are available; what was the level one year previously; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 21 February 1995]:* Annual average concentrations of pollutants measured at monitoring sites in the vicinity of Parliament square are presented in the table.

Site Type	*Location*	*Pollutant*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Automatic monitoring	Bridge Place, Westminster	ozone	11 ppb	11 ppb	13 ppb
		nitrogen dioxide	39 ppb	34 ppb	35 ppb
		carbon monoxide	1.0 ppm	0.9 ppm	0.8 ppm
		sulphur dioxide	9 ppb	8 ppb	6 ppb
Non-automatic nitrogen dioxide diffusion tubes	Intercontinental Hotel, Park Lane	nitrogen dioxide	—	29 ppb	—
	North Westminster Community School, North Wharf Road	nitrogen dioxide	—	26 ppb	26 ppb
	33 Belgrave Gardens	nitrogen dioxide	—	17 ppb	21 ppb
	Drury Lane	nitrogen dioxide	—	—	24 ppb
Non-automatic smoke and sulphur dioxide monitoring*	Public Mortuary, Horseferry Road	sulphur dioxide	17 ug/m³	23 ug/m³	—
		smoke	13 ug/m³	13 ug/m³	—

* Monitoring undertaken in co-operation with local authorities.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of financial support the Local Government Commission received in 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95; and what is planned for 1995–96.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Local Government Commission incurred expenditure of £2.056 million in 1992–93 and £5.146 million in 1993–94. We are making £8.3 million available to the Commission in 1994–95 and intend to make available £2.508 million in 1995–96.

Rural White Paper

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the organisations that have *(a)* sent a submission and *(b)* indicated that they intend to send a submission for the rural White Paper; and if he will place copies of all such submissions in the Library.

Mr. Atkins: A list of organisations from which my Department or that of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had received written submissions by 20 February and which have not requested confidentiality has been placed in the House Library. A number of individuals have, in addition, submitted their views.

Both Departments expect to receive a number of further submissions. The names of organisations making such submissions which do not request confidentiality will be made known after submissions have been received.

Copies of submissions which we have not been asked to keep confidential will be made available for inspection in the departmental library in due course. In line with normal departmental practice, a list of those who have up to that point made such submissions will be placed in the House Library.

Sanitary Ware and Tiles

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the extent to which there is sufficient production capacity within *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the European Union to meet demands for the production of sanitary ware and tiles.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Sanitary ware and tiles are items which are traded internationally. Decisions about production capacity and location are taken by industry on the basis of their own assessments of demand for their products.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Jordan Defence Package

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment he has made of the compliance of the interest rate support offered by the Ministry of Defence since 1986–87 to the Jordan defence package

with the OECD consensus arrangements for export support.

Mr. Ian Taylor: None. The consensus guidelines for export credit support do not apply to contracts involving military equipment.

Export Licences

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the countries for which export licences were granted in respect of heading PL 5001 of the 1989 and 1994 Export of Goods (Control) Orders and the number of licences issued for such countries.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The following licences were issued from 1 January 1989 to date:

Country	*Number of licences*
Algeria	1
Argentina	1
Australia	1
Belgium	2
Bermuda	3
Brazil	1
Canada	1
Cyprus	1
Czech	1
Finland	1
France	7
Gambia	1
Ireland	2
Jamaica	1
Jordan	3
Macao	2
Malaysia	3
Malta	1
Mauritius	2
Mexico	1
Norway	1
Poland	2
Portugal	1
Saudi Arabia	3
Singapore	1
Solomon Islands	2
South Africa	1
Sri Lanka	2
Switzerland	1
USA	1
Zimbabwe	1

Cable Companies

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many cable companies currently provide free feeds to educational institutions.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 21 February, *Official Report*, column *108*.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. Heseltine: Some 987 letters were received by Ministers in the Department from hon. Members last month, of which 126 were eventually transferred to other Departments. A further 98 letters were redirected from other Departments to Ministers at DTI. In addition, 12 letters from hon. Members were received by chief executives of departmental agencies.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Heseltine: In total, 711 letters were sent to hon. Members last month by Ministers in the Department, broken down as follows:

Minister	*Number of letters sent to hon. Members*
President of the Board of Trade	72
Minister for Small Firms and Consumer Affairs	84
Minister for Trade	40
Minister for Industry and Energy	73
PUSS for Corporate Affairs	132
PUSS for Industry and Energy	178
PUSS for Trade and Technology	132

Insider Dealing

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his oral answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column 1004, what is the current state of the review into insider dealing, and when he intends to report on his findings to Parliament.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 21 February 1995]*: The hon. Member may have misunderstood my hon. Friend's reply to which he refers. My Department is reviewing the law on disclosure of interests in shares as part of a wider review of company law. The law on insider dealing is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Trade Associations

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his oral answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, column 341, if he will list the lead employer, industry and trade association or organisations so far referred to him in respect of proposals for a single trade association.

Mr. Heseltine: I have made it very clear that I wish to encourage a process which leads to more powerful, better resourced and more effective trade associations. Many industrialists share this objective, and officials have been asked to consider with their industry and trade association contacts how best this can be achieved.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are 364 letters from hon. Members recorded on my Department's parliamentary correspondence database as having been received in January 1995.

Legal Aid

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what was the total cost to the legal aid fund of serious cases for each of the last five years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The information is not readily available. For criminal legal aid in the Crown court and above it is not possible to identify either the prosecution agency or "serious fraud" offences from information held centrally. However, it is possible to identify payments made in respect of final bills for the most serious types of fraud offences, namely fraud and false accounting, involving more lengthy trials. Expenditure in the higher criminal courts in respect of those offences, involving trials of 10 days or more, in each of the last five years was as follows:

	Expenditure £ million	*As percentage of total criminal higher legal aid*
1989–90	5.1	3.8
1990–91	8.9	5.7
1991–92	11.2	6.0
1992–93	20.3	9.2
1993–94	15.8	6.7

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what plans he has to make legal aid available, subject to eligibility restrictions, for defamation cases.

Mr. John M. Taylor: None.

Children and Families

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what plans his Department has to publish family impact statements with all major policy announcements and new legislation to make clear their intended effect on the welfare of children and families.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There are no such plans. The intended effect of policy and legislative proposals is made clear in Government publications relating to the family, in particular in consultation papers and reports.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what part his Department plays in the Government's efforts to co-ordinate policy on the law relating to children and the family across different Ministries.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor's Department chairs, and provides the secretariat for, an inter-departmental working party, the family law and administration working party, which oversees work directed at improving family law and administration. In addition, the Lord Chancellor's Department participates in frequent consultation with other Departments about issues which touch upon the family.

Defamation Cases

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what plans he has to make it the responsibility of the presiding judge, rather than the jury, to determine the level of damages for successful plaintiffs in defamation cases that go to trial.

Mr. John M. Taylor: None. However, we shall be introducing a new summary procedure, so that the judge will have power to dispose of straightforward claims summarily, instead of sending them to trial.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what plans he has to impose a limit on the level of damages that can be awarded in defamation cases other than those which are dealt with summarily.

Mr. John M. Taylor: None. However, since 1990, the Court of Appeal has had the power, when it finds that the amount of damages awarded by a jury was excessive, to substitute the amount which appears to the court to be proper.

Complaints

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many complaints his Department has received from *(a)* members of the public, *(b)* members of the legal profession and *(c)* hon. Members about apparent conflicts of interest between the Lord Chancellor's three roles in each of the last five years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: A search of my departmental records has revealed no evidence of complaints about apparent conflicts of interest between the Lord Chancellor's three roles.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many complaints from *(a)* members of the public, *(b)* members of legal profession and *(c)* hon. Members his Department has received in each of the last 10 years with regard to the conduct of the judiciary in each different court level.

Mr. John M. Taylor: It is not possible to provide the information requested except at disproportionate cost.

Serious Fraud (Prosecutions)

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what was the total cost to the court system, excluding legal aid costs but including judicial costs, of prosecution for serious fraud in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department does not keep figures on the prosecution of serious fraud cases. The figures can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Crossville Wales Ltd. *v.* Tracey

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, if he will make a statement on the timetable for hearing the case of Crossville Wales Ltd. *v.* Tracey in the Court of Appeal; if he will take steps to ensure that the case is heard without delay; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The appeal hearing is due to take place at the Court of Appeal on 28 and 29 June 1995. My position as a Minister precludes me from intervening in individual cases; however, it is open to the parties' legal advisers to apply to the court for an expedited hearing date.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many changes there have been to statistics calculating the numbers unemployed since 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: Like most developed countries the United Kingdom publishes both an administrative and a survey based measure of unemployment. In the United Kingdom the administrative source involves a count of people claiming unemployment-related benefits. The monthly claimant count is more frequent and more timely than the survey-based measure and also gives figures for very small areas. However, in common with other statistics based on administrative systems, the monthly claimant count has inevitably been subject to changes in coverage whenever there have been changes to the administrative procedures on which the statistics are based. These changes are taken into account in the consistent, seasonally adjusted series published by the Employment Department. The latter series allows consistent comparisons over time which are free from distortions and properly adjusted for seasonality.

Since 1979 there have been nine changes to the coverage of the monthly unemployment count which have had a discernible effect on the figures, three of which have taken place since 1988.

Details of these changes are given in an article in the December 1990 issue of *Employment Gazette* entitled "Monthly Unemployment Statistics: Maintaining a Consistent Series" and on page S16 of the April 1994 *Employment Gazette*; copies of both these documents are available in the Libarary.

The survey measure of unemployment from the Labour Force Survey is based on ILO guidelines and is entirely independent of the benefit system. Data have been available consistently since spring 1984 on an annual basis and since spring 1992 on a quarterly basis. The LFS provides an internationally comparable measure of unemployment and also provides detailed information on the characteristics of the unemployed not available from the claimant count. In addition, the LFS provides an articulated source of information on employment, unemployment and economic activity.

Further details of both official measures of unemployment can be obtained from the booklet "How Exactly is Unemployment Measured?", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Training

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many places are being provided on training schemes in the northern region in the current year by individual training and enterprise councils; and what was the overall number of Government-sponsored training places in 1978.

Mr. Paice: The following number of entrants into training are planned for 1994–95 in northern region:

TEC	*Number*
Tyneside	14,047
County Durham	9,073
Sunderland City	6,505
Teeside	10,148
Northumberland	4,631
Total	44,404

Information which identifies the overall number of Government-sponsored training places in 1978 is not available at regional level.

Delegated Pay

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Miss Widdecombe: The following decisions have been taken so far:

a) NDPBs that intend to follow the pay arrangements of the Employment Department:

—Equal Opportunities Commission;

—Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.

b) NDPBs that are pursuing independent arrangements under the delegated pay option:

—Health and Safety Executive (from April 1995).

Employers' Liability

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what recent representations he has received from the Health and Safety Commission and others concerning the Employers Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969;

(2) what plans he has to establish a review of the Employers Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969; if the Trades Union Congress will be represented on the review committee; and if he will list the proposed membership of the committee;

(3) if he will list the numbers and the names of those individuals and organisations who have made representations to him concerning the Employers Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969 who have *(a)* supported and *(b)* opposed (i) the suggestion that the £2 million minimum cover provided by the Act should be changed and (ii) the decision by the Association of British Insurers no longer to recommend providing unlimited cover to its members.

Mr. Oppenheim: Following the decision of the United Kingdom insurance industry to cease providing unlimited cover for employers' liability insurance, I received a number of representations that some large industrial and commercial concerns would be unable to comply with the law as it stood from the beginning of this year. After consulting the Health and Safety Commission, I laid before the House amending regulations to ensure that all employers could comply with the law from 1 January 1995. I also announced on 22 December 1994 my intention to carry out a review of the legislation.

I propose to issue a consultative document shortly seeking views on possible changes to this legislation. It is

my intention to circulate this widely, so that all interested parties have the opportunity to put their views forward. The Trades Union Congress and HSC will be among those consulted. I will send a copy of the consultative document to the hon. Member.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month;

(2) how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Miss Widdecombe: During January, the Department received 512 letters from hon. Members. In the same period, 448 ministerial replies were sent. Of these, 19 were answered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, 107 by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Cambridgeshire, South East (Mr. Paice) and 152 by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim). I have answered 170 letters.

South London TEC

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when Solotec will agree new contracts with the former providers of training services to South Thames training and enterprise council.

Mr. Paice: Solotec is currently drawing up its proposals to undertake training and enterprise council responsibilities in the boroughs of Greenwich and Lewisham. It is for Solotec to determine with which providers it wishes to contract to provide services in the two boroughs. The timing for the agreement of new contracts will depend upon the progress of negotiations between the parties.

Wakefield TEC

Mr. Sykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress Wakefield training and enterprise council is making in meeting the criteria for the award of a three-year licence.

Mr. Paice: I am pleased to announce that Wakefield training and enterprise council has now completed the process of meeting the rigorous standard we set for the award of the new three-year licences. Its licence will be effective from April 1995.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Western Sahara

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the statement made to the United States Congress House Appropriations Committee on 25 January by Frank Ruddy concerning the United Nations operation in Western Sahara; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[pursuant to the reply 8 February, Official Report, column 281]:* My Department has now seen a copy of the statement submitted by Mr. Frank Ruddy to the sub-committee of the Committee on Appropriations of the US House of Representatives. We understand that the UN has now sent a team to the Western Sahara to investigate the allegations made by Mr. Ruddy.

Western European Union

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards the recommendation of the Assembly of Western European Union that the Council of the Western European Union should study the conditions in which the Council might meet as a European security and defence council, either as necessary or on the occasion of meetings of the European Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This recommendation is under consideration by the Permanent Council of the Western European Union, which will evaluate the desirability of holding a WEU meeting at summit level.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken in response to recommendation 538 of the Assembly of Western European Union on security in the Mediterranean; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The WEU Council has set out its views on this issue in its response to recommendation 565 of the Assembly.

The Council has also considered and endorsed relevant elements of work done in the CFSP framework on the implications for European security of the situation in neighbouring regions including the Mediterranean.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans there are for the participation of the Western European Union in missions of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Military units of WEU member states, acting under the authority of the WEU, can be employed for humanitarian and rescue tasks, as the WEU Council of Ministers decided in its Petersburg declaration of June 1992. The Council of Ministers also declared the WEU's willingness to consider any requests for assistance from the OSCE, then CSCE on a case-by-case basis. The OSCE has, as yet, made no formal requests.

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to support the establishment of a multinational European humanitarian intervention force under the auspices of the Western European Union; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is one of the roles of the WEU to provide for a European instrument of reaction in cases where, due to the dimension or urgency of a humanitarian crisis or the need for military protection, military rather than civilian means must be employed.

United Kingdom forces would be provided on a case-by-case basis, rather than committing ourselves to a standing intervention force which might not be tailored to the requirements of a specific humanitarian crisis.

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made by the Permanent Council of the Western European Union in taking forward the commitment gradually to develop the Western European Union Institute for Security Studies into a European Security and Defence Academy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At its meeting on 11 November 1994 in Noordwijk the WEU Council of Ministers reiterated its commitment gradually to develop the Institute for Security Studies into a European Security and Defence Academy and requested the Permanent Council to take this matter forward as a priority.

Details of the proposal were presented to the Permanent Council of the WEU by the director of the institute at its meetings of 24 January and 7 February 1995.

Indonesia

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will press the European Community to play a more positive role in pressing the Indonesian authorities to ensure human rights.

Mr. Goodlad: We are in regular contact with our European Union partners about the human rights situation in Indonesia and East Timor and, where appropriate, make known our concerns directly to the Indonesian Government and in such bodies as the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will urge President Suharto to repeal the anti-subversion law.

Mr. Goodlad: The repeal of the anti-subversion law is one of the recommendations of the UN special rapporteur on torture. The UN Commission on Human Rights, of which the United Kingdom is a member, has called repeatedly on the Indonesian Government to take the necessary steps to implement these recommendations.

Morocco

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what position the United Kingdom Government are taking up over the proper extent of Moroccan territorial water to be included in the EU-Morocco fishing agreement; and if he will make it his policy that no disputed territorial waters will be so included.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As with all EC fisheries agreements, the waters under the sovereignty or jurisdiction of Morocco will not be defined. The United Kingdom Government do not consider the renegotiation of the EC-Morocco fisheries agreement the appropriate place to address the issue of the sovereignty of the former Spanish Sahara.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to ensure a successful conclusion to the conference of state parties to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty opening in April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Our aim at the nuclear non-proliferation treaty review and extension conference is to secure the treaty's indefinite and unconditional extension by a substantial majority. We are lobbying at ministerial and official levels, both bilaterally and as part of an EU joint action, to achieve this aim.

Fast Stream Entry

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of those accepted for fast stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. Goodlad: The percentage of women accepted for fast stream entry to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Overseas Development Administration in each of the last four years was:

1991: 29.2 per cent.
1992: 26.1 per cent.
1993: 19.2 per cent.
1994: 30.8 per cent.

Non-departmental Public Bodies (Pay)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Goodlad: The British Council is developing proposals for separate pay arrangements from April 1996.

We expect the following NDPBs to follow the FCO's pay arrangements in April 1996:

The Britain-Russia Centre
The Great Britain-China Centre
The British Association for Central and Eastern Europe
The Foreign Compensation Commission

The Marshall Commission and the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission are supported by a secretariat provided by the Association of Commonwealth Universities to which the FCO pays a management fee. The staff of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy are retained on short-term contracts. We see no reason to change these arrangements.

It would be premature to comment on pay arrangements for the Commonwealth Institute before its business plan is submitted in July 1995.

Iraq

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what United Nations reports the Government have received about the supply of products to the Iraqi plant at Ad Dwar and Salman Pak by United Kingdom-based companies or their subsidiaries over the last five years; if he will name those companies and what they supplied; what prior knowledge or approval was given by Her Majesty's Government; and what measures he proposes to take in this matter.

Mr. Baldry: It is not our practice to comment in detail on information given to us by the UN Special Commission on companies which have traded with Iraq. Any information about potential offences will be investigated and, if substantiated, will be a matter for the courts.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many letters

were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. Baldry: During January 1995 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office received 1,502 letters from hon. Members.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Baldry: Ministers in the Department sent the following numbers of letters to hon. Members last month:

Minister	*Number*
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	65
Minister of State for Overseas Development	196
Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Hogg)	254
Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Davis)	93
Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Goodlad)	134
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Baldry)	202

The correspondence unit of the migration and visa department answered 503 letters from hon. Members. Forty-three letters from hon. Members were sent to other Government Ministers for reply, and 50 are still receiving attention.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Attorney-General (1) how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month;

(2) how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

The Attorney-General: Sixty-one letters were received from and 50 letters were sent to hon. Members in January. Of the 50 letters sent to hon. Members 17 were written by the Attorney-General and one by the Solicitor-General. The remaining 32 letters were sent by the private office informing hon. Members that their letters were being transferred.

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Attorney-General what has been the cost of running the Serious Fraud Office for each year since its establishment, and what is the projected cost for the next financial year.

The Attorney-General: The SFO became operational in April 1988. Running costs are most readily ascertainable by reference to financial years ending 31 March. The cost of running the Serious Fraud Office is given in the table. The provision for 1995–96 will be published in the departmental report for the Lord Chancellor's and Law Officers' Departments, which is expected to be presented to Parliament on or about 7 March 1995.

Serious Fraud Office

Year	*Running Cost Expenditure (£000)*
1987–88[1]	509
1988–89	4,641
1989–90	5,687
1990–91	6,771
1991–92	8,931
1992–93	10,508
1993–94	10,548
1994–95[2]	11,317

[1] This figure is for part year only; the SFO being established in June 1987.
[2] This figure is the 1994–95 running costs provision.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Housing Adaptations

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for assessments by occupational therapists in respect of housing adaptations were made during the years from 1 April 1989 to 31 March 1994 in the Eastern and Southern health boards; of these how many were *(a)* processed *(b)* approved for adaptation and *(c)* rejected.

Mr. Moss: Information on the total number of applications for assessment by occupational therapists for housing adaptations is not collected centrally.

Since 1 April 1993 information has been collected centrally only in respect of referrals to occupational therapists from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Some 2,263 such referrals were made to the Eastern and Southern health boards in the year ended 31 March 1994 and 1,512 assessments were completed.

Information on the outcome of these assessments is not collected centrally.

Zoos

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list those zoos which are owned by local authorities.

Mr. Ancram: There are five zoos in Northern Ireland which are owned by district councils. These are:-

Belfast zoo—Belfast city council
Ward park, Bangor—Bangor borough council
Craigavon leisure centre—Craigavon borough council
Exploris sealife centre, Portaferry—Newtownards borough council
Pinebank community centre, Craigavon—Craigavon borough council

Fast Stream Entry

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Sir John Wheeler: The proportion of fast stream entrants to the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office who were women is as follows:

1991: 33 per cent.
1992: 20 per cent.

1993: 14 per cent.

1994: 50 per cent.

Residential and Nursing Homes

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many clients have been admitted by each residential and nursing home in *(a)* the Armagh and Dungannon and *(b)* the Newry and Mourne units of management since 30 September 1993.

Mr. Moss *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The information requested is set out in the following tables. The figures do not include those people who have made their own arrangements to enter homes and pay for their care or admissions by trusts/units of management in other board areas.

Persons admitted to residential/nursing home care from 30 September 1993 to 17 February 1995

Armagh and Dungannon Unit of Management

Private nursing homes	*Number of admissions*[1]
Armagh PNH (Sandown)	15
Castledillon	34
Castlemanor	5
Chestnut Lodge	15
Collegelands	6
Copperfields	7
Corkhill Lodge	13
Dungannon PNH (Sandown)	3
Fairlawns	29
Glenview	18
Greenpark	35
The Haven	6
Hockley Lodge	15
Manor Court	50
Nightingale	31
Rathowen	2
The Retreat	14
Sanville	4
The Valley	19
Total	321
Residential Homes	
Benvinda	1
Glenview	18
Hebron House	1
Monique	2
Roughan House	2
Sunnymead	7
Total	31

Newry and Mourne HSS Trust

Private Nursing Homes	*Number of Admissions*[1]
Ardmaine	16
Arnosvale	12
Avila	12
Cairnhill	1
Coolbawn	16
Glencarron	11
Kilbroney House	19
Lisnaaran	32
Our Mother of Mercy	2
Rathfriland Manor	8
Rockfield	19
St. John of God	40
St. Joseph's	4
Total	192
Residential Homes	
Glencarron	1
Kilbroney House	3
Moneydarragh Lodge	3
Mountain House	1
Our Mother of Mercy	12
Peacehaven	3
St. Joseph's	16
Sennen House	5
Total	44

[1] Figures include both permanent and temporary admissions.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Second World War (Anniversary)

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *161*, what considerations underlay his Department's decision to disclose the fee paid to the firm Lowe Bell Communications in respect of its organisation of the programme of events to mark the 50th anniversary of D-Day in its release of 24 January 1994.

Mr. Dorrell: Messrs Lowe Bell Communications were appointed to advise the Government on the D-Day commemorative programme and to assist in the implementation of the programme. Messrs Lowe Bell agreed that publication of the fee paid to them would not raise issues of commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *161*, what is the Department's total budget for the organisation of the programme of events to commemorate the end in Europe of the second world war.

Mr. Dorrell: A sum of £4.75 million has been voted in 1995–96 to this Department for work on organising commemorative events. In addition, funds will be required in the current financial year, and parliamentary approval is being sought for the necessary expenditure. The pattern of expenditure between this year and next year is not yet clear.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *161*, how many other firms were involved in tendering for the contract to organise events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end in Europe of the second world war.

Mr. Dorrell: Fourteen firms in all were invited to submit outline proposals for the Hyde park contract and nine firms did so. Of these, five firms in addition to Messrs Unusual Industries tendered for the contract.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 7 February,

Official Report, column *161*, if the firm Unusual Industries submitted the lowest bid for the contract to organise a programme of events to commemorate the end in Europe of the second world war.

Mr. Dorrell: Yes.

Delegated pay

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Dorrell: Many of the 35 executive NDPBs sponsored by my Department will be establishing separate pay arrangements and will do so from April 1996. English Heritage, the National Maritime Museum, the British Tourist Authority and the English tourist board aim to establish separate pay arrangements this year.

Privacy

Mr. Bouteng: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to publish his Department's White Paper on privacy law.

Mr. Dorrell: Responsibility for publication of the White Paper on privacy and media intrusion rests with me. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Sir D. Knox) on 30 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *667*.

Wreck Sites

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment of the value of the published and archived historical and archaeological information resulting from licensed work on protected wreck sites has been made by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the archaeological diving unit at St. Andrews.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* None. Bibliographical references to published work on protected sites are detailed in the ADU's "Guide to Historic Wreck Sites".

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will now commission a review of the working of the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The existing provisions of the 1973 Act have served well in the protection of our underwater heritage.

HEALTH

Patients (Northern Region)

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients were treated in the northern region in each year since 1978.

Mr. Sackville: For in-patients, the number of finished consultant episodes for Northern regional health authority is published in "Ordinary and day case admissions for England" for each year from 1982 to 1993–94. Figures before 1986 refer to discharges and deaths. For 1978 to 1981, figures are published in SH3 national and regional summaries for the relevant year.

For out-patients, numbers of attendances at clinics are published in "Outpatient and ward attenders for England" for each year from 1982 to 1993–94. Earlier figures are published in SH3 national and regional summaries for the relevant year.

Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Communicable Diseases

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what rights parents have to be informed that there have been cases of a known potentially fatal communicable disease in their child's school.

Mr. Sackville: Under the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 and the Public Health (Infectious Diseases) Regulations 1988, information obtained as a result of notification of disease can be divulged by the relevant health official if it is reasonably necessary for preventing the spread of the disease.

NHS Patients (Charges)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what charges NHS trusts can levy on *(a)* in-patients, *(b)* out-patients and *(c)* persons admitted following industrial accidents.

Mr. Sackville: National health service hospitals have no power to charge unless there is a specific statutory power to charge for a particular service or item of equipment.

NHS Staff (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has for extending the arrangements set out in "Ethnic Minority Staff in the NHS: A Programme of Action" to primary health care staff employed by family health service authority and general practitioner practices.

Mr. Malone: None. "Ethnic Minority Staff in the NHS: A Programme of Action" applies to all staff employed by NHS authorities and trusts, including family health services authorities. It does not cover employees of general practitioners, who are autonomous employers.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the results of the ethnic monitoring of NHS staff, which took place in September 1993, will be published.

Mr. Malone: Ethnic monitoring data on the national health service work force in England collected in September 1993 was published in the "Department of Health Statistical Bulletins" 1994/10 of September 1994 and 1994/11 of October 1994, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mental Illness Hospitals

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list those remaining large mental

hospitals, by region and district, which are still admitting *(a)* any in-patients and *(b)* any acute admissions;

(2) if she will list in each remaining large mental hospitals, by district and region, in England, how many in-patients are long stay with over a year in hospital care and how many were admitted before 1971;

(3) if she will list those large mental hospitals which have closed in England, by region and district, and the present use of their sites;

(4) if she will list the remaining large mental hospitals still open, by region and health district in England, together with in each case the number of patients, their age, the number of available beds, and the estimated date of closure.

Mr. Bowis: Details on the remaining large mental illness hospitals, with over 100 beds, were published in the mental health task force report, "Survey of English Mental Illness Hospitals, March 1993", copies of which are available in the Library.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the size range recommended by her Department for nursing homes.

Mr. Bowis: We have not made any recommendations about the size of nursing homes.

Emergency Treatment Charges

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to end the right to health authorities, NHS trusts and general practitioners to collect charges for emergency treatment under the Road Traffic Act 1988.

Mr. Sackville: I have no plans to do so.

Macmillan Breast Care Nurses

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Macmillan breast care nurses are currently employed by the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Care For The Elderly

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is proposing to take to improve the availability of care for the elderly.

Mr. Bowis: Every citizen has the right to receive health care on the basis of clinical need. The "Priorities and Planning Guidance for the NHS: 1995–96" requires authorities to identify needs and put specific actions in hand to ensure further improvements in services for elderly people, and to secure care in the community, including continuing health care, in effective collaboration with local authorities and other agencies.

Continuing Health Care

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether she will be issuing guidance clarifying NHS responsibilities for meeting needs for continuing health care; and whether she will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I shall issue tomorrow to health authorities, local authorities and other interested parties guidance on national health service responsibilities for meeting needs for continuing health care. This follows careful consideration of the responses we have received on the draft guidance on this subject which was issued for consultation last summer. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will be issuing parallel guidance in Wales.

The guidance will make clear that arranging and funding a full range of services to meet needs for continuing health care is a fundamental part of the responsibilities of the NHS. In discharging those responsibilities the NHS needs to work closely with its partners in local authorities, building on the improved collaboration which has resulted from the introduction of the community care reforms.

The guidance will set out a national framework of conditions which must be addressed in the local policies and eligibility for continuing health care which all health authorities will be required to develop and publish. We will also make clear the action which health authorities, working with local authorities, general practitioners and others, must take to implement the guidance, including specific action to address where significant gaps in services are identified.

I shall be placing copies of the guidance in the Library.

Breast Cancer

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will establish targets to reduce mortality from breast cancer.

Mr. Sackville: In "The Health of the Nation—A Strategy for Health" the Government have set a target to reduce breast cancer mortality in women invited for breast screening by 25 per cent. by the year 2000.

NHS Charges

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to increase current NHS charges and the value of optical vouchers; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: I shall shortly lay regulations before the House to increase national health service charges in England and Wales from 1 April 1995. The prescription charge will increase by £0.50, from £4.75 to £5.25 for each quantity of a drug or appliance dispensed. The fees for prescription prepayment certificates will rise to £27.20 for a four-month certificate and £74.80 for an annual certificate. These represent considerable savings for those needing more than five items in four months or 14 items in a year.

The new prescription charge is still significantly less than the average total cost of a single prescription item to the NHS. A charge is now paid only on around one item in five dispensed by community pharmacists and appliance contractors. When the Government took office, about two items in five attracted a charge. In 1993–94 the drugs bill for family health services was over £2.9 billion. The new charge will raise over £310 million for the NHS in 1995–96.

Charges for elastic stockings and tights, wigs and fabric supports supplied through the hospital service will be increased in line with the rise in the prescription charge.

The maximum patient charge for a single course of dental treatment begun on or after 1 April 1995 will increase from £275 to £300. Fewer than three in every 1,000 courses of treatment will attract the new maximum charge.

I am pleased to announce that as from 1 April 1995, the overall value of optical vouchers issued under the NHS optical voucher scheme will increase by an average of 3.25 per cent. Optical vouchers may be used as full or partial payment for spectacles or contact lenses. People entitled to the most commonly used vouchers—which constitute about 85 per cent. of all vouchers—will find the value of their vouchers increased by about 3.5 per cent.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland will lay regulations to increase charges and spectacle voucher values in Scotland by the same amounts. Similar arrangements will apply in Northern Ireland.

Details of the revised charges and increased optical voucher values have been placed in the Library.

VAMP Research Database

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what plans she has for the future of the VAMP research database.

Mr. Sackville: Since the Department of Health accepted the VAMP research database from Reuters plc on 8 September 1994, a number of significant developments have taken place:

Professor David Lawson of Glasgow University has been appointed to lead an advisory group on the scientific and ethnical soundness of research projects;

the Department has decided in principle to support research projects designed to improve its understanding of the capacity of the Database to aid policy making in epidemiological and other areas;

two established researchers have sought and been granted licences to use the data for pharmaco-vigilance and other purposes; and

existing research projects are being undertaken and new projects are being scrutinised by Professor Lawson, pending the formation of the full advisory ethics group.

The Department of Health has also constituted an advisory management board to provide advice on strategic management of the research database. It comprises representatives of the doctors who contribute anonymised data, licensees, epidemiological researchers, the pharmaceutical industry and the scientific and ethical advisory group under Department of Health chairmanship. Taking account of the advisory management board's advice and the urgent nature of some enhancements of the system's hardware and software, it has been decided that the day-to-day management of the data collection, validation and support services will remain with the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for the next two years under a service-level agreement with the Department of Health. It is expected that the database will be broadly self-financing as a result of licence and other fee income for the use of data in research projects.

Mentally Ill People

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were placed on supervision registers for the mentally ill between 1 October 1994 and 31 January 1995; and what is the total number now on these registers.

Mr. Bowis: Information on the numbers of mentally ill people placed on supervision registers is not available centrally.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. Sackville: There were 1,383 letters received from hon. Members during January.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Minister	*Number of letters sent to hon. members*
Secretary of State	186
Mr. Malone	251
Mr. Sackville	327
Mr. Bowis	315
Baroness Cumberlege	340

Children and the Family

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will *(a)* ask or *(b)* require all Ministers to publish family impact statements with all major policy announcements and new legislation to make clear their intended effect on the law relating to, and the welfare of, children and the family.

Mr. Bowis: The Government make clear the intended effect of policy and legislative proposals in consultative papers and reports.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all the Cabinet committees, ministerial groups and interdepartmental committees of officials, together with respective members, which have responsibility for co-ordinating Government policy on the law relating to children and the family.

Mr. Bowis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) on 22 November 1994 at columns *89–96*, which gave details of Cabinet committees and their membership. The ministerial groups and interdepartmental committees of officials with a role in the co-ordination of Government policy on the law relating to children and the family are as shown:

Family Law Administration Working Party;

Inter-departmental Group on Child Abuse;

Steering Groups on Child Evidence;

Inter-departmental Consultative Group on Provision for Young Children;

Ministerial Group on Domestic Violence;

Official Group on Domestic Violence;

Ministerial Group on Crime Prevention;

Official Group on Crime Prevention;

Official Group on Reducing Criminality; Children Act Advisory Group.

Public Appointments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *440*, how many appointments to public positions have been made by her Department in the last year.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* The latest information is that for 1994, when 1,531 people were appointed to posts in Department of Health public bodies.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Private Lee Clegg

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his office gave the governor of Her Majesty's prison, Wakefield clearance for Private Lee Clegg to give media interviews; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 22 February:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking whether the Home Office gave the governor of Wakefield prison clearance for Private Lee Clegg to give media interviews.

Under Standing Order 5A 37 governors are advised that members of the press should not normally be allowed to visit prisoners in a professional capacity. Permission has not been given for any member of the press to interview Mr. Clegg, either in person or by telephone, although the governor has received a number of requests. However, a journalist recently interviewed Private Clegg on a domestic visit without permission, having used an assumed name for the purpose of the visit.

False Identities

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals, in each of the past five years for which figures are available, have been caught acquiring or having acquired false identities for passport, DSS or other purposes by using official documentation obtained *(a)* by posing as a deceased person or *(b)* in any other way; how many false identities are known to have been acquired; and what was the maximum number known to have been acquired by any one individual in each of those years.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The total number of fraudulent passport applications in each of the last five years was:

	Total number	*Number identified by United Kingdom Passport Agency before passport issued*
1990	854	671
1991	1,037	569
1992	984	764
1993	1,162	845
1994	1,031	846

These figures represent less than 0.04 per cent of passports issued annually.

Separate figures are not available for the number of those applicants who used false identities either by posing as a deceased person or in another way.

Figures for the Department of Social Security's Benefits Agency are available only for the last two financial years. They are:

	Total false identities detected	*Largest number used by one person*
1992–93	1,200	not available
1993–94	2,117	250

The figures include multiple identity fraud detected by organised fraud teams. However the total value of multiple identity fraud was less than 1 per cent. of all detected fraud in each of the two years for which figures are available.

Telephone Reference Service

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give the terms of reference of the review of the Government telephone preference service; if he will list the persons carrying out the review; when the review is expected to be completed; if he proposes to publish details of the review and its recommendations; and if he will list those telecommunications services companies with which the Government have agreements regarding instituting telephone preference at a time of emergency.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The terms of reference for the working party conducting this review require it to assess whether there is still a requirement for a scheme to provide assured access for essential users; and, if so, to identify options and associated costs; and to make recommendations to Ministers. It is chaired by a Home Office official and its membership includes representatives of the other Departments involved in emergency planning and of the major telecommunications service providers.

The intention is that the working party should produce an interim report by the autumn of this year; the date for the completion of the review will depend upon reaction to the interim report. Because some of the details in the final report are likely to be commercially sensitive, it is not intended to publish it; but the outcome will be made known to the House in due course. It is not the practice to provide details of a direction to a company under the Telecommunications Act 1984 which may include a requirement to provide an assured service in a time of emergency.

Betting Shops

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidelines are issued which betting shops are legally obliged to follow;

(2) what plans he has to introduce legislation to form guidelines for betting shops in regard to legal proceedings.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The statutory controls relating to licensed betting offices are contained in sections 9 and 10 of the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act 1963, Schedule 4 to that Act, and the Licensed Betting Office Regulations 1986.

We have no plans to introduce legislation or guidelines for licensed betting offices in regard to legal proceedings.

Sentencing

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will require judges to discuss sentences with juries prior to passing sentence.

Mr. Maclean: No.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the sums assigned within the budget of the Metropolitan police for *(a)* additional costs of police officers attending magistrates-courts, if separately identified, *(b)* costs relating to the attendance of police as Crown prosecution witnesses; and if he will give the nature of reserves held to ensure that no case is abandoned or withdrawn due to financial constraints.

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that funds to cover the additional costs of police officers attending magistrates courts during the course of their duty or as Crown prosecution witnesses are not identified separately within the force's budget. The actual costs of officers attending court as Crown prosecution witnesses are not collated. From April 1995, the Metropolitan police will have available a financial reserve and it would be possible to consider the use of funds from the reserve in cases where actual expenditure exceeds the sum allocated in the force's budget estimates.

Immigration

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by European Union member state *(a)* the number of applications for citizenship of that member state which are currently being processed and *(b)* the number of applications for political asylum.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The number of applications for British citizenship which were outstanding at the end of January 1995 in the United Kingdom was 42,327. Corresponding information on citizenship applications in other EU member states is not available. Information on persons who applied for asylum was given in a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), on 3 February 1995, *Official Report*, column 899.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of legal immigrants accepted by each European Union member state in each of the last three years.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information available relates to gross inward migration, including temporary migration, of non-EEA nationals into European Union countries in 1992, and is given in the table. Corresponding data for 1993–94 are not yet available.

Country	*Gross inward migration of non-EEA nationals in 1992*[1]
Belgium	27,000
Denmark	15,000
France	85,800
Germany	1,080,000
Greece	10,400
Ireland	4,600
Italy	n/a
Luxembourg	2,740
Netherlands	58,700
Portugal	12,100
Spain	18,500
United Kingdom	50,800[2]
Austria[3]	n/a
Finland[3]	9,240
Sweden[3]	31,000

n/a Not available.

[1] Source: Burostat (except for the United Kingdom figure) based on annual returns from member countries. Definitions will vary between countries but are likely to include temporary migration, mainly for six months or longer.

[2] Figure relates to non-EEA nationals accepted for settlement, that is, allowed to stay indefinitely, in 1992. The corresponding figure for 1993 was 54,200.

[3] Joined the European Union on 1 January 1995.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what facilities are available for people with hearing impediments seeking entry into the United Kingdom, with special reference to those seeking political refugee status at ports of entry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There are no special facilities at immigration controls at ports for interviewing people with hearing impediments. The interviewing officer is required to confirm and record in writing that an applicant for asylum understands what is being communicated and that he or she is understood. If necessary, information will be obtained in writing using translator assistance as necessary.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what legal objections have been reported to him advising that for the police to withdraw passports from known troublemakers wishing to travel overseas would be illegal; in what way the powers differ from the powers of Immigration Service officers to retain passports from people wishing to enter the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The police have no power to remove a passport from someone unless passport facilities have been withdrawn from him by my right hon. and learned Friend under the royal prerogative or a court has required surrender of the passport. The Immigration Service has power to retain the passport of someone seeking entry until the person concerned is given leave to enter the United Kingdom or is about to depart or be removed following refusal of leave.

India (Torture)

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture regarding evidence of torture in India to male Sikh asylum seekers.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There have been no recent discussions with the foundation on this subject.

Police

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the current number of police officers per 1,000 of the population and *(b)* the current amount spent per annum on the police per person, in rank order for each (i) police authority and (ii) county police authority in England including average figures.

Mr. Maclean: The latest available information for police to population ratios can be found in the appendix to the annual report of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary for 1993. Details of police expenditure per head of population are set out in the table:

Police expenditure per head of population

	Estimated expenditure 1994–95 £000	*Population 1993*[1]	*Average expenditure per head £000*
City of London	56,186	4,000	14,047
Metropolitan	1,638,659	7,420,000	221
Merseyside	222,217	1,441,000	154
Greater Manchester	330,361	2,579,000	128
Cleveland	71,037	559,000	127
West Midlands	323,607	2,634,000	123
Northumbria	176,002	1,445,000	122
West Yorkshire	240,140	2,102,000	114
Wiltshire	66,362	583,000	114
Cumbria	55,697	490,000	114
Surrey	86,912	770,000	113
South Yorkshire	145,647	1,306,000	112
Nottinghamshire	112,458	1,028,000	109
Humberside	95,452	884,000	108
Lancashire	151,890	1,421,000	107
Kent	160,948	1,540,000	105
Gloucestershire	56,084	544,000	103
Durham	62,578	608,000	103
Warwickshire	50,510	494,000	102
Avon and Somerset	147,302	1,447,000	102
Lincolnshire	60,485	601,000	101
Thames Valley	198,813	2,001,000	99
Essex	147,572	1,489,000	99
Northamptonshire	58,624	592,000	99
Dorset	65,161	667,000	98
Bedfordshire	52,463	539,000	97
Staffordshire	101,365	1,054,000	96
Devon and Cornwall	143,917	1,526,000	94
Hertfordshire	79,097	849,000	93
Derbyshire	87,227	951,000	92
North Yorkshire	66,156	722,000	92
Sussex	130,749	1,440,000	91
Hampshire	155,219	1,718,000	90
Cambridgeshire	61,216	683,000	90
Suffolk	57,426	646,000	89
West Mercia	98,399	1,109,000	89
Leicestershire	80,672	910,000	89
Cheshire	85,533	972,000	88
Norfolk	66,561	765,000	87

[1] Population figures are provided by the OPCS. 1993 is the latest available estimate.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce his decision on section 11 funding bids for 1995–96; what the total funding bid was in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: It remains our hope that it will be possible to announce the outcome of the bidding round by the end of February. The following table shows the amount of grant sought by each applicant in relation to the 1995–96 financial year.

Amount of grant sought 1995–96

Applicant	*Grant sought in 1995–96 (£)*
Local authorities etc	
Avon	584,488
Barking and Dagenham	265,750
Barnet	221,000
Bedfordshire	93,200
Berkshire	19,500
Bexley	49,261
Birmingham	487,636
Bolton	217,411
Bradford	3,723,014
Brent	775,500
Bromley	37,800
Buckinghamshire	1,138,021
Burnley	50,603
Bury	35,940
Calderdale	74,250
Cambridgeshire	185,000
Camden	1,506,763
Cardiff	24,093
Cleveland	180,056
Clwyd	139,968
Coventry	165,355
Crewe and Nantwich	35,627
Croydon	427,174
Derbyshire	347,176
Devon	85,000
Doncaster	54,654
Dorset	45,700
Dudley	811,318
Ealing	1,242,773
East Sussex	88,480
Enfield	561,647
Essex	113,716
Gateshead	27,000
Gloucester	49,160
Gloucestershire	83,608
Greenwich	1,043,000
Gwent	184,000
Hackney	531,692
Hammersmith and Fulham	488,876
Hampshire	66,750
Haringey	357,258
Harrow	26,989
Havering	35,484
Hereford and Worcester	175,500
Hertfordshire	29,000
Hillingdon	205,650
Hounslow	653,700
Humberside	127,480
Hyndburn	30,500
Islington	1,590,701
Kensington and Chelsea	175,370
Kent	172,600
Kingston	53,604
Kirklees	2,207,312
Lambeth	1,649,969

Amount of grant sought 1995–96

Applicant	*Grant sought in 1995–96 (£)*
Lancashire	1,214,630
Leeds	880,686
Leicester	148,420
Leicestershire	234,083
Lewisham	1,527,759
Lincolnshire	18,437
Liverpool	163,855
London Boroughs Grants Committee	22,210
Luton	136,004
Manchester	240,970
Merton	147,570
Middlesbrough	74,829
Milton Keynes	52,725
Newcastle	19,670
Newham	624,605
Norfolk	217,051
North Tyneside	33,513
Northamptonshire	293,846
Nottingham	80,000
Nottinghamshire	729,500
Oldham	207,500
Oxford	14,856
Oxfordshire	174,000
Peterborough	18,488
Portsmouth	93,830
Preston	23,902
Reading	25,704
Redbridge	323,000
Redditch	13,536
Richmond	25,200
Rochdale	97,000
Rotherham	393,384
Salford	99,110
Sandwell	494,395
Scunthorpe	19,750
Sefton	24,165
Sheffield	763,500
Shropshire	124,884
Somerset	34,273
South Glamorgan	91,943
South Tyneside	168,000
South Yorkshire FCDA	12,194
Southampton	47,110
Southwark	939,453
St. Albans	27,770
St. Helens	20,064
Staffordshire	320,000
Suffolk	40,100
Sunderland	52,920
Surrey	47,985
Sutton	126,343
Tameside	160,481
Tower Hamlets	1,198,519
Trafford	61,959
Wakefield	265,000
Walsall	1,462,469
Waltham Forest	290,749
Wandsworth	220,536
Warwickshire	863,500
West Glamorgan	237,244
West Midlands FCDA	53,250
West Sussex	15,165
West Yorkshire FCDA	50,586
Westminster	270,821
Wigan	80,000
Wiltshire	67,600
Wirral	54,300
Woking	35,513
Wolverhampton	1,323,600

Amount of grant sought 1995–96

Applicant	*Grant sought in 1995–96 (£)*
Grant-maintained schools and City Technology Colleges	
Alperton Common School	46,626
Anglo European School	10,877
Ash Green GM School	8,527
Avon Valley School	10,000
Beechen Cliff GM School	20,000
Beechview Middle GM School	13,675
Billericay School	7,000
Bishop Challoner RC GM School	5,240
Blessed Edward Oldcorne RC GM School	3,599
Brentside High School	33,000
Broomhill Infant GM School	4,000
Brushwood Middle GM School	4,625
Castle Hall School	8,280
Castlefield GM School	97,527
Chadwell Heath GM School	20,979
Claremont School GM	40,924
Copland Community College	15,000
Deacon's School	27,302
Desborough School	23,000
Dixons City Technology College	4,000
Djanogly City Technology College	26,535
Dormers Wells Infants GM School	70,807
Dormers Wells Junior GM School	29,423
Drayton Manor School	25,000
Dunraven GMS	37,600
Durand Primary GM School	45,504
Francis Bacon School	13,000
Gordon's GM School	1,710
Graveney GM School	49,489
Greenford High GM School	74,460
Greenwood Dale School	23,568
Hall Green GM School	11,322
Hamilton Combined GM School	42,469
Hendon GM School	43,758
Hollingwood 1st School	1,200
Holly Hall GM School	29,250
Holy Cross Convent GM School	9,250
Holy Trinity School	12,000
Holywell School	2,973
Hopwood Hall College	9,625
John Kelly Girls's Technical College	11,366
Kelsey Park GM School	82,754
Kingsbury High School	42,000
London Oratory GM School	35,930
Merrill Community School	39,922
Montagu School	7,950
Myton GM School	18,413
Northampton Boys GM School	12,637
Northolt High School	20,000
Norte Dame GM School	9,000
Oldfield GM School	4,785
Prospect School	13,300
Queens Park GM School	79,500
Radcliffe School	23,000
Raines Foundation GM School	32,660
Reading Girls School	14,750
Reay Primary GM School	24,166
Richard Challoner GM School	8,500
Scared Heart RC School	5,718
Small Heath School	63,000
St. Andrews RC GM School	26,367
St. Bartholomew's School	2,500
St. Benedict's Catholic High School	4,000
St. Bernadette RC GM School	11,000
St. Marks West Essex GM School	5,000
St. Martin in Field GM School	12,271
St. Thomas the Apostle GM School	5,707
Stantonbury Campus	12,048
Stopsley High School	5,000
Stratford GM School	34,426

Amount of grant sought 1995–96

Applicant	Grant sought in 1995–96 (£)
Surrey Square GM School	16,340
The Gilberd School	14,752
Weavers GM School	24,000
Wood End Junior GM School	7,336
Woodnewton Junior School	4,750
Wrenn GM School	32,900
Colleges of Further Education	
Amersham and Wycombe College	20,000
Arnold and Carlton College	22,600
Barnet College	19,942
Bexley College	9,675
Bilborough College	51,058
Birmingham Fe Consortium	1,733,926
Bolton College	72,700
Calderdale College	49,500
Cambridge Regional College	15,000
Charles Keene College	333,000
City College Manchester	40,189
City of Westminster College	72,000
City and Islington College	88,000
Clarendon College	90,712
Coventry Technical College	70,000
Crawley College	4,113
Croydon College	36,352
Dewsbury College	4,268
Doncaster College	13,611
Dudley College of Technology	138,000
Ealing Tertiary College	213,000
East Berkshire College	17,616
Enfield Fe College	45,515
Gateshead College	36,000
Gateway 6th Form College	38,250
Gloscat	30,451
Greenhill College	293,063
Hackney Community College	57,750
Hendon College	105,000
Henley College	34,400
Huddersfield Technical College	57,000
Huntingdonshire Regional College	21,000
Joseph Chamberlain Coll	48,000
Keighley College	16,894
Kensington and Chelsea College	56,835
Kingsway College	86,000
Language and Literacy Unit Southwark	119,535
Leyton 6th Form College	43,352
Manchester College of Arts and Technology	79,070
North East London College	185,310
Newcastle College	37,236
Newham Fe College	447,000
Newham Sixth Form College	101,790
North Herts College	67,650
Northampton College	17,336
Oaklands College	96,000
Oldham College	55,123
Park Lane College	68,198
Peoples College of Tertiary Education	12,016
Rotherham College	13,650
Runshaw College	13,440
Sheffield College	272,150
South Nottingham College	21,000
Southgate College	72,900
Southwark College	22,000
St. Francis Xavier College	24,955
Stoke on Trent 6th Form College	12,000
Stourbridge College	21,000
Swindon College	11,100
Tameside College of Technology	32,000
Thomas Danby College	113,500
Tile Hill College	47,500
Tower Hamlets College	181,000

Amount of grant sought 1995–96

Applicant	Grant sought in 1995–96 (£)
Tresham Institute	50,000
Uxbridge College	48,500
Wakefield College	111,255
Walsall College of Arts and Technology	67,000
Wandsworth Adult College	42,000
West Hertsfordshire College	75,184
Woolwich College	21,737

Probation Service

Ms Lynne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate he has made of the impact of the 1994 probation budget reductions on staffing levels with each grade of staff; and what assessment he has made of the likely redundancies within each grade of staff in the Greater Manchester probation service;

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact of the 1994 probation budget reductions on *(a)* liaison with victim support, *(b)* work with victims, *(c)* staff terms and conditions of service, *(d)* the implementation of national standards for the supervision of offenders, *(e)* probation centre provision and *(f)* hostel provision in respect of the Greater Manchester Probation Service;

(3) what was the effect of the November 1993 budget statement on the budget of the Greater Manchester probation service; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the November 1994 budget statement on the work of the Greater Manchester probation service.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the effect of the November 1993 budget statement on the budget of the South Yorkshire probation service; and what assessment he has made of the impact of the November 1994 budget statement on the work of the Greater Manchester probation service.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave yesterday to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, (Mr. Morris), *Official Report*, column *156*.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the impact of the November 1993 statement on the budget of the South Yorkshire probation service.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made as to the effect of the November 1993 statement on the budget of the South Yorkshire probation service.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) yesterday, *Official Report*, column *154*.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed and at what grade, by the South Yorkshire probation service on *(a)* 30 June 1992, *(b)* 30 June 1993 and *(c)* 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information is given in the table.

Staff employed by the South Yorkshire probation service, in post at 30 June, whole-time equivalent[1], by grade and type.

	Number of staff, whole time equivalent 30 June 1992	30 June 1993	30 June 1994
Probation Officers			
Chief	1	1	1
Deputy Chief	2	2	2
Assistant Chief	6	7	7
Senior	37	40	42
Main grade	176	178	180
Total probation officers	222	228	232
Non-probation grade staff			
Probation Services' Officers[2]	81	78	78
Clerical/Secretarial	109	120	114
Administrative	34	37	40
Other non-probation grade staff, excluding hostel staff[3]	42	40	31
Hostel staff	64	62	46
Total non-probation grade staff	330	336	308
Total probation staff	553	565	541

[1] Whole-time staff plus whole-time equivalent of part time staff. Figures rounded to the nearest whole number. Components and totals are rounded independently and so components may not add precisely to totals.
[2] Formerly ancillaries.
[3] Figures include sessional supervisors on community service schemes, staff employed in student training units and on miscellaneous functions.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many offenders were supervised by South Yorkshire probation service on 30 June 1994;

(2) how many court reports were completed by South Yorkshire probation service during *(a)* 1992 and *(b)* 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and others yesterday, *Official Report*column *154*.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the impact of the November 1994 budget statement on the South Yorkshire probation service.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment he has made of the impact of the November 1994 Budget statement on the South Yorkshire probation service.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), 20 February, *Official Report*, column *19–20*.

Drug Prevention Initiative

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what criteria were used in determining successful bids from the south-east and south-west regions for projects under the drug prevention initiative;

(2) which local authorities in the south-east and south-west regions made bids under the drug prevention initiative; what was the amount sought in each case; and which were the successful bids;

(3) what assessment he made of the extent of the drugs problem in each of the local authorities in the south-east and south-west regions which sought to participate in the drug prevention initiative.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: From 1 April, there will be one Home Office drugs prevention team in the south-east region, covering the counties of East and West Sussex, and one team in the south-west region, covering the counties of Avon and Somerset. These areas represent extended coverage for the present teams in Brighton and Hove and Bristol. It was not possible to provide teams in additional areas in these regions, as was explained to Southampton city council when it inquired in December about inclusion in the drugs prevention initiative.

England *v.* Ireland Football Match

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people were issued with tickets for the England *v.* Ireland football match in Dublin by the England Travel Club; what was the total number of tickets issued to the Football Association; how many tickets were returned to the Football Association of Ireland; and what discussions took place between the Football Associations and the British and Irish police about the allocation of returned tickets;

(2) what reports he has received about the transfer of police intelligence about known troublemakers travelling to Dublin for the England *v.* Ireland football match; to whom in Ireland such information was made available; on what dates information was issued; and what steps he has taken to ensure that there was full and proper assessment made of intelligence by responsible bodies in the United Kingdom;

(3) if he will call for reports from the police on varying use of powers to stop people travelling to attend the England *v.* Ireland football match in Dublin *(a)* at Holyhead and *(b)* elsewhere;

(4) how many British police travelled with persons travelling to Dublin *(a)* the day before and *(b)* on the day of the England *v.* Ireland football match in Dublin.

(5) if the advice of the British police was sought by the FAI and or the Irish police over the kick-off time of the England *v.* Ireland football match in Dublin, the seating and segregation arrangements of English and Irish fans and the reallocation of tickets not taken up by the England Travel Club.

Mr. Maclean: I have asked for reports from the police on the assistance given to the Irish authorities and other action taken in relation to this match. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House on 16 February, *Official Report*, column *1125*, the Football Associations of England and Ireland are conducting a joint inquiry into the events in Dublin and this will also look into some of the matters which the hon. Member has raised. I do not think it would be helpful for me to comment in advance of the results of the joint inquiry.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what considerations underlay the decision of the police not to use, to stop known troublemakers travelling to attend the England *v.* Ireland football match in Dublin, the powers used during strikes to stop persons joining pickets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The police may limit numbers in any particular place in order to prevent breaches of the peace and it was under this common law power that the police stopped and turned back pickets during the miners' dispute. This power is not available to the police in situations where breach of the peace is likely to occur outside this jurisdiction nor have they any other such power to stop known troublemakers travelling abroad.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what policy initiatives he is taking as a result of public disorder at the England v. Ireland football match, involving British citizens before and after the match in Dublin and by persons wishing to travel to the match who were prevented from taking ferries to Ireland at Holyhead; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Over the last few years, we have introduced a range of measures to counter the threat posed by football hooliganism both inside and outside the ground. I will consider—in consultation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage—what further measures may be necessary in the light of the events which took place in Dublin, of reports from the police and of the joint inquiry being undertaken by the Football Associations of England and of Ireland.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what policy action he is taking, jointly with ministerial colleagues from appropriate Departments, to address the threat posed to public order within the United Kingdom and overseas by fascist groups based in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I ensure that the police have the resources and powers that they need effectively to discharge their responsibility to assess and counter threats to public order from any quarter. The police pass information about threats to public order overseas to their counterparts in the countries concerned.

Facist and Paramilitary Groups

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what inquiries he is making, jointly with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office, and the British and Irish police, to ascertain what links exist between Combat 18, the British National party, and other British-based fascist groups, and Unionist paramilitary groups including the UDA and the UFF.

Mr. Howard: Responsibility for gathering information about extremist organisations and their members, and for the investigation of specific criminal offences, rests with the police. They exchange relevant information with their counterparts in the Irish Republic as necessary.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will convene, jointly with Foreign Office Ministers, meetings with European Union ambassadors, and the American ambassador, to discuss the links between British-based fascist groups and fascist groups in Europe and America.

Mr. Howard: My ministerial colleagues, my officials and I have regular meetings with our counterparts from the other member states of the European Union on police co-operation matters, including illegal activity by extremist groups and possible international links between them. The Justice and Home Affairs Council on 30 November and 1 December 1994 approved a report on work within the third pillar to combat racism and xenophobia. The police exchange relevant operational information with their counterparts in other member states and in the United States of America and the security service has also confirmed publicly that it continues to monitor the possibility of contact between extreme right-wing nationalist and racist groups in this country and overseas.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange to meet the American ambassador to discuss what action can be taken to close down post office box numbers, held by the Dixie Press in North Carolina, used by Combat 18 in the United Kingdom to disseminate information covertly to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Howard: Until the Metropolitan police have completed their investigation of the publication and distribution of written material by Combat 18, it would not be sensible to decide whether separate action or inquiries might be warranted.

Passports

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passports have been reported *(a)* missing and *(b)* stolen in each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 25 October 1994, *Official Report*, column *513*.

Victim Support

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funds his Departments has provided for Victim Support since such funding began: what other help is being provided for victims of crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: Home Office funding of Victim Support has grown at a rate unprecedented for a voluntary organisation. Grant in the coming financial year will amount to nearly £11 million, an increase at 8 per cent. over the current year's figure. The record of Home Office funding of Victim Support is as follows:

Year	*Grant(£)*	*Year on year increase*	*Percentage increase*
1979–80	5,000	n/a	n/a
1980–81	10,000	5,000	100
1981–82	18,000	8,000	80
1982–83	16,000	–2,000	–11
1983–84	38,000	22,000	138
1984–85	62,000	24,000	63
1985–86	126,000	64,000	103
1986–87	286,000	160,000	127
1987–88	1,763,000	1,477,000	516
1988–89	2,740,000	977,000	55
1989–90	3,910,000	1,170,000	43
1990–91	4,735,000	825,000	21
1991–92	5,670,000	935,000	20

Year	Grant(£)	Year on year increase	Percentage increase
1992–93	7,260,000	1,590,000	28
1993–94	8,375,000	1,115,000	15
1994–95	10,016,000	1,641,000	20
1995–96	10,817,000	801,000	8

The additional funding given in 1994–95 and 1995–96 will enable Victim Support to complete the programme of establishing witness support services in all 78 Crown court centres by the end of 1995, and to develop further the work of its 365 local schemes and branches which provide emotional support and practical help to over 1 million victims of crime a year throughout England and Wales.

We published the victims charter five years ago today, the first charter to be published. Most of the 50 standards in the charter have been, or are well on the way to being met. This has done a great deal to improve the way victims are treated by the criminal justice system, and we will build on this by publishing later this year a statement of service standards for victims of crime. This will be a charter-style document telling victims more clearly what they can expect of the criminal justice system and what they can do if they do not get it.

The Government have taken a range of other measures to help victims of crime. These include giving them better information about progress in their case, and ensuring that their views are taken more into account at all stages of the criminal justice process. A good example of this was the establishment in December of a victims' helpline so that any victim concerned about an inmate's possible temporary release can tell the prison authorities. The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 contained a number of measures designed to help victims and witnesses, including the abolition of committal proceedings and the creation of a new offence of witness intimidation. These, and many other measures, are firm evidence of the Government's concern for victims of crime and their continuing desire to improve services for them.

Probation Officers

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the arrangements governing the recruitment and qualifying training of probation officers.

Mr. Howard: I am today publishing a consultation document setting out proposals for wide-ranging changes to the present arrangements. Copies of the document and of the report of the departmental scrutiny carried out last year of which my proposals take account are being sent to a wide range of interested bodies and are being placed in the Library.

I propose to sweep away the barriers to the recruitment as probation officers of people who have relevant skills and experience to offer but who lack the social work diploma qualification which is at present required by law. Under the proposals set out in the consultation document, probation committees will be able to recruit from a much wider range of sources; and the initial training prospective probation officers undertake to equip them with competence to practise will be made more flexible to take account of mature candidates' previous work. On this basis, I am proposing to terminate the present scheme under which the Home Office sponsors students on selected social work courses after students joining this autumn have qualified; and to fund area probation services on the basis that they will meet their own training requirements. This change will be arranged so that it is not to the detriment of those committed to existing courses.

The scrutiny report highlights strengths as well as weaknesses in the present arrangements; and I am determined that standards of training and recruitment should not be compromised. On the contrary, I believe that there is scope for more rigorous assessment of individuals' training needs and competence to practise to be introduced. The social work dimension of probation officers' responsibilities will not be ignored in these arrangements and it is not my intention to discourage applications from suitable candidates with social work qualifications. But the work of probation officers and social workers is different, so there is no good reason for a common training qualification. Now that core competences for probation officers have been published, and are to be used as the basis for performance appraisal, training arrangements should be specifically geared towards those competences. My proposals envisage greater ownership of training and the maintenance of standards by the probation service itself. I shall over the next three months welcome comments on these proposals, which are intended to ensure that the probation service has a firm long-term foundation for the provision of high quality services to the courts and to the community.

Special Advisers

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the severance payments made to special advisers in each of the last five years indicating *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the date.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 1 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Minister of State for the Treasury on 6 February, *Official Report*, column *69*.

SCOTLAND

Community Hospital, Forfar

17. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the new community hospital in Forfar; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Minister of State has recently received correspondence about the proposed new community hospital in Forfar from the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and from GPs in Forfar and others.

Community Care

22. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet Greater Glasgow health board and Lanarkshire health board to discuss the effect of the Government's community care policies in their area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no immediate plans to meet with either health board to discuss community care policies.

The Greater Glasgow health board is consulting until 28 February on its joint community care plan. Lanarkshire health board is consulting until 24 March on the joint community care plan for its area.

Job Losses

23. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss the loss of highly skilled jobs in Scotland.

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend meets representatives of the Scottish Trades Union Congress from time to time to discuss a range of matters concerning the Scottish economy.

Development Corporations

24. **Mr. Donohoe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will next meet the development corporation chairmen to discuss wind-up.

Mr. Kynoch: I will meet the board of Glenrothes development corporation on 10 March, and expect to meet the boards of the four other corporations later.

Maternity Hospital, Rutherglen

25. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the cost of building a maternity hospital to deal with the births currently being dealt with at Rutherglen maternity hospital.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It would be inappropriate to anticipate a possible outcome of the Greater Glasgow health board public consultation on maternity provision, the results of which will not be known until after 30 April. There are many aspects to be taken into account in any reprovision costings, including location, size and design considerations.

Carstairs State Hospital

26. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received a report from the Carstairs state hospital management committee into the recent breakdown in security at the hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes. Consideration of the findings and recommendations are of course subject to the conclusion of the related police inquiry, which is continuing.

Local Enterprise Companies

27. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the chairman of Scottish Enterprise to discuss the future boundaries of local enterprise companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of Scottish Enterprise regularly. He has asked Scottish Enterprise to consult interested parties about the possible implications of local government reorganisation for the boundaries of local enterprise companies, and will consider its findings before taking any decision.

Water

28. **Mrs Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet the chairmen of new water authorities to discuss charges for consumers.

36. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will arrange to meet the chairmen of the new water authorities to discuss the future of water supply in Scotland.

Mr. Kynoch: I refer the hon. Members to the answer my right hon. Friend gave today in an oral answer to the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh).

National Health Service Trusts

29. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to make national health service trusts more accountable to the communities they serve.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: NHS trusts are accountable, through the NHS executive, to me and to Parliament. Their directors are required, as a condition of appointment, to subscribe to codes of conduct and accountability; and through the establishment of the Health Appointments Advisory Committee my right hon. Friend has made the process of appointment of non-executives more open. Trusts are required to publish an annual business plan, and an annual report and audited accounts which are presented to a public meeting. I will shortly be issuing a code of practice on openness, setting out the public's right to information, which has recently been the subject of wide consultation with interested parties.

Gross Domestic Product

30. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of United Kingdom gross domestic product is currently contributed by Scotland.

Mr. Kynoch: In 1993, the Scottish share of United Kingdom—less continental shelf—gross domestic product was 8.7 per cent.

Economic Regeneration

31. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for regenerating the Scottish economy with particular reference to alleviating unemployment.

Mr. Kynoch: The Government's economic policies provide the right framework for the regeneration of the Scottish economy exemplified by a record level of manufacturing productivity, record levels of exports, record levels of inward investment, a larger number of employees in employment, increasing business confidence and a steadily reducing unemployment level.

Farming

32. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he has taken to ensure that Scottish farming interests are taken into account when discussing the future of the common agricultural policy.

Sir Hector Monro: Policy on the common agricultural policy is the collective responsibility of the United Kingdom Agriculture Ministers. My right hon. Friend and I have regular meetings with a wide variety of bodies to ensure that Scotland's interests are properly taken into account in formulating UK policy on the future of the CAP.

Dental Services

33. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet chairmen of health boards to discuss the provision of national health service dental services.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Minister of State regularly meets chairmen of health boards. The Government are currently considering responses to its consultation paper on the future of NHS dentistry, including those received from all 15 Scottish health boards, before deciding the way forward.

Housing

34. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many local authority houses have been built in Scotland since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities built 31,757 houses in the period from July 1979 to September 1994.

Public Expenditure

35. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest estimate of public expenditure per head in Scotland; and what comparison he has drawn with other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Kynoch: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on 2 February, *Official Report*, columns 1199–1200. In 1993–94 the identifiable general Government expenditure per head in Scotland was £4,185. This figure is 16.8 per cent. higher than the equivalent UK figure.

39. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the uses to which public money is put in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I refer my hon. Friend to the departmental report of the Scottish Office and associated Departments "Serving Scotland's Needs". This year's report will be published on 10 March.

Manufacturing

37. **Mrs. Liddell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the decline in manufacturing industry in Scotland.

Mr. Kynoch: Manufacturing in Scotland is not in decline. Manufacturing output and exports are at record high levels. During the four quarters to quarter 3, 1994 manufacturing output rose by 5.3 per cent. Productivity in manufacturing rose by 5 per cent. in 1993 to a record level.

Primary School Pupils

38. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent per pupil in primary schools in Scotland in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what were the figures in 1978–79 at constant prices.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave him on 8 December 1994, *Official Report*, column 273.

Zoos

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those zoos which are owned by local authorities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: According to our records the following zoos in Scotland, which are licensed under the Zoo Licensing Act 1981, are owned by local authorities:

Calderglen country park children's zoo, East Kilbride;
Camperdown wildlife centre, Dundee;
Palacerigg country park, Cumbernauld;
Pittencrieff park animal centre, Dunfermline;
The Aviaries, Woodhead park, Kirkintilloch.

Apprenticeship Scheme

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which organisations will be eligible for financial support for capital equipment under the new apprenticeship scheme in Scotland.

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend has not yet complete his consideration of the comments made on the consultation paper "Training for the Future". However, he expects to do so shortly and will make an announcement at that time.

EDUCATION

Qualified Indexed Securities

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education which higher education institutions have taken advantage of qualified indexed securities; what was the value of the capital project supported and the subject matter concerned; and what estimate has been made of the additional cost to each university of the qualified indexed securities package ceasing to be available.

Mr. Boswell: From the information currently available, the higher education institutions in England involved in qualifying index securities schemes are: London school of economics, Kings college London, University college London, University of Greenwich, University of Westminster, University of Bristol, University of Durham, University of Manchester, University of Portsmouth, University of Sheffield. Full details of all schemes are not necessarily kept centrally. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals has estimated that some £300 million has been raised by about a dozen UK universities through QISs, to finance general building development and student accommodation. Universities concerned have estimated that the savings to them of QISs, by comparison with other available forms of funding, are about 2 per cent. per annum of the value of

the loans. Assuming an average loan of £25 million, this represents £0.5 million per annum for each university.

Non-admission Appeals

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many appeals were received in the academic year 1993–94 from parents against non-admission of their child to school; how many were withdrawn before the appeals committee stage; how many were settled to mutual satisfaction before the appeals committee stage; how many were decided in the parents favour by appeal committee; and how many were rejected *(a)* in each local education authority and *(b)* nationally.

Mr. Forth: Information for the academic year 1993–94 will be available this summer.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month;

(2) how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Boswell: The Department does not collect individual statistics on the number of letters received from, or sent to, hon. Members. However, in January the Department received a total of 1,222 letters which were marked for ministerial reply, including all letters from hon. Members, and signed a total of 1,103. The number sent by each Minister is shown in the following table:

	Number
Secretary of State	288
Minister of State	186
Mr. Boswell	268
Mr. Robin Squire	361

Cash Limits on Votes

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals she has for the cash limits on votes within her responsibility for 1994–95.

Mr. Robin Squire: The cash limit for class X, vote 1, schools research and miscellaneous services will be reduced by £3.5 million from £787,796,000 to £784,296,000. The reduction will be used to offset an increase in the non-voted cash limit Department for Education/local authority capital—DFE/LACAP—for local authority capital for school building projects. The local authority capital cash limit DFE/LACAP will therefore be increased by £3.5 million from £42,898,000 to £46,398,000.

University Student Grants and Loans

Mr. Mans : To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the rates of university student grants and loans in each of the last five years; and what proportion of average earnings do they represent.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested is shown in the table.

Value of the standard maintenance grant and grant plus loan: England and Wales

Academic year	*Standard maintenance grant* £[1]	*Standard maintenance grant plus loan* £[2]	*Standard maintenance grant as a percentage of average earnings*[3]	*Standard maintenance grant plus loan as a percentage of average earnings*[3]
1990–91	2,265	2,685	15	18
1991–92	2,265	2,845	14	18
1992–93	2,265	2,980	[4]14	[4]18
1993–94	2,265	3,065	13	18
1994–95	2,040	3,190	n/a	n/a

[1] The standard maintenance grant rate is that applicable to students living away from home and studying outside London. In 1994–95 the corresponding London rate of grant is £2,560 and the parental home rate of grant is £1,615.
[2] Since 1990–91 student support has included grant and loan; the grant was frozen at the 1990–91 level (ie £2,265) until 1994–95 when it was reduced to £2,040. Figures include grant plus full year loan for students living away from home. The full year loan for students studying in London in 1994–95 is £1,375 and £915 for those living at their parents' home.
[3] Average annual earnings approximated from weekly earnings in April from the New Earnings Survey on full-time employees whose pay for the survey pay period was not affected by absence. The survey may not include bonuses paid at other weeks than the survey week and does not capture seasonal work. Earnings are compiled on the basis of employees on adult rates.
[4] These figures correct those given in reply to the hon. Member for Newport West (Mr. Flynn) on 25 October 1994, *Official Report* column 527.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income and Wealth

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if Her Majesty's Government will undertake to *(a)* study and *(b)* report to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation inquiry into income and wealth; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Burt: We are studying the report of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's inquiry into income and wealth. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State commented on the report during the debate on Tuesday 14 February, *Official Report*, columns 812.

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will detail for the latest available year the value of stolen order books;

(2) how many income support order books were reported stolen while in transit in the last year for which figures are available.

(3) how many claimants reported the loss of income support order books in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The recording of instrument of payment losses is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Frank Field, dated 21 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the value of all stolen order books, the number of Income Support (IS) order books stolen in transit and the number of IS order books reported lost by customers.

In 1993/94, order books with a potential value of £26.6 million were reported stolen.

In 1993/94, 29,817 IS order books were reported lost in transit. Losses in transit may occur between the issuing office and the post office, between the post office and the customer, or between the issuing office and the customer. This figure will include stolen books, though there is no separate record of thefts.

In 1993/94, 52,931 IS order books were reported as lost or destroyed by customers while in their possession. There is no separate record of how many customers made these reports.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many officials of his Department in each of the last 30 years have been prosecuted for making fraudulent benefit claims.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The figures requested are not available for any of the past 30 years. However, the Benefits Agency recently conducted a special survey to ascertain how many staff were prosecuted for benefit fraud during 1994. There were 16 such prosecutions.

National Insurance

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what study he has made of the role of targeting reductions in national insurance contributions to aid employment.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 16 February, *Official Report,* column *733-34.*

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of whether the Netherlands system for national insurance contributions could be successfully employed in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Arbuthnot: No formal assessment has been made of the Netherlands system for national insurance contributions by this Department. However, we do keep abreast of developments in social security systems which operate in many other countries.

Social Fund

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the total expenditure on the discretionary social fund for *(a)* the district offices in Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* the Lothian, Central district office and *(c)* Scotland for each year since 1988–89;

(2) what were the total returns in the budget for the social fund for *(a)* the district offices in Greenock and Port Glasgow and *(b)* the Lothian Central district office for each year since 1988–89.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 21 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking for details of expenditure since 1988/89 on the Social Fund (SF) for the district offices in Greenock and Port Glasgow, the Lothian Central district office and for Scotland; also for information since 1988/89 on the total returns in the SF budget for those offices.

With the advent of the Benefits Agency in April 1991, the former local offices of the Department were grouped into Districts. The Greenock and Port Glasgow offices formed Clye Coast & Cowal District, with the Edinburgh City and Edinburgh North offices forming Lothian Central District.

The information requested is not available for the years 1988/89 and 1989/90. I have provided, at Annex A, SF expenditure for the year 1990/91 by local office; for the years 1991/1992 to 1993/94 information is provided at District level and for the whole of Scotland for the period 1990/91 to 1993/94.

Expenditure on grants for Scotland for the year 1991/92 was less than that for the year 1990/91. This is because, in September 1990, offices received an in-year allocation of funds to help them meet costs resulting from a High Court judgement. Following amended legislation there was no reflection of the High Court judgement in the allocation for the 1991/92 financial year.

I have provided at Annex B information in respect of loan recovery for the year 1990/91 at local office level and at District level for 1992/93 to 1993/94.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A: Expenditure for the year 1990–91 for Local Offices Edinburgh City, Edinburgh North, Greenock and Port Glasgow

Year	*Local office*	*Type*	*Expenditure £*
1990–91	Edinburgh City	Grants	337,824.00
		Loans	578,464.82
	Edinburgh North	Grants	173,655.00
		Loans	492,790.00
	Greenock	Grants	321,907.45
		Loans	785,627.34
	Port Glasgow	Grants	174,583.99
		Loans	415,487.98

Expenditure for the years 1991–92 to 1993–94 for benefits agency districts of Clyde Coast and Cowal and Lothian Central

Year	*District*	*Type*	*Expenditure £*
1991–92	Clyde Coast and Cowal	Grants	493,975.05
		Loans	1,228,805.08
	Lothian Central	Grants	456,009.00
		Loans	1,092,362.99
1992–93	Clyde Coast and Cowal	Grants	518,682.69
		Loans	1,337,320.81
	Lothian Central	Grants	486,047.00
		Loans	1,201,102.00

Expenditure for the years 1991–92 to 1993–94 for benefits agency districts of Clyde Coast and Cowal and Lothian Central

Year	District	Type	Expenditure £
1993–94	Clyde Coast and Cowal	Grants	544,618.13
		Loans	1,404,186.95
	Lothian Central	Grants	502,749.00
		Loans	1,269,565.00

Expenditure for the years 1990–91, 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94 for the whole of Scotland

Year	Type	Expenditure (£)
1990–91	Grants	13,883,235.58
	Loans	31,265,101.53
1991–92	Grants	13,102,422.85
	Loans	32,571,933.75
1992–93	Grants	13,981,015.30
	Loans	35,250,252.65
1993–94	Grants	14,629,296.24
	Loans	37,215,640.22

Annex B: Loan recovery data by office 1990–91 and district 1991–92 to 1993–94

Year	District £	Recovery £
1990–91	Edinburgh City	392,637.19
	Edinburgh North	403,199.63
	Greenock	594,882.44
	Port Glasgow	306,772.61
1991–92	Clyde Coast and Cowal	1,037,612.72
	Lothian Central	897,890.74
1992–93	Clyde Coast and Cowal	1,086,162.59
	Lothian Central	1,003,600.49
1993–94	Clyde Coast and Cowal	1,247,536.72
	Lothian Central	1,058,299.28

Industrial Injuries Benefits

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claimants were awarded *(a)* weekly industrial disablement benefit and *(b)* reduced earnings allowance in each of the last six years for which figures are available in the North Tyneside district.

(2) how many claims for industrial disablement benefit and reduced earnings allowance were allowed in each of the last six years for which figures are available; and what were the total amounts of *(a)* lump sum back payments and *(b)* gratuities awarded in each year in the North Tyneside district.

Mr. Hague: The administration of industrial injuries benefit and reduced earnings allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 21 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about awards of Industrial Injury Disablement Benefit (IIDB) and Reduced Earnings Allowance (REA) in the North Tyneside District.

Information about awards of IIDB and REA is not available for all of the past six years because collection of the data did not begin until October 1991; the information that is available has been provided at Annex A. The figures for 1991–92 cover a period of 5 months and the figures for 1994–95 cover a period of 10 months, that being the year to date.

Information about lump sum back payments and gratuities is not readily available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A: Industrial injury disablement benefit and reduced earnings allowance claims at the North Tyneside district

Year	IIDB	REA
1991–92	159	71
1992–93	219	103
1993–94	139	111
1994–95	166	93

Note:
1. These figures are provisional and are subject to amendment.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. Hague: A total of 3,863 letters were received within DSS HQ and its agencies from hon. Members in January.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Hague: The information is in the table.

	Number
Secretary of State—Peter Lilley	187
Minister of State—William Hague	276
Minister of State (Lords)—Lord Mackay	45
Parliamentary Under Secretary—James Arbuthnot	404
Parliamentary Under Secretary—Alistair Burt	319
Parliamentary Under Secretary—Roger Evans	388

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many national insurance numbers were in existence in 1965; how many have been issued since; how many in each category have been cancelled by the death of the owner or for other reasons; and what is the total number of people currently *(a)* eligible for and *(b)* holding a national insurance number.

Mr. Arbuthnot: There were approximately 28.5 million numbers in 1965. Up to 16 February 1995 a further 36.9 million have been issued.

National insurance numbers are not cancelled following the death of the owner because the record continues to be needed for a variety of reasons, for example to support payment of a widow's pension. The record is noted with the date of death. We currently hold approximately 9 million such records.

Information is not held on the number of national insurance numbers cancelled for other reasons.

Information on the total number of people eligible for a national insurance number is not maintained. However, figures supplied by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys advise that at mid 1992 the adult population of the United Kingdom was an estimated 46.6 million.

There are approximately 56 million national insurance numbers in issue. This figure includes numbers issued to people:

(a) who live abroad and are in receipt of retirement pension;

(b) who live abroad and have not notified the Department: and

(c) who may now be deceased but whose death has not been notified to the Department.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if a national insurance number is cancelled once it is shown that the person to whom it has been issued is fictitious;

(2) in what circumstances a national insurance number may be cancelled.

Mr. Arbuthnot: For security purposes, national insurance numbers are not cancelled when it is shown that the person to whom it has been issued is fictitious. This is to prevent applications for a national insurance number being made under the same fictitious identity details at a later date. All such records are collated and held centrally.

National insurance numbers may be cancelled when:

(a) a juvenile has died prior to age 16; or

(b) a national insurance account has been set up erroneously.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the verification procedure for issuing national insurance numbers, detail the changes in verification since 1965 and the minimum level of proof which is required of identification before a number is issued.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The verification procedure for allocating national insurance numbers can be divided into two main elements, namely:

Establishing a person's identity and

establishing that the person does not already have a national insurance number.

Everyone who applies for a national insurance number is interviewed by a DSS officer in order to establish their identity. At the interview the customer is asked to provide documentary evidence to support their application. The level and scope of the interview is determined by the amount and type of documentary evidence the customer provides.

Whilst the acceptability of certain documents has altered since 1965 the basic procedure for establishing a person's identity has not.

In September 1994 the Department introduced a new guide to establishing a customer's identity, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. The handbook, entitled "Evidence of Identity", introduces a change of emphasis. Whilst recognising the value of certain documents such as current valid passports, it encourages staff to adopt a broader view and suggests a method for building up a picture of the person and their circumstances rather than relying solely on documentary evidence. This was seen as essential as some customers legitimately have no documentation at all.

Given that the Department's customers come from a wide variety of backgrounds it is not possible to prescribe a minimum level of proof in terms of the types of documents that are acceptable. It is only possible to ask officers to make a judgment on each customer's circumstances.

Having established a person's identity a variety of clerical and automatic checks are made to ensure that the person does not already have a national insurance number.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column *739*, how many people in work were claiming *(a)* housing benefit and *(b)* council tax rebate at the latest available date.

Mr. Roger Evans: The latest available information is set out in the table:

	In work recipients	*Total number of recipients*
Housing Benefit, without Income Support	288,000	1,676,000
Council Tax Benefit without Income Support	321,000	2,233,000

Source:
Housing Benefit Management Information System, one per cent. sample, without Income Support, at the end of May 1993.

Notes:

1. The figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. The figures are where either the claimant and/or partner has declared earnings, which may be part-time or full-time.
3. The figures are for benefit units which may be a single person or couple.
4. There will be an overlap in the figures, as many claimants receive both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

DEFENCE

Military Vehicles

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the *(a)* numbers, *(b)* types, *(c)* ages and *(d)* manufacturers of vehicles in the current inventory of his Department's fleet of B vehicles.

Mr. Soames: My Department has some 92,900 B vehicles divided into around 15 generic categories. Examples of these are: motor cycles, cars, minibuses, coaches, vans, truck utility light/medium, truck utility heavy, 4–8 tonne trucks, 10 tonne plus trucks, recovery vehicles, fuel tankers, tank transporters, trailers and miscellaneous vehicles.

There are more than 150 manufacturers of B vehicles. Detailed information on the manufacturer and age is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Anti-missile Defence Programmes

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his policy on the establishment by the Western European Union of a European space-based defence system; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement about co-operation with *(a)* the United States Ballistic Missile Defence Organisation and *(b)* other member states of the Western

European Union on the development of European anti-missile defence programmes.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom continues to enjoy a close relationship with the US Ballistic Missile Defence Organisation and other United States authorities involved in ballistic missile defence issues. This relationship is founded on a 1985 US/UK memorandum of understanding. Additionally and more widely, ballistic missile defence issues are discussed with other allies in NATO forums and bilaterally. There are no plans for WEU to establish a European space-based defence system.

The UK is currently engaged on a two-year national programme of pre-feasibility studies into ballistic missile defence options for the UK. Once this is completed, we hope to be in a position to make a definitive decision on whether we have a requirement for such a capability.

European Armaments Policy

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the work of the informal group of Government experts of member states of the Western European Union, the Western European armaments group and the European Union to study options for a European armaments policy.

Mr. Freeman: The informal group of Government experts was set up in October 1994 to undertake a fundamental review of European armaments policies, centring on an examination of the means of ensuring security of supply within Europe and within the framework of a competitive industry; harmonisation of defence export policies; and standardisation of equipment requirements and procurement practices. The group has held three meetings to date and is expected to complete its work later this year.

Surplus Land

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the location of tracts of land owned by his Department which are surplus to requirements, noting the acreage at each such location; and which of these locations contain land which cannot be offered back into general civilian use because of unexploded munitions, radiation and chemical hazards.

Mr. Soames: Some 216 sites, totalling 11,779 acres, have been passed to the defence lands service for disposal. No sites have been identified on which the presence of unexploded munitions, radioactive material or chemical hazards would preclude their disposal. In accordance with current Government policy, the level of remediation required will depend on the proposed future use of the sites.

Officer Entitlements

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many two-star officers and above are entitled to a dedicated staff car and driver; where the officers are based; what make of car is provided, and what is the total annual cost in salaries, maintenance and car replacement.

Mr. Soames: At two-star rank and above, there are 114 posts in the armed forces and my Department, including civilians, who are entitled to a dedicated staff car and driver. These are:

Staff car and driver

Posts open to more than one service	*Offices*
5 Posts*	
1 Chief of the Defence Staff	London
2 Chairman of the Military Committee	Brussels
4 Posts*	
3 Vice Chief of Defence Staff	London
3 Posts*	
4 United Kingdom Military Representative	Brussels
5 Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Commitments)	London
6 Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Personnel and Programmes)	London
7 Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Systems)	London
8 Chief of Defence Intelligence	London
9 Surgeon General	London
10 Commandment Royal College of Defence Studies	London
2 Posts*	
11 Commander British Forces Cyprus	Episkopi
12 Commander British Forces Falkland Islands	P. Stanley
13 Head of British Defence Liaison Staff	Washington
14 Commandant Joint Services Defence College	Greenwich
15 Commander Immediate Reaction Force (Land)	Heidleberg
16 Commander Multinational Division (Centre)	Brussels
17 Military Deputy/Head of Defence Export Services	London
Royal Navy	
4 Posts*	
18 Chief of the Naval Staff	London
19 Chief of Naval Home Command/2nd Sea Lord	Portsmouth
20 Commander in Chief Fleet	Northwood
21 Controller of the Navy	London
3 Posts*	
22 Chief of Fleet Support	Bath
23 Deputy Commander in Chief Fleet	Northwood
24 Flag Officer Plymouth	Plymouth
25 Flag Officer Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland	Pitreavie
26 Flag Officer Submarines	Northwood
2 Posts*	
27 Director General Naval Personnel Strategy and Plans	Portsmouth
28 Flag Officer Portsmouth	Portsmouth
29 Flag Officer Training and Recruiting	Portsmouth
30 Flag Officer Surface Flotilla	Portsmouth
31 Commander British Forces	Gibraltar
32 Flag Officer Sea Training	Portland
33 Flag Officer Naval Aviation	Yeovilton
34 Naval Secretary	Portsmouth
35 Commander United Kingdom Task Group	Portsmouth
36 Commandant General Royal Marines	Portsmouth
37 Medical Director General (Naval)	Gosport
Army	
4 Posts*	
38 Chief of General Staff	London
39 Adjutant General	London
40 Commander in Chief United Kingdom Land Forces	Wilton
41 Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe	Mons

Staff car and driver

Posts open to more than one service	*Offices*
42 Quartermaster General	Andover
3 Posts*	
43 Master General of the Ordnance	London
44 Inspector General Doctrine and Training	Upavon
45 Commander United Kingdom Field Army	Wilton
46 General Officer Commanding Southern District	Aldershot
47 General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland	Lisburn
48 Commander ACE Rapid Reaction Corps	Rhinedahlen
2 Posts*	
49 Director General Military Survey	Feltham
50 Engineer in Chief (Army)	Minley
51 Director General Land Warfare	Upavon
52 Director General Army Training	Upavon
53 Commandment Staff College	Camberley
54 Commandment Royal Military College of Science	Shrivenham
55 Commandment Royal Military Academy Sandhurst	Camberley
56 Director Royal Armoured Corps	Bovington
57 Director Royal Artillery	Woolwich
58 Director of Infantry	Warminster
59 Director Army Air Corps	M. Wallop
60 Military Secretary	London
61 Chief of Staff HQ Adjutant General Corps	Worthy Downs
62 Director General Logistics Support (Army)	Andover
63 Director General Engineering Support (Army)	Andover
64 Director General Army Medical Service	Mychett
65 Commander Medical United Kingdom Land Forces	Wilton
66 General Officer Commanding 2nd Division	York
67 General Officer Commanding London District	London
68 General Officer Commanding 5th Division	Brecon
69 General Officer Commanding Scotland	Edinburgh
70 Commander 3rd Division	Bulford
71 Commander United Kingdom Support Command Germany	Rheindahlen
72 Commander 1st Division	Hereford
73 Chief of Staff HQ ACE Rapid Reaction Corps	Rheindahlen
74 Chief Combat Support Ace Rapid Reaction Corps	Rheindahlen
75 Director Support Land Centre	Heidleberg
76 Commander British Forces	Hong Kong
77 Commander Land Forces Northern Ireland	Lisburn
78 Chief of Staff HQ Quartermaster General	Andover
79 Governor of Gibraltar	Gibraltar
Royal Air Force	
4 Posts*	
80 Chief of the Air Staff	London
81 Air Officer Commanding in Chief HQ Personnel and Training Command	Innsworth
82 Air Officer Commanding in Chief HQ Logistic Command	Brampton
83 Air Officer Commanding in Chief HQ Strike Command	High Wycombe
84 Deputy Commander in Chief Central Europe	Brunssum
85 Controller Aircraft	London
86 Commander HQ Allied Air Forces North West Europe	High Wycombe

Staff car and driver

Posts open to more than one service	*Offices*
3 Posts*	
87 Chief of Staff HQ Strike Command	High Wycombe
88 Chief of Staff HQ Logistic Command	Brampton
89 Deputy Commander Allied Air Forces Central Europe	Ramstein
90 Director General Saudi Al Al Yamaha Project	Saudi
2 Posts*	
91 Air Secretary	Innsworth
92 Chief of Staff HQ Personnel and Training Command	Innsworth
93 Assistant Chief of Staff (Policy)	Mons
94 Air Officer Commanding Information Systems	Brampton
95 Air Officer Engineering and Supply	High Wycombe
96 Air Officer Commanding 1 Group	Upavon
97 Air Officer Commanding 2 Group	Rheindahlen
98 Air Officer Commanding 11 Group	Stanmore
99 Air Officer Commanding 18 Group	Northwood
100 Air Officer Commanding 38 Group	High Wycombe
101 Air Officer Training	Innsworth
102 Air Officer Maintenance	Brampton
103 Commandant Staff College Bracknell	Bracknell
104 Commandant RAF College Cranwell	Cranwell
105 Director General Medical Services (RAF)	Innsworth
106 Director General Policy and Plans	London
107 Air Officer Administration	High Wycombe
108 Director General Support Management (RAF)	Brampton
MoD Civilians	
109 Permanent Under Secretary of State	London
110 Chief Scientific Adviser	London
111 2nd Permanent Under Secretary of State	London
112 Chief of Defence Procurement	London
113 Deputy Chief of Scientific Adviser	London
114 Command Secretary Logistics Command	Brampton

The total estimated cost of the driver posts for the financial year 1993–94 is approximately £2.3m. Entitled officers have the use of a Rover 800 car. The total costs of car maintenance are not separately identifiable, however, the available data suggests that the likely annual cost is in the region of £300 per vehicle per annum. The total annual cost of car replacement for the last three years is as follows:

Year	*Vehicles bought*
1992–93	131 costing £1.7m
1993–94	7 costing £100k
1994–95	0

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month;

(2) how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Freeman: During January, my Department received 657 letters from hon. Members on constituency business. Over the same period we sent 536 such letters

to hon. Members. Letters on a number of other issues will have been sent to and received from hon. Members, including correspondence between Ministers in other Government Departments, but the number of these is not recorded.

Security (Central Europe)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the consequences of the US NATO Participation Act of 1994 on the security of central Europe.

Mr. Soames: Allied Heads of State and Government have made it clear that they expect and would welcome enlargement that would reach out to democratic states to its east, as part of an evolutionary process taking into account political and security developments in the whole of Europe. Active participation in the partnership for peace will play an important role in this. In common with other Allies, and in conjunction with partnership for peace, the US maintains its own bilateral co-operation programmes with states of central and eastern Europe; the US NATO Participation Act of 1994 provides for US assistance to appropriate partnership for peace countries to facilitate eventual transition to full NATO membership.

"Partnership for Peace" Programme

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which countries participating in the NATO "Partnership for Peace" programme have requested the transfer of military equipment from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: Albania has made a request for some limited logistic support equipment which is currently being considered.

Nagorno-Karabakh

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what troops or logistical support he intends to provide for the proposed Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe peacekeeping force for Nagorno-Karabakh.

Mr. Soames: The OSCE is still planning a possible peacekeeping mission for Nagorno-Karabakh; a decision to deploy such a mission would be taken only after the conclusion of an agreement on a cessation of hostilities and an appropriate mandate. Any UK contribution would be judged against a range of factors including our other military commitments.

Baltic Peacekeeping Battalian

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military equipment he intends to provide for the Baltic peacekeeping battalion.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom's contribution to the Baltic peacekeeping battalion initiative comprises infantry training conducted by a team of Royal Marines and English language training provided by the British Council. English will be the working language of the battalion. We have no current plans to provide military equipment, though some is being provided by our partners in this initiative.

The Army

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce the numbers in the Army over the next three months.

Mr. Soames: The trained strength of the Army at 1 January 1995 was about 112,000. In line with post "Options for Change" restructuring and the outcome of the defence costs study, we expect the trained strength of the Army at 1 June 1995 to be about 108,000.

Haymes Garth

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *466*, if he will identify the budget holder for Haymes Garth.

Mr. Soames: Since 1 April 1994, spending on Haymes Garth has been met from the top level budget of the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Personnel and Training Command. Before that date Air Officer Commanding RAF Support Command was the budget holder.

Manpower Reductions

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for further redundancies among senior Army officers.

Mr. Soames: There are no plans further to those announced in my answer to the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *870*.

Government Art Collection

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many paintings lent to his Department by the Government art collection have been officially classified as missing; if he will list them with their painters; what action is being taken to investigate how they have come to be missing; what is the estimated market value of the missing paintings; if they were insured; and what evidence he has of theft.

Mr. Soames: A list of 205 works of art which the Government art collection was unable to locate was circulated throughout my Department at the beginning of the year. I shall arrange for a copy of this list to be placed in the Library of the House.

The list was circulated with a request that individual members of staff check works of art for which they are responsible and report any which appeared on the list. As a result, 19 works have been located so far.

The Government art collection does not provide my Department with valuations of the works of art it lends. In accordance with Treasury guidelines on Government property, my Department does not insure these works of art.

The losses of 13 of the works on the list have been investigated by the Ministry of Defence police as apparent cases of theft. Unfortunately, in 12 of the cases the work has not been recovered, nor has the institution of criminal or disciplinary proceedings proved possible. A further case is under investigation.

Golf Courses

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how much the golf courses at *(a)* Whittington barracks, Lichfield, *(b)* RAF Binbrook, *(c)* RAF Swinderby and *(d)* RAF Halton were (i) valued at prior to sale and (ii) sold.

Mr. Soames: It is not my Department's practice to disclose the sale price of sites which is commercial in confidence to the purchaser.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which aspects of military training involve the use of land on which golf courses are situated.

Mr. Soames: The training aspects carried out are: navigation and map reading, fieldcraft, distance judging, fitness training, low-level tactics and surveying techniques.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the composition by rank of each of the golf clubs sited on his Department's land;

(2) how many members are there at each of the golf courses sited on his Department's land;

(3) what is the management structure and what remuneration for management is involved in respect of those golf courses sited on his Department's land which are not leased out to private golf clubs;

(4) how much is the subscription fee charged for membership of each of the golf clubs situated on his Department's land for *(a)* service personnel, *(b)* civilian staff and *(c)* civilians otherwise unconnected to his Department.

Mr. Soames: No central record is held of the membership details, subscription fees and management arrangements of the clubs which use golf courses sited on land owned by my Department. It will take a little time for this information to be assembled. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member when the information is available and a copy of his letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the golf courses sited on his Department's land in the United Kingdom are leased to private golf clubs; and, of these, how many cater exclusively for civilians otherwise unconnected with his Department.

Mr. Soames: Two of the courses sited on land owned by my Department, at Tenby and Canterbury, are leased to private golf clubs. The membership of those clubs is not a matter for my Department.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to whom the golf course at *(a)* Whittington Barracks, Lichfield, *(b)* RAF Binbrook, *(c)* RAF Swinderby and *(d)* RAF Halton were sold.

Mr. Soames: The course at Wittington barracks was sold to the Whittington barracks golf club; the course at RAF Binbrook was part of a larger site sold to S.U.N. (Binbrook) Ltd. and C. J. M. Cottingham Ltd., and the RAF Halton course was sold to the Chiltern Forest Golf Club Ltd. My noble friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member about the course at RAF Swinderby.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which golf courses are at present being considered for disposal.

Mr. Soames: The courses at Tenby, North Luffenham and Strensall near York are being considered for disposal.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at how much each of three golf courses being considered for disposal have been valued.

Mr. Soames: It is not my Department's practice to discuss the commercial value of sites being considered for disposal as this could prejudice negotiations on their sale.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which section of his Department receives the £63,000 accrued from the leasing to private clubs of golf courses sited on his Department's land.

Mr. Soames: Receipts from lettings and licences for use of facilities on the defence estate accrue to the budget holder with management responsibility for the site.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names and locations of the 23 golf courses sited on his Department's land in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: The following golf courses are sited on land owned by my Department in the United Kingdom:

Tidworth Garrison Golf Course, Tidworth, Hants
Upavon Golf Course, Upavon, Wilts
Canterbury Golf Club, Sandwich, Kent
Tenby Golf Club, Penally, Dyfed
Catterick Garrison Golf Club, North Yorkshire
York Golf Club, Strensall, York
Bassingbourne Golf Course, Royston, Herts
Waterbeach Golf Course, Cambs
Wattisham Golf Course, Ipswich, Suffolk
Wimbish Golf Course, Carver Barracks, Essex
Army Golf Club, Aldershot, Hants
Royal Armament Research and Development Establishment, Chertsey, Surrey
Royal Military College of Science Shrivenham, Swindon, Wiltshire
RAF Benson, Oxon
Woodhall Spa, RAF Coningsby, Lincoln
RAF Cottesmore, Leicestershire
RAF Henlow, Bucks
RAF North Luffenham, Leicestershire
RAF Odiham, Basingstoke, Hants
RAF Waddington, Lincoln
RAF Lakenheath, Suffolk
Southwick Golf Course, HMS Dryad, Southwick, Hants
Royal Naval Aircraft Yard, Fleetland, Hants

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the security implications of allowing civilian golfers otherwise unconnected with his Department to use golf courses sited on land owned by his Department

Mr. Soames: I am satisfied that the security arrangements in place for the use of golf courses on my Department's land are satisfactory.

Expenditure Reductions

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the actions, together with their relevant savings, his Department is taking to reduce defence expenditure in 1996–97 by the sum agreed with the Treasury.

Mr. Soames: An extensive range of measures is being taken to contain the costs of defence while continuing to maintain and enhance the front-line capabilities of the armed forces. It is, however, our practice not to publish

details of the contents of the Department's annual long-term costing. Major proposals and decisions that have been announced in Parliament are set out in the annual departmental report and the statement on the defence estimates, as well as in other publications, notably last year's report on the outcome of the defence costs study.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's estimated percentage change in defence expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product between 1994–95 and 1999–2000.

Mr. Soames: Defence expenditure is expected to fall from 3.3 per cent. to 2.8 per cent. of GDP between 1994–95 and 1997–98. Defence expenditure plans beyond 1997–98 have not yet been set.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk Quota

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many farmers in the United Kingdom have *(a)* a milk quota but no longer have a herd of cows producing milk, *(b)* a milk quota larger than their actual production, or *(c)* sold their total quota or partial quota in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The Intervention Board keeps a record of individual producers' milk quota but not their milk production, so the information needed to answer *(a)* and *(b)* is not available. Since 1 April 1994, when the Intervention Board assumed responsibility for the administration of milk quotas, 2,280 producers in the United Kingdom have sold their quota, either in whole or in part.

Potatoes

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list details of the increases in the price of potatoes in the west Yorkshire area over the past six months.

Mr. Jack: Details of movements in retail prices are not available at an area level. The retail prices index represents the most accurate indicator available of price movements and is for the United Kingdom as a whole. Information on movements in the indices for potatoes for the period July 1994 to January 1995 is shown in the table.

The retail prices index: potatoes

January 1987=100

	July 1994	*August 1994*	*September 1994*	*October 1994*	*November 1994*	*December 1994*	*January 1995*
Raw Potatoes	131.7	197.8	171.8	169.4	169.9	177.6	183.8
Percentage of change over 12 months	25.8	53.3	46.1	51.7	51.0	58.7	60.7
All Potatoes (including Processed)	132.6	161.4	150.0	149.2	151.4	154.5	159.0
Percentage of change over 12 months.	8.7	22.6	19.6	20.8	24.1	26.3	29.7

Source:
Retail Prices Index.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what volume and value of potatoes have been imported into the United Kingdom over the past 12 months.

Mr. Jack: Provisional figures for imports of fresh potatoes into the United Kingdom for the period 1 January 1994 to 30 September 1994, the latest available information, are as follows:

Imports	*Weight (tonnes)*	*Value £000s*
Total	392,835	79,173
of which		
from EC	272,939	45,622
from non-EC	119,896	33,551

Source:
Customs and Excise.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. Jack: The number of letters received by Ministers in this Department from hon. Members and peers in January 1995 was 1,127.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Jack: The total number of letters sent to hon. Members and peers by Ministers in this Department in January 1995 was 962. Disaggregated figures for individual Ministers are not recorded.

Rural White Paper

Dr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the organisations that have *(a)* sent a submission and *(b)* indicated that they intend to send a submission for the Rural White Paper; and if he will place copies of all such submissions in the Library.

Mr. Waldegrave: A list of organisations from which my Department or that of my right hon. Friend the

Secretary of State for the Environment had received written submissions by 20 February and which have not requested confidentiality has been placed in the House Library. A number of individuals have, in addition, submitted their views.

Both Departments expect to receive a number of further submissions. The names of organisations making such submissions who do not request confidentiality will be made known after submissions have been received.

Copies of submissions which we have not been asked to keep confidential will be made available for inspection in the departmental Library in due course. In line with normal departmental practice, a list of those who have up to that point made such submissions will be placed in the House Library.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 20 and 21 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting of the Council.

The main item on the agenda was a proposal to improve the protection of farm animals transported within the Union. I reported on this to the House earlier today. A presidency compromise remains on the table, though it is not acceptable to me in its present form.

The Council had a first discussion of the proposals for 1994–95 farm prices. It will return to this item at its next meeting.

I advocated that arrangements should be put in place allowing for the leasing of milk quota across national boundaries. This will now be finther considered at official level so that the Commission can decide whether to take the matter forward.

The United Kingdom raised the question of veal crates. The commissioner said that he expected to make an interim report well before the end of the year.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 23 February 1995

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 February.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many letters were received from hon. Members last month;

(2) how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* I received nearly 180 letters from hon. Members last month. Approximately half received responses.

Treaty of Rome

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister whether he has under review any revision to article 223 of the treaty of Rome; and what requests he has received from British defence manufacturers to consider such a review.

The Prime Minister: In preparation for next year's intergovernmental conference, the Government are considering the operation of the treaty as a whole.

I am not aware of any request by British defence manufacturers to review article 223 in particular.

ENVIRONMENT

Domestic Heating Costs

Sir Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the percentage of extra fuel which is required to heat identical houses in *(a)* London, *(b)* Manchester, *(c)* Cardiff, *(d)* Newcastle, *(e)* Leicester, *(f)* Norwich, *(g)* Birmingham, *(h)* Plymouth, *(i)* Edinburgh, *(j)* Aberdeen and *(k)* Brighton, taking Bristol as the base.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The percentage of extra fuel required to heat a typical semi-detached house with gas central heating is estimated to be as follows for each of the specified locations:

(a) London –1 per cent. *(b)* Manchester +16 per cent. *(c)* Cardiff 0 per cent. *(d)* Newcastle +17 per cent. *(e)* Leicester +17 per cent. *(f)* Norwich +10 per cent. *(g)* Birmingham +13 per cent. *(h)* Plymouth –13 per cent. *(i)* Edinburgh +28 per cent. *(j)* Aberdeen +41 per cent. and *(k)* Brighton –3 per cent.

These figures have been calculated using the Building Research Establishment domestic energy model and taking Bristol as the base case.

Zoos

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those zoos which are owned by local authorities.

Sir Paul Beresford: According to our latest information, the following zoos in England, which are licensed under the Zoo Licensing Act 1981, are owned by local authorities:

Abbey Gardens zoo, Bury St. Edmunds
Animal world, Bolton
Battersea Park children's zoo, Wandsworth, London
Birmingham nature centre, Birmingham
Blackpool municipal zoological gardens, Blackpool
Aquarium, Bolton
Butterfly world, Bolton
Clissold park, Hackney, London
Crystal Palace park zoo, Crystal Palace, London
Harewood bird garden, Leeds
Lotherton Hall bird garden and deer park, Aberford, Leeds
Newquay zoo, Newquay
Pudsey park, Leeds
Roundhay park, Leeds
Sir George Staunton country park, Leigh park gardens, Havant
Stewart park, Marton, Middlesborough
War Memorial park aviaries and pets corner, Coventry.

Construction Contracting

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement regarding the implementation of the Latham report.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend announced on 7 February, *Official Report*, column *131*, that he had agreed with the construction industry that a construction industry board should be set up to take forward the proposals of the Latham report for restructuring the construction process. Sir Michael Latham has agreed to be the board's first chairman, and my right hon. Friend has agreed to be its president.

The board will oversee the working groups established in the wake of the report to look at specific aspects of the report's recommendations. It will also provide a channel for industry and client comment to Government on any legislative proposals—I hope to enter into public consultation on such proposals shortly.

Radioactive Waste

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his Department's review of radioactive waste policy.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) on Tuesday 6 December, *Official Report*, column *132*.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many civil servants in the north-west government office were involved in assessing each of the bids submitted under the single regeneration budget; and what was the average time spent reviewing each bid.

Sir Paul Beresford: In the two-stage process for submission of potential single regeneration budget bids, approximately 40 staff from the government office for the north-west were involved to some degree.

It is not possible, in hindsight, to give an average time spent on each bid.

Delegated Pay

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Sir Paul Beresford: Three of the Department's NDPBs need to change their pay arrangements as a result of civil service pay delegation. English Nature proposes to introduce its own pay system during 1996; the Countryside Commission and Rural Development Commission are still developing their proposals.

Housing Revenue Account Subsidy

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was spent on housing revenue account subsidy in each year from 1979–80 to 1994–95; and what the planned spending is in 1995–96, in *(a)* Greater London, *(b)* the metropolitan district areas and *(c)* elsewhere.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 21 February 1995]:* Provision for the pre-1981 housing subsidy system was:

Year	*£ million*
1979–80	1,128
1980–81	1,869

The amounts of housing subsidy paid in respect of the years 1981–82 to 1989–90 were as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1981–82	1,216
1982–83	887
1983–84	324
1984–85	357
1985–86	484
1986–87	475
1987–88	451
1988–89	542
1989–90	644

The amounts of housing revenue account subsidy paid in respect of the years 1990–91 to 1994–95 were as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1990–91	3,550
1991–92	3,778
1992–93	3,983
1993–94	4,027
1994–95	4,043

The increase in payments in 1990–91 was largely due to rent rebate costs being met from HRA subsidy instead of by the Department of Social Security. Most subsidy claims in respect of 1993–94 and 1994–95 are still subject to final validation checks.

Total expenditure on housing revenue account subsidy in 1995–96 is expected to be £4,119 million. Local authorities have still to submit their claims for 1995–96 and it is not yet possible to provide a reliable breakdown by area.

Air Pollution

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *674*, what information his Department will be giving to the European topic centre of the European Environment Agency on air quality; and what plans he has for changes to the monitoring system of air pollution in United Kingdom cities and in measures to reduce pollution.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* The European topic centre of the European Environment Agency on air quality has only recently been established. It is currently developing its work programme which includes preparing questionnaires for collecting relevant air quality information from member states. The Government will be co-operating fully with the topic centre in taking its work programme forward.

The Government published "Air Quality: Meeting the Challenge" on 19 January. This describes the Government's strategic policies for air quality management, including the Government's plans to expand their urban air quality monitoring programme. A copy is available in the House of Commons Library.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations his Department have received *(a)* supporting and *(b)* opposing the proposed boundary change in his draft order to create a new York local authority from (i) individual members of the public (ii) local authorities (iii) parish councils and (iv) others.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The figures are as follows:

Representation received from	*Against*	*For*
Individual members of the public	1,066	30
Local authorities	7	0
Parish Councils	26	0
Others	15	1

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations the Local Government Commission received *(a)* supporting and *(b)* opposing its proposals for the boundary for a new local authority for York from (i) individual members of the public, (ii) local authorities, (iii) parish councils and (iv) others.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: This is a matter for the Local Government Commission.

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the current electoral wards within the proposed new York local authority boundary, plus the parishes of Shipton, Overton, Upper Helmsley, Gate Helmsley and Warthill; how many residents in each of these wards made representations to *(a)* him or other Ministers and officials in his Department and *(b)* the Local Government Commission (i) supporting and (ii) opposing the inclusion of their own ward or parish in a new York local authority.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Representations to the Department have been as follows:

Ward/Parish name	*Opposing*	*Supporting*
Existing City of York	76	8
Parishes:		
Shipton	32	1
Overton	5	0
Upper Helmsley	2	0
Gate Helmsley	140	0
Warthill	40	0
New Wards:		
Bishopthorpe with Copmanthorpe, parish of Acaster Malbis	172	1
Askham Bryan, Askham Richard, Rufforth, Hessay, Nether Poppleton and Upper Poppleton	27	0
Clifton Without	4	1
Skelton, Rawcliffe	7	0
Wigginton	102	0
Haxby	43	3
New Earswick and Huntington	199	0
Strensall, Towthorpe, Earswick, Stockton-on-the-Forest, Holtby and Murton	136	1
Heworth without	0	0
Osbaldwick	5	0
Fulford	7	1
Dunnington and Kexby	10	1
Elvington, Wheldrake, Deighton and Naburn	3	2

The analysis of representation made to the commission is a matter for the commission.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what objections were received before the end of the statutory consultation period on 10 February to the Local Government Commission's proposal to set up separate parish councils for Ulgham and Widdrington Station, Northumberland.

Mr. Curry: No representations have been received objecting to this proposal.

Housing (Negative Equity)

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 30 November, *Official Report*, column *726*, if he will now update the table on negative equity.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Estimates of negative equity are sensitive to the house price index used. Based on Department of the Environment house price data, an estimate of the number of households affected by negative equity in the fourth quarter of 1994 and the value of negative equity by region are as follows:

Region	*No. of households (thousands)*	*Value (millions)*
South East	334.68	- 1576.97
Greater London	96.80	- 363.39
South West	82.82	- 282.18
East Anglia	61.59	- 238.33
East Midlands	13.67	- 19.02
West Midlands	15.32	- 15.99
Wales	17.45	- 45.94
Yorks & Humberside	30.54	- 28.67
North West	6.47	- 1.46
North	8.52	- 10.12
Scotland	8.52	- 6.12
Northern Ireland	1.06	- 1.15
United Kingdom	677.44	- 2589.34

Black Country Limestone Advisory Panel

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he will make a statement on the past work of the Black Country limestone advisory panel; and what is its future role.

Mr. Curry: The Black Country limestone advisory panel was appointed by the then Secretary of State in November 1983 to advise him on proposals for monitoring site investigations and remedial works in relation to old limestone mines in the black country which were to be funded by derelict land grant and, particularly, on the development of a practical programme of work and priorities within it.

The chairman, Sir Edward Parkes, and the five individual members, Professor David Blockley, Professor John Burland, Mr. Owen Gregory, Mr. Donald Reeve and Mr. John Trustram Eve, have served continuously since the panel's establishment until Mr. Reeve's death last year.

With the assumption by English Partnerships of responsibility for derelict land grant, which is now subsumed within the agency's land reclamation programme, the Secretary of State's need for external advice is less than it was in the past. With the publication of its reports and the advice given over the last 11 years, the advisory panel has effectively completed its remit. The panel will therefore cease operations at the end of this financial year.

The Government recognise that, although much has been achieved in reducing the impact of old limestone mines in the black country, much remains to be done. The panel's contributions point the way forward to English Partnerships in carrying forward the programme of reclamation, which was identified as a priority in the guidance issued by the Secretary of State in April 1993.

It is now for the agency to continue the programme, subject to the availability of resources, to enable the limestone problems to be solved.

I would like to thank the chairman and all members of the Black Country limestone advisory panel for the work which they have undertaken since 1983, without which the programme of remedial works to the old limestone mines in the west midlands would not have proceeded as smoothly as it has.

Freshwater Quality

Mr. Thomason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he intends to make to the 16th report from the Royal Commission on environmental pollution on freshwater quality.

Mr. Gummer: The Government welcomed the commission's report as an independent and authoritative review of freshwater quality issues. It has made an important contribution to our understanding of the issues surrounding the control of water pollution; those remain essential as we seek to maintain progress in protecting the water environment. I am today publishing the Government's response.

We have accepted many of the recommendations made by the commission; others accorded with action and initiatives which were already under way. In developing our policies for water quality in the period since the report was published, we have taken careful note of its recommendations.

We share the concern expressed by the commission about the need to protect our best-quality rivers and to tackle those stretches of river which are currently of the worst quality. In implementing this approach, we have to take a wide view of priorities for improvement both in the water environment and the environment more generally and to make assessments of the associated costs and benefits so that the maximum benefit is obtained from the resources that are available for environmental improvement. The results are encouraging. In respect of England and Wales, the National Rivers Authority, the body that we have established to be the guardian of the water environment, estimates that there has been a net improvement in the quality of more than 15 per cent. of our rivers between 1990 and 1993. In Scotland, between 1985 and 1990, the proportion of class 1 rivers rose from 95 per cent. to 97 per cent. and in Northern Ireland 89 per cent. of river length is classified as of good or fair quality.

Provision was made in the price limits determination announced last year by the Director General of Water Services for a major investment programme for maintaining and improving freshwater quality, including £522 million of expenditure in the period 1995 to 2000 specifically intended to secure discretionary improvements over and above statutory obligations. In Scotland, the water and sewerage programme currently amounts to some £240 million per annum, about 60 per cent. of which is directed towards sewerage investment programmes and the Government will be considering longer-term needs in the context of the establishment of the new water and sewerage authorities in 1996. In Northern Ireland, the Government are undertaking a major capital works programme of some £80 million over the period 1994–96 aimed at improvements to sewage treatment.

I recently announced our intention to consult on proposals for a small set of statutory water quality objectives which will allow us to test the operation of the system on a pilot basis. We are also continuing to study whether the is a role for economic instruments in improving river quality. All these issues have, of course, to be seen in the broader context of the development of European legislation on water.

There is then good reason to believe that for the immediate future, with the work of the current environmental regulators being transferred to the proposed environment agencies for England and Wales and Scotland respectively and corresponding arrangements for Northern Ireland under consideration, the encouraging trends of recent years will be maintained and that the objective of the commission report—to secure an improvement in freshwater quality—will be achieved.

Buying Agency

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the outcome of his review of the prior options for the future of his Departments's Buying Agency.

Mr. Gummer: The Buying Agency acts as a purchasing agent for Government Departments and other public bodies. It has an impressive record of securing favourable terms to the advantage of the Exchequer. Its costs are fully covered by commissions paid by its departmental clients.

I have conducted a review of its future in order to determine, after its initial period of operation, whether these functions continue to be necessary, whether Government need to be responsible for them and whether they might be better carried out by the private sector. This review, in which I was advised by consultants KPMG Corporate Finance, made an exhaustive study of the costs and benefits of this range of options.

The review confirmed that the work carried out by the Buying Agency secures significant savings in the costs of public sector procurement. It is important that savings continue, and that they should accrue to the Exchequer. I have decided therefore that to achieve the best value for money the Buying Agency should continue as a next steps agency for a further five years. The agency's chief executive has already implemented a number of efficiency gains identified by the consultants, and I have asked him to continue to examine the scope for further improvements in performance.

I have also concluded that, subject to parliamentary approval, the Buying Agency should adsorb as soon as practical my Departments's fuel branch, which negotiates contracts for the public purchase of fuels on behalf of a wide range of public sector bodies, and has a successful record of securing advantageous terms for them. These functions are complementary to those of the Buying Agency, and I believe the two bodies will operate more effectively together. My Department is consulting with its trade unions on the staffing consequences of this proposed merger.

These conclusions and consequent adjustments to the financial controls of the agency will be reflected in the framework document which is to be reviewed and updated for the period ahead.

Special Advisers

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each of the past five years, and in total all advisers employed directly by Ministers in his Department and all staff employed in each private office giving the official post held by each person and the salary or fees paid to each member of staff or adviser.

Mr. Gummer: The following information covers staff in private offices of my Department on 1 April of each year:

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Civil Servants	59	70	66	72	69
Special Advisers	4	4	6	3	4

The four special advisers are my expert adviser on the environment, Tom Burke; my expert adviser on architecture, Liam O'Connor; my political adviser, Keith Adams; and the Ministers of State's political adviser, James Gray.

The salaries for permanent civil servants employed in the private offices in the financial year 1993–94 total £1,517,302 and in this financial year, to end December, £1,059,416.

The salaries for special advisers employed in the private offices in the financial year 1993–94 total £132,394 and in this financial year, to end December, £114, 373.

Information about previous financial years or on a calendar year basis is not readily available and could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

EMPLOYMENT

Departmental Funding

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to change his Department's cash limits and running costs limits in 1994–95.

Mr. Portillo *[pursuant to his reply, 2 February 1995, c. 770]:* Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary revised supplementary estimate, the following change will be made:

(a) the cash limit for class V, vote 1—Department of Employment: programmes and central services—will now be increased by £28,549,000 from £2,302,056,000 to £2,330,605,000. The increase in the cash limit arises from additional Employment Department group restructuring costs.

The increase will be offset by savings, transfers or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many full and part-time jobs have been created between 1988 and 1994;

(2) how many full-time jobs have been lost to the united Kingdom economy since 1988;

(3) what was the number of employed persons in 1988 and the number employed in 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: Information is available only for the net change in jobs. Also, estimates of full and part-time jobs in 1988 are available only for Great Britain. In September 1988 the work force in employment in Great Britain stood at 25,760,000 compared to 24,755,000 in September 1994—a net decrease of 1,005,000, or 3.9 per cent. Full-time jobs fell by 1,776,000, or 9.1 per cent., over this period, while part-time jobs rose by 771,000, or 12.6 per cent.

A more meaningful comparison can be made by comparing similar points in the economic cycle. Between 1979 and 1990—peak to peak of the cycle—the work force in employment grew by 1.5 million. Over this period, the United Kingdom was also the only major EU country which increased the proportion of its population of working age in employment.

Jobcentres

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been placed in work by jobcentres in the northern region in each year since 1979.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Modern Apprenticeship Scheme

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which sectors the modern apprenticeship scheme will cover in 1995–96; and what funding he will make available for the scheme.

Mr. Paice: Modern apprenticeships will continue to be offered in the sectors covered by the current prototype arrangements. These are:

- Agriculture
- Business Administration
- Chemicals Industry
- Child Care
- Construction
- Electrical Installation Engineering
- Engineering Manufacture
- Engineering Construction
- Information Technology
- Marine Engineering
- Merchant Navy
- Plumbing
- Polymers
- Retailing
- Steel Industry
- Travel Services
- Wool Textiles

In addition, it is envisaged that modern apprenticeships will also be offered in the following sectors from September 1995:

- Accounting
- Air Transport
- Amenity Horticulture
- Arts and Entertainment
- Aviation
- Master Bakers
- Banking

Broadcasting, Film and Video Production
Builders Merchants
Bus and Coach
Carpet Industry
Ceramics
Cleaning and Support Services
Clothing
Electricity
Engineering Services
Estate Agency
Fabric Care
Fire Service
Furniture Manufacture
Glass
Hairdressing
Health Care
Housing
Hotel and Catering
Insurance
Knitting, Lace and Narrow Fabric Industries
Landscape Gardening
Manmade Fibres
Meat Training
Motor Industry
Paper and Board Industry
Printing
Road Haulage and Distribution
Sea Fish
Security
Sports and Recreation
Telecommunications
Timber Trade

In 1995–96, the Department will make £680 million available for youth training and modern apprenticeships.

Disabled People (Horticultural Industry)

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he is taking to encourage the employment of people with disabilities in the horticultural industry.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department has a wide range of initiatives and services which help enhance employment opportunities for people with disabilities, including those wishing to work in the horticultural industry. We will continue our programme of educating and persuading employers to adopt good employment practices for disabled people. We will also continue to provide effective practical help to both employers and disabled individuals.

The Government have also introduced a Disability Discrimination Bill which will make it unlawful for an employer to treat a disabled person less favourably because of his or her disability, without justifiable reason.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what the arrangements are for paying employers investment in people programme, contractors to South Thames TEC, since the appointment of the receiver; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Paice: Since his appointment on 21 December 1994, the receiver has been operating South Thames training and enterprise council in accordance with the company's operating agreement with the Employment Department. The receiver is making payments to providers in respect of employers investment in people activity undertaken since his appointment. He is making related claims upon the Department and the Department is meeting legitimate claims. As is normally the case when a company is in receivership, the receiver has not met claims arising from activities undertaken before his appointment.

Small Firms Training Initiative

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much in *(a)* cash and *(b)* percentage terms he expects to distribute of the skills for small business budget in 1995–96 in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: I have been asked to reply.

I am providing £1 million to fund the small firms training initiative in Wales during 1995–96. This represents 11 per cent. of the £9 million level of funding set aside for the equivalent programme in England known as skills for small business.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Prosecutions

Mr. Simon Hughes : To ask the Attorney-General how many representations his office has received in each year since 1990, alleging unfair outcomes of prosecutions in England and Wales.

The Attorney-General: The detailed information requested by the hon. Member could be obtained only by scrutiny of all correspondence and other representations received in my office since 1990 and would involve disproportionate expense.

TREASURY

Redundancies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice he has sought for his Department from the director general of the BBC on how to manage redundancy.

Mr. Nelson: None.

Government Securities

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of new long-dated government borrowing is from the accumulated funds of *(a)* insurance linked saving, *(b)* a personal equity plans and *(c)* tax-exempt special savings accounts.

Mr. Nelson: Information is available only for the net investment in long-dated government stock by insurance companies, unit and investment trusts up to September 1994.

Table: Net investment in British Government Securities (over 15 years maturity and undated). £ million and as a percentage of long gilt insurance.

	1993–94		1994 (April–September)	
	£ million	Percentage	£ million	Percentage
Insurance Companies	7,943	66.7	1,951	85.4
Unit Trusts	86	0.7	-31	-1.4
Investment Trusts	114	1.0	-54	-2.4

Source:
CSO, "*Financial Statistics*", tables 1.2C, 5.1A, 5.2C and 5.2D.

No information is available on the proportion of PEP funds specifically invested in long-dated gilts. TESSAs represent a significant proportion of bank and building society retail funds. Although bank and building societies currently own around 9½ per cent. of UK government stock, these holdings are predominantly of short and medium-dated issues. No information is available on their recent transactions in long-dated stock.

Alcohol (Illegal Imports)

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many prosecutions have been made against individuals importing and illegally selling duty-free wines, beers and spirits from the EU; and what was the total value of goods seized.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Of the 182 prosecutions brought by customs in the period 1 January 1993 to 31 December 1994 for the illegal importation or sale of alcoholic drinks duty paid in other member states, 54 involved alcohol only and 128 involved mixed loads of alcohol and tobacco. The retail value of the goods seized is not available, the volumes involved were 117,579 litres of beer, 4,556 litres of spirits and 13,314 litres of wine.

Retail Prices Index

Sir Timothy Sainsbury: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of whether the retail prices index takes sufficient account of consumers' expenditure patterns varying in response to the availability of sales and special offers.

Mr. Nelson: In accordance with the recommendations of the retail prices index advisory committees, the RPI is based on a fixed "basket" of items revised annually in line with changes in consumer spending. The monthly RPI price indicators are based on prices charged; sale and special offers available to all purchasers are included.

Reinvestment Relief

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to announce whether capital gains tax reinvestment relief for unquoted rule 4.2 companies will be extended to those companies that transfer to the alternative investment market.

Sir George Young: I announced on 20 February that reinvestment relief will be available for investment in shares traded on the alternative investment market.

Departmental Reports

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the 1995 departmental reports to be published.

Mr. Aitken: Proposed publication dates for the 1995 departmental reports are as follows:

Departmental reports	*Dates*
Statistical Supplement to the Financial Statement and Budget Report	24 February
Cabinet Office, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Departments, Privy Council and Parliament	1 March
Department of Trade and Industry	2 March
Ministry of Defence	2 March
Department of Health and Office of Population Censuses and Surveys	3 March
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and Intervention Board	3 March
HM Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's other Small Departments, and Net Payments to EC Institutions	6 March
Inland Revenue	7 March
HM Customs and Excise	7 March
Department of Transport	7 March
Department for Education	7 March
Lord Chancellor's and Law Officers' Departments	7 March
Home Office (including Charity Commission)	8 March
Department of the Environment	8 March
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (including the Overseas Development Administration)	8 March
Department of Social Security	9 March
Department of National Heritage	9 March
Welsh Office	9 March
Scottish Office (including Forestry Commission)	10 March
Northern Ireland Office	10 March
Department of Employment	10 March

Copies will be made available at the Vote Office.

Women's Earnings

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide the latest available estimates of the number of women who have earnings below *(a)* the tax threshold and *(b)* the national insurance threshold, broken down for married women, lone parents and single parents and for each year since 1979.

Sir George Young *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* It is estimated that in 1994–95 about 2.3 million women employees have no income tax liability, and about the same number have earnings below the national insurance lower earnings limit. Some women in this latter category will be taxpayers due to income from other sources. In each of the categories, approximately 75 per cent. are married women, 10 per cent. are lone parents and 15 per cent. single women. It is not possible to provide a consistent series of figures for earlier years.

Bank of England

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the core purposes of the Bank of England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 21 February 1995]:* The Bank of England defines its core purposes as follows.

As the central bank of the United Kingdom, the Bank of England's overriding objective is to maintain a stable and efficient monetary and financial framework for the effective functioning and development of the economy. In pursuing this goal, it has three core purposes: maintaining the integrity and value of the currency; maintaining the stability of the financial system, both domestic and international; and seeking to ensure the effectiveness of the UK's financial services.

The three core purposes relate primarily to the UK, but achieving them requires the bank to monitor international developments and co-operate with other monetary authorities and international organisations.

Betting Duty

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the total additional tax yield per annum that would accrue from increasing betting duty to 15 per cent.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* Increasing the rate of general betting duty—off course—is estimated to raise an additional revenue of around £500 million.

Value Added Tax (Domestic Fuel)

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total annual additional tax yield generated to date by the increase in VAT on domestic fuel.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* The total yield of VAT on domestic fuel is estimated at £950 million in 1994–95.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date the United Kingdom named Iraq as being in breach of the 1925 chemical weapons obligation; when his Department first became aware that Iraq had breached its 1925 obligations; what action ensued in respect of Iraq as a result of it being so named; and what assessment his Department made as to the adequacy of these actions.

Mr. Baldry: In a written answer to the House on 20 March 1986, *Official Report*, column *260*, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Renton) condemned Iraq's

"clear breach of the Geneva protocol".

He referred to a report by a team of specialists which had been released on 14 March 1986 by the UN Secretary-General which confirmed the use of chemical weapons by Iraqi forces in the conflict between Iran and Iraq.

The Security Council subsequently considered the report, and on 21 March 1986 the president of the council made a statement on behalf of all the members of the council, including the United Kingdom. The statement considered the

"continued use of chemical weapons in clear violation of the General Protocol".

On 3 December 1986, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution referring to the Geneva protocol, calling for compliance with

"existing international prohibitions on chemical and biological weapons"

and condemning actions contravening such obligations. The United Kingdom voted in favour of this resolution.

United Kingdom controls on the export to Iraq of chemical precursors and dual-use equipment were introduced in 1985.

Following the Gulf war and the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 687, Iraq was required to accept the destruction of all its chemical and biological weapons and all related subsystems, components and research facilities. Iraq is now subject to long-term monitoring by the UN special commission—UNSCOM.

EU Directives

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will bring forward proposals to add to the third paragraph of article 189 of the EC treaty a provision that directives shall have no legal consequences except in so far as they are implemented in national legislation;

(2) if he will propose for the intergovernmental commission a review of the European Court of Justice with an intention to limit a priori application of directives and to overcome the expression "independently of the legislation of member states" in the judgment Van Gend en Loos—ECJ 1963.

Mr. Goodlad: We are considering ways of addressing concerns we have about some ECJ judgments, particularly where they have had unforeseen or disproportionate cost implications. But it is important that any changes to the treaty articles relating to the European Court of Justice should maintain or strengthen the rule of law in the Community, which is in the interests of all member states, including the United Kingdom.

Agricultural Surpluses (Dumping)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he intends to put forward at the world summit on social development to prevent the dumping of subsidised European Union agricultural products in developing countries.

Mr. Hogg: The world summit on social development will deal with issues relevant to all UN members and not focus on specific EU policies. We believe it is important to reduce EU surpluses which damage the agricultural economies and industries of developing countries. The reforms of the common agricultural policy, begun in 1992, have already gone a long way towards reducing surplus agricultural production which led to the subsidising of exports to world markets. The United Kingdom continues to press for further reforms, including continuing reductions in support prices, leading to a more market-oriented CAP.

Chechnya

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings have been held with representatives of the Chechen people since last November; what contact they have been able to have with Her Majesty's ambassador in Moscow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In January, a meeting was organised under the auspices of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation between an official at our embassy in The Hague and a citizen of the Chechen republic. There have been no meetings in London or Moscow.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what policy his Department has in respect of self-determination for Chechnya.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We continue to press the Russian Government to pursue a peaceful settlement which allows the Chechen people to express their identity within the framework of the constitution of the Russian Federation.

China (Child Labour)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Government of China concerning the use of child labour; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: We regularly raise human rights issues with the Chinese authorities, both bilaterally and with our European partners. China is a signatory to the UN convention on the rights of the child. We have seen reports both of exploitation of child labour and of action taken by the authorities to tackle the problem.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mrs. Ghazalah Yaqoob—Ref: C5009—applied to the United Kingdom post in Islamabad to join her husband in the United Kingdom; when she was interviewed; when a decision is to be taken on her application; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I have asked the entry clearance officer in Islamabad to let me have a report on the application from Mrs. Ghazalah Yaqoob. I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as soon as possible.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the letter, dated 9 February, from the migration and visa correspondence unit of his Department to the hon. Member for Bradford, West, how many of the 31 entry applications with solicitors Aurangzeb Iqbal and Co. of Bradford asked the entry clearance manager at Islamabad to review have to date been reviewed; how many decisions have been maintained; how many decisions have been varied; if the solicitors have been informed of all decisions after review; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I have asked the entry clearance officer in Islamabad to let me have a report. I shall arrange for the hon. Member to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as soon as possible.

World Trade Organisation

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he is putting forward at the world summit on social development to request the World Trade Organisation to pursue objectives that help the poor in poor countries.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: One of the core issues which the summit will discuss is the alleviation of poverty; the UK has contributed a number of proposals for action in this area. Although we do not think it is for the summit to advise the World Trade Organisation on its work programme, we believe developing countries and their populations should benefit substantially from the effects of implementation of the Uruquay round agreements, which is the World Trade Organisation's main task.

Social Development Summit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now announce the leadership and composition of his delegation to the world summit on social development.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A final decision on attendance at the summit will be made shortly.

Child Labour

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the recent international conference concerning the use of child labour that was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh; and what response he made to the declaration.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There was not an international conference as such.

Representatives of the International Labour Organisation, UNICEF and the US Government recently had discussions with the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association about child labour in Bangladesh. The member companies of BGMEA have undertaken to try to end child labour in their factories.

We applaud this, but understand that the immediate effect has been to increase hardship as many thousands of children have been laid off with no provision for their welfare. Many of the children, instead of working in garment factories, are now working elsewhere.

This reinforces our view that the best approach to the problem of child labour is to try to tackle the poverty which is often its cause. Our aid programme seeks to address poverty, and includes funding for projects to help children in employment. We also encourage other Governments to help children, both through dialogue and by funding activities such as slum improvement schemes in south Asia.

UN Weaponry Convention

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Government plans to ratify the 1981 United Nations weaponry convention, in particular protocol II in relation to the use of land mines.

Mr. David Davis: The United Kingdom permanent representative to the UN in New York deposited the United Kingdom's instrument of ratification with the UN Secretary-General on 13 February. We will be bound by

all three protocols to the convention which cover the use of non-detectable fragments, land mines and booby-traps, and incendiary weapons.

Former Prisoners of War

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support has been given to the far eastern prisoners of war and civilian internees who are seeking compensation from the Japanese Government.

Mr. Goodlad: The Government have the deepest respect for all those who suffered as prisoners of the Japanese during world war two, and the greatest sympathy for their families.

The question of compensation was legally settled, in the Government's view, by the San Francisco peace treaty of 1951, and we are precluded from raising it formally with the Japanese Government.

British Ministers have drawn the attention of their Japanese counterparts to the strong feelings which the treatment of the prisoners continues to arouse in this country. When the Prime Minister visited Japan in September 1993, he discussed the matter with the then Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Hosokawa, and Mr. Hosokawa expressed his

"deep remorse as well as apologies for the fact that Japanese past actions had inflicted deep wounds on many people including former prisoners of war".

The Prime Minister informed Mr. Hoskawa that we were examining whether non-governmental measures would assist in solving this problem. Mr. Hosokawa agreed this approach was worth examining.

The British Government then brought together a small group, led by Sir Kit McMahon, to develop one such proposal—for a foundation financed by the private sector which could provide practical help to former prisoners. Last November, however, after Sir Kit had visited Tokyo to sound out the reactions of the Japanese private sector, it became clear that this approach was unlikely to succeed in present circumstances.

At the end of August, the present Japanese Prime Minister, Mr. Murayama, announced a £650 million initiative involving exchange visits and historical research. The United Kingdom is one of the countries included in this scheme.

We have not given up. The Prime Minister wrote to Mr. Murayama about these matters at the end of the last year. We are continuing regular discussions with the Japanese Government.

Our embassy helped the FEPOWs who recently visited Japan to meet a representative of the Japanese Government and to pay tribute to their fallen comrades at the commonwealth war graves cemetery.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Correspondence

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will reply to the British Retail Consortium's letter regarding its concern that the provisions of the Jobseekers Bill may discriminate against unemployed people who take up part-time vocational training.

Mr. Roger Evans: I wrote to the director general of the British Retail Consortium on Wednesday 15 February, explaining that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment would be responding on behalf of both this and his own Department shortly. I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Employment sent a full reply on 19 February.

Child Care Allowance

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, (1) what is his estimate of the projected annual cost of the child care allowance for 1995–96 at current levels of take-up;

(2) what are the latest figures for take-up of the child care allowance; and what percentage of those eligible for child care allowance he estimates this constitutes.

Mr. Roger Evans: It is not possible to be precise about percentage take-up levels or costs so early in the life of the new child care allowance. It will take some time for the new help to take full effect. Existing family credit recipients can claim the child care help only when their 26-week award which was current at the end of September 1994 expires, while many potential beneficiaries need to find work of 16 hours or more and to make appropriate child care arrangements.

By 31 January 1995, the latest date for which figures are available, 10,500 families had been awarded higher family credit as a result of the new help with child care charges. This figure will increase as claims made but not decided by that date are awarded. No information is yet available about the number of housing benefit and council tax benefit recipients. In the long term, we expect that, in total, around 150,000 families will benefit from the new help at an annual benefit cost of around £60 million.

Source: Five per cent. sample of family credit awards made between 1 October 1994 and 31 January 1995.

Social Fund

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 30 November, to the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes), *Official Report*, column 747, how many of those refused benefits under the habitual residence test have received crisis loans.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, (1) if he will list by county in Wales *(a)* how many applications have been made to the social fund for a payment for rent in advance and *(b)* how many of these applications were successful for each year since the social fund came into operation;

(2) how many *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans have been awarded with respect to applications made to the social fund for a payment for rent in advance in each county in Wales for each year since the social fund came into operation.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Ron Davies, dated 22 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions requesting information on the number of applications made and grants and loans awarded in respect of rent in advance for each county in Wales.

Information is not available in the format requested. Statistics are not collated in respect of the number of loan or grant applications made for specific purpose. However, information is available relating to the number of awards which have been made. The Secretary of State's directions do not allow a Community Care Grant to be made for rent in advance and, therefore, the information supplied relates only to Budgeting Loans.

The information that is available does not relate to counties. Benefits Agency boundaries do not correspond with county boundaries and I have therefore provided information relating to the Benefits Agency's offices in Wales. Data for the financial years 1988/89 and 1989/90 is not available at local office level. However, I have given information at local office level for 1990/91 at Annex A. With the advent of the Benefits Agency in April 1991, local offices were grouped into Districts and at Annex B the information has been provided from 1991/92 at District level.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A: Number of awards made for rent in advance by local offices in Wales 1990–91

Local Office	*Number of awards*
Aberdare	22
Aberystwyth	1
Ammnanford	4
Anglesey	1
Bargoed	13
Barry	20
Blackwood	8
Bridgend	24
Caernafon	18
Caerphilly	23
Cardiff Central	5
Cardiff West	3
Carmarthen	18
Colwyn Bay	8
Cwbran	9
Deeside	28
Ebbw Vale	9
Haverfordest	9
Llanelli	5
Merthyr Tydfil	4
Morriston	9
Neath	2
Newport Gwent	27
Newtown	43
Pembroke Dock	5
Pontypridd	3
Port Talbot	19
Porthmadog	20
Rhyl	1
Swansea	28
Tonypandy	6
Wrexham	29

Number of awards for rent in advance by Agency District in Wales from 1991–92 to 1993–94

District	*Number of Awards*
1991–92	
Cynon, Merthyr, Rhymney Valley	34
Gwyneddigion	47
Mid Wales and Maelor	116
North Gwent and Brecon	33
North Wales Coast	49
Ogwr Afan Nedd	13
South Glamorgan	37
South Gwent and Islwyn	87
Swansea	107
Taff Rhondda	6
West Wales	37
1992–93	
Cynon, Merthyr, Rhymney Valley	16
Gwyneddigion	94
Mid Wales and Maelor	115
North Gwent and Brecon	67
North Wales Coast	65
Ogwr Afan Nedd	7
South Glamorgan	18
South Gwent and Islwyn	102
Swansea	156
Taff Rhondda	13
West Wales	41
1993–94	
Cynon, Merthyr, Rhymney Valley	43
Gwyneddigion	86
Mid Wales and Maelor	105
North Gwent and Brecon	86
North Wales Coast	97
Ogwr Afan Nedd	20
South Glamorgan	25
South Gwent and Islwyn	55
Swansea	200
Taff Rhondda	33
West Wales	113

Mesothelioma

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration his Department has given to evidence from the Scottish cancer research scheme on the number of women suffering from mesothelioma who are not recognised by his Department as doing so; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: I am advised on the list of occupational diseases by the independent Industrial Injuries Advisory Council which keeps developments in the field of all occupational diseases under review. I understand the council is aware of this research into asbestos-related diseases which it intends to review, together with other available new evidence, as part of its work programme for the next year.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the numbers of housing benefit claimants, split into rent rebate and rent allowance categories and the total amounts paid under each heading, *(b)* the numbers and amounts of housing benefit back-dated payments, regulation 72(15) and the amount paid as a percentage of each local authority's housing benefit expenditure, *(c)* the number, amount and

percentage of amount in relation to total housing benefit expenditure in relation to discretionary payments, regulation 69(8) and *(d)* the number and amount of housing benefit overpayments and the amount as a percentage of the authority's overall housing benefit expenditure for each district and metropolitan borough council in England and Wales for each available year since 1991–92.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

National Insurance Credits

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people annually gain national insurance credits; and what estimate he has made of the cost of these credits if taxpayers contributed the sums which such individuals would have paid into the national insurance scheme from their own employer's contributions if they were on *(a)* two thirds and *(b)* average earnings.

Mr. Arbuthnot *[pursuant to his answer, 13 February 1995, c. 541-52]:* I regret that the information provided was incorrect. The correct information is set out.

In 1992–93, the most recent year for which information is available, some 10.5 million people were awarded an average of 37 national insurance contribution credits. If these individuals were receiving earnings and paid employee's national insurance contributions at current rates, those on two thirds of average earnings would have paid £734.08 and those on average earnings would have paid £1,185.48 in contributions.

Notes:

(a) Calculations based on weekly male average earnings of £366—new earnings survey, April 1994.

(b) Calculations assume that contributions were paid at the not contracted out rate of 2 per cent. + 10 per cent.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what have been the 10 largest amounts of benefit recovered by the compensation recovery unit in this financial year; and what disease, sickness or disability the person paying benefit suffered from in each case;

(2) how many people have had to pay back benefits to the compensation recovery unit in this financial year, and what is the distribution by the size of the amounts recovered.

Mr. Roger Evans: This is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Tony Worthington, dated 22 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions concerning the ten largest amounts recovered by the Compensation Recovery Unit (CRU) this financial year; also how many people have paid back benefits to the CRU this financial year and what is the distribution by size of the amounts recovered.

I have provided at Annex A a table relating to the ten largest amounts recovered this financial year.

In the period 1 April 1994 to 31 January 1995 there have been a total of 32,829 cases in which benefit has been recouped. The range and number of recoveries within each band are provided at Annex B.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A

Disease/injury	*Amount recovered* £
Back/spinal injury	84,630.01
Multiple injuries	79,186.77
Multiple injuries	79,014.03
Multiple injuries	69,945.16
Miscellaneous[1]	69,835.23
Miscellaneous[1]	68,607.50
Chest injury	68,223.99
Multiple injuries	67,843.94
Head/facial injury	66,726.13
Multiple injuries	65,514.13

[1] Non-coded injury/disease—includes lacerations/cuts, bruising or any combination where no specific part of the body is mentioned.

Annex B

Range £	*Number of cases*	*Percentage of cases*
Up to and including 5,000	27,982	85.23
5,000.01—10,000	2,075	6.32
10,000.01—15,000	1,192	3.63
15,000.01—20,000	654	2.00
20,000.01—25,000	418	1.28
Recovery exceeding 25,000.01	508	1.54

TRANSPORT

Spanish Flagships

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many Spanish flagships are not part of the British register.

Mr. Norris: The information requested is not available.

Channel Tunnel Freight Trains

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the environmental impact of channel tunnel freight trains in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The railway operators and the local authorities concerned have taken the lead in determining the environmental effects and dealing with them. My officials and I have followed this process closely and have visited some of the lines involved with local authority representatives and hon. Members.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representatives he has received regarding the environmental impact of channel tunnel freight trains in London; and from whom.

Mr. Watts: Since January 1994 I have received 113 representations from hon. Members and members of the public, and a petition from residents of west London. We have also maintained close contact with local authorities and railway operators on the subject.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take, to reduce the environmental impact of channel tunnel freight trains in London.

Mr. Watts: It falls to the railway operators to take measures to mitigate environmental effects. The measures include installing continuously welded rail to reduce the

noise of wheels on the track; ordering a fleet of new wagons, which are quieter than existing stock; and working with local authorities to provide jointly funded noise barrier schemes for locations which remain noisy. Axle loadings of international freight trains are lower than for domestic, in accordance with internationally agreed standards.

The Government have assisted these schemes by providing supplementary credit approvals to the authorities. Noise will be further reduced by the introduction later this year of new electric locomotives, which will replace the diesels currently in use.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the volume of channel tunnel freight trains currently running through central London; and what volume of trains are projected for each of the next 10 years.

Mr. Watts: There are currently 11 trains a day in each direction. BR expects a gradual increase in frequencies to 27 a day each way by the end of 1996.

Properties (Discretionary Purchase)

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish his response to the appeal by Colonel Owen and the effect of the judgment on those affected by planning blight created by developments proposed by Government Departments.

Mr. Watts: My Department will publish new guidelines for the discretionary purchase of property by the Highways Agency. These guidelines will take full account of the requirements of the judgment. The effect of the judgment on discretionary purchase of property by other highway authorities or by other departments will be for them and their legal advisers to consider.

Westminster Station

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the improvements now being made to Westminster tube station will provide full access for disabled people.

Mr. Norris: Yes.

Barking–Gospel Oak Railway Line

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports he has received of the accident on the Barking–Gospel Oak railway line on 18 February; and what information he has of plans for changing the signalling of the line.

Mr. Watts: The circumstances of the collision at Wanstead Park between the 12.30 Barking to Gospel Oak passenger train and a Freightliner train standing at a signal are being investigated by the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate, and by Railtrack and British Rail. It is too early to say what caused the accident and what, if any, remedial action is necessary.

British Rail (Through Ticketing)

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what train stations currently provide through ticketing facilities for services that do not require prior booking within *(a)* Hampshire and *(b)* South West Trains.

Mr. Watts: I understand from BR that the following stations are equipped with through ticketing automatic passenger ticket issuing system machines. Those marked with an asterisk also have access to the computerised seat reservation system.

(a) Hampshire
Hinton Admiral
New Milton
Sway
Brockenhurst*
Lymington Town
Totton
Romsey
Southampton Central*
St. Denys
Woolston
Netley
Swanwick
Fareham*
Portchester
Cosham
Fratton
Portsmouth and Southsea*
Portsmouth Harbour*
Bedhampton
Havant*
Warblington
Emsworth
Rowlands Castle
Petersfield
Liss
Liphook
Hedge End
Swaythling
Southampton Airport Parkway*
Eastleigh
Winchester*
Micheldever
Whitchurch
Andover*
Basingstoke*
Bramley
Hook
Winchfield
Fleet
Farnborough Main*
Aldershot*
Bentley
Alton
Ryde Esplanade*
Shanklin

(b) South West Trains
Addlestone
Andover*
Basingstoke*
Bagshot
Bentley
Bookham
Bracknell*
Brockenhurst*
Byfleet and New Haw
Chessington North
Christchurch
Claygate
Cosham
Dorchester South
Eastleigh
Esher
Farnborough*

Feltham
Fratton
Gillingham
Guildford*
Hampton Court
Haslemere
Hersham
Hinton Admiral
Hook
Kingston*
Malden Manor
Mortlake
New Malden
Parkstone
Pokesdown
Portsmouth and Southsea*
Putney
Salisbury*
Aldershot*
Ascot
Ash Vale
Barnes
Berrylands
Branksome
Brookwood
Camberley
Chessington South
Clandon
Cobham and Stoke D'Abernon
Crewkerne
Earley
Effingham Junction
Ewell West
Farncombe
Frimley
Godalming
Hampton Wick
Havant*
Horsley
Liphook
London Road (Guildford)
Lymington Town
Martins Heron
Motspur Park
New Milton
Peterfield
Poole*
Richmond*
Southampton Central*
Alton
Ash
[illegible]ster
[illegible]mpton
[illegible]rnemouth*
Chertsey
Clapham Junction*
Datchet
Earlsfield
Egham
Fareham*
Farnham*
Fleet
Fulwell
Hamworthy
Hedge End
Hinchley Wood
Honiton
Hounslow
Liss
Micheldever
Netley
Norbiton
Oxshott
Portchester
Portsmouth Harbour*
Raynes Park
Rowlands Castle
Sherborne
Shepperton
St. Denys
St. Margarets
Southampton Airport (Parkway)*
Strawberry Hill
Sway
Teddington
Tisbury
Twickenham
Vauxhall
West Byfleet
Wimbledon*
Windsor and Eton Riverside
Winnersh Triangle
Wool
Yeovil Junction
Staines*
Surbiton*
Sunbury
Swaythling
Templecombe
Tolworth
Upper Halliford
Virginia Water
Wandsworth Town
Weybridge
Whitchurch
Winchester*
Woking*
Woolston
Witley
Stoneleigh
Sunningdale
Swanwick
Thames Ditton
Totton
Walton on Thames*
Wareham
Weymouth
Whitton
Winchfield
Winnersh
Wokingham
Worcester Park
Worplesdon

Rolling Stock

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new action he is taking to encourage increased renewal of the United Kingdom's rail rolling stock.

Mr. Watts: It is for British Rail, including the rolling stock leasing companies, and other train owners to evaluate the needs for renewal. BR recently invited expressions of interest in the provision of new trains for Kent and discussions are continuing. The recently approved order for Northern line trains demonstrates the Government's commitment to worthwhile renewal programmes through the private finance initiative.

Driving Test Centres

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list, by region, the number of driving test centres in Scotland;

(2) if he will list, by region, the number of driving test centres that have closed in the past 15 years in Scotland.

Mr. Norris: These are operational matters for the Driving Standards Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from L. M. Manley to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 23 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your questions about the number of driving test centres in Scotland and the number that have been closed in the past 15 years.

I attach a list of the current 30 permanent centres and 66 outstations for "L" tests and 5 permanent and 11 outstations for LGV/PCV tests in Scotland. This includes those centres where we have had to change accommodation in the same area, for example because the lease expired.

With the exception of those centres where the Agency has had had to vacate for the above reasons it has closed centres at Alloa (Central), Arbroath LGV (Tayside), Brechin (Tayside), Cumbrae (Strathclyde), Keith (Grampian), Lochinver (Highland), Rutherglen (Strathclyde), and Turriff (Grampian).

DRIVING TEST CENTRES IN SCOTLAND BY REGION:

Borders
- Duns
- Galashiels
- Hawick
- Kelso
- Peebles

Galashiels LGV

Central
- Callander
- Falkirk
- Stirling

Dumfries and Galloway
- Castle Douglas
- Dumfries
- Newton Stewart
- Stranraer

Locharbriggs LGV

Fife
- Cupar
- Dunfermline
- Kinross
- Kirkcaldy

Grampian
- Aberdeen Balgownie Road
- Aberdeen Clunie Place
- Ballater
- Banff
- Buckie
- Elgin
- Fraserburgh
- Huntly
- Inveruric
- Peterhead
- Stonehaven

Aberdeen LGV
Elgin LGV

Highland
- Ballachulish
- Barra
- Bettyhill
- Benbecula
- Skye Broadford
- Dingwall
- Fort Augustus
- Fort William
- Gairloch
- Golspie
- Grantown on Spey
- Harris
- Helmsdale
- Inverness
- Kingussie
- Kyle of Lochalsh
- Lairg
- Lewis
- Mallaig
- North Uist
- Orkney
- Skye Portree
- Shetland
- South Uist
- Strontian
- Tain
- Ullapool
- Wick

Inverness LGV
Lewis LGV
Orkney LGV
Shetland LGV
Wick LGV

Lothian
- Bathgate
- Edinburgh Joppa
- Edinburgh Newington
- Edinburgh Parkhead
- Haddington

Livingston LGV

Strathclyde
- Airdrie
- Arran
- Ayr
- Campbeltown
- Cummock
- Dumbarton
- Dunoon
- Girvan
- Glasgow Anniesland
- Glasgow Shawlands
- Glasgow Shettleston
- Glasgow Springburn Park
- Greenock
- Hamilton
- Inverary
- Islay
- Kilmarnock
- Lanark
- Lochgilphead
- Mull
- Oban
- Paisley
- Rothesay

Saltcoats
Tiree
Wishaw

Bishopbriggs LGV
Connel LGV
Kilmarnock LGV
Machrihanish LGV
Port Ellen LGV

Tayside
Aberfeldy
Arbroath
Blairgowrie
Crieff
Dundee
Forfar
Montrose
Perth
Pitlochry

Perth LGV

EDUCATION

Feversham College, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assistance she will give the governors of Feversham college in Bradford to submit a fresh application for voluntary-aided status; and what financial assistance is available to the college to make such an application.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend has assured the governors that officials will be available to advise them as they prepare a further application for voluntary-aided status. The Department does not make funding available to help promoters draw up proposals for voluntary-aided status.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on what grounds she rejected an application for voluntary-aided status by Feversham college in Bradford; when the application was submitted; how many meetings have since taken place between her officials and governors and others to discuss the application; on what dates her officials visited the college; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: I set out the reasons for the decision in my letter of 16 February to the hon. Member. The school accommodation does not meet the standards required of schools joining the maintained sector. My right hon. Friend was also not persuaded that the school was in a position to deliver the full national curriculum. We have made it clear, however, that we are ready to consider a fresh application from the promoters.

The promoters published their proposals on 26 March last year and submitted them to the Department on 10 May. Officials have since held one meeting with the governors and others, and visited the school on 23 June.

Ethnic Minority Funding

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is her Department's estimate of the total number of full-time equivalent teaching posts that are under threat from a reduction in section 11 funding; and how many, and from which authority, have been given redundancy notices.

Mr. Robin Squire: Section 11 funding is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. The number of teaching posts to be provided in 1995–96 will depend on detailed decisions by individual local authorities in the light of the outcome of their bids for single regeneration budget and section 11 support. The Department does not collect information about the particular arrangements made by individual authorities for the management of any changes in the number of these posts.

Non-departmental Public Bodies (Pay)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by her Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Boswell: No DFE-sponsored NDPBs will introduce new arrangements from April 1995. All such bodies that currently follow civil service pay arrangements are considering their preferred option from April 1996. None has yet put forward proposals.

Child Care

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what information is held by her Department on charges levied by private nursery schools; and if she will list the available data by geographical area;

to ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is her estimate of the total level of expenditure on private day care for children under the age of five years in the United Kingdom; and what this amount constitutes per head for children under the age of five years who are in the care of private day carers;

(2) what information she has as to the average cost of a child minder to the parent, by local education authority area.

Mr. Bowis: Local authority social services departments, which register day care facilities for children aged under eight, have no responsibility under the Children Act 1989 to collect information on payments or charges for private care.

The precise information requested on national costs is not collected centrally, but relevant information for England of costs in 1990 of the different types of private day care was published in 1994 in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys report "Day care services for children", a copy of which is in the Library—tables 6.4, 7.5, 8.10, 10.10, 11.10 and table 16.2.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Industrial Development Board

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff have been employed in the Industrial Development Board in each of the last three

financial years; and what plans there are to reduce the number.

Mr. Ancram: The number of staff directly employed by the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland for the last three full financial years is as follows:

At 31 March 1992: 376
At 31 March 1993: 421
At 31 March 1994: 412

IDB will continue to make a contribution to improved efficiency within the Northern Ireland civil service as a whole and staffing levels will be kept under review in that context.

Non-departmental Public Bodies (Pay)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Sir John Wheeler: Annexe A lists those NDPBs which currently follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and will continue to do so on 1 April 1995—these are, in fact, the pay arrangements for the Northern Ireland civil service.

Annexe B lists those NDPBs which currently have pay arrangements which are different from the sponsor Department.

Departments-NDPBs will shortly be required to determine whether the existing pay arrangements are the most appropriate for NDPBs post-1995.

Annexe A

NORTHERN IRELAND NDPBS WHICH FOLLOW THE PAY ARRANGEMENTS OF THEIR SPONSORING DEPARTMENT

Northern Ireland Office
- The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland
- The Standing Advisory Commission for Human Rights
- The Police Authority for Northern Ireland
- The Independent Commission for Police Complaints

Department of Agriculture
- Fishery Harbour Authority
- Fisheries Conservancy Board
- Agricultural Research Institute of Northern Ireland
- Foyle Fisheries Commission
- Livestock and Meat Commission (Grade 7 and above only)

Department of Economic Development
- Equal Opportunities Commission
- Fair Employment Commission
- Northern Ireland Tourist Board
- Local Enterprise Development Unit
- General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
- Enterprise Ulster
- Labour Relations Agency
- Construction Industry Training Board
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Rights of Trade Union Members
- Northern Ireland Industrial Court
- Industrial Tribunals
- Fair Employment Tribunal
- Scheme for Compensation for Loss of Employment through Civil Unrest (Civil Unrest Tribunal)

NB Tribunals, with the exception of the Civil Unrest Tribunal, contain judicial appointees whose salary is determined by HM Treasury.

Department of Education
- Arts Council for Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Museums Council
- Northern Ireland Higher Education Council
- 'Sports Council for Northern Ireland
- 'Youth Council for Northern Ireland
- 'Ulster Museum
- 'Ulster Folk and Transport Museum
- 'Some grades only

Department of Environment
- Laganside
- Planning Appeals Commission
- Water Appeals Commission

Department of Finance and Personnel
- Northern Ireland Economic Council

Annexe B

NDPBS WHICH DO NOT FOLLOW THE PAY ARRANGEMENTS OF THE SPONSORING DEPARTMENT

Northern Ireland Office
- Probation Board for Northern Ireland
- Rathgael and Whiteabby Training Schools Management Board

Department of Agriculture
- Livestock and Meat Commission (staff other than Grade 7 and above)

Department of Economic Development
- Ulster Sheltered Employment Ltd.

Department of Education
- Belfast Education and Library Board
- South Eastern Education and Library Board
- North Eastern Education and Library Board
- Southern Education and Library Board
- Western Education and Library Board
- Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- NI Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
- 'Sports Council for Northern Ireland
- 'Youth Council for Northern Ireland
- 'Ulster Museum
- 'Ulster Folk and Transport Museum
- 'Some grades only

Department of Environment
- Northern Ireland Local Government Officers Superannuation Committee
- Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company
- Local Government Staff Commission
- Fire Authority for Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Department of Health and Social Services
- Health and Social Services Boards
  - Eastern
  - Northern
  - Southern
  - Western
- Northern Ireland Central Services Agency for Health and Social Services
- National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Council for Post Graduate Medical Education
- Northern Ireland Health Promotion Agency
- Northern Ireland Regional Medical Physics Agency
- Health and Social Services Trusts (HSS Trusts are not directly funded by the Department of Health and Social Services)
- Health and Social Services Councils

Government Policy

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list each policy change which he has announced since the cessation of murder by paramilitaries in the province.

Sir John Wheeler: There has been no change in Government policy towards Northern Ireland in this period. However, the reduced level of violence has led to a number of operational changes. These include the lifting of closure orders on border crossings, the cessation of daylight patrolling by the Army within the greater Belfast area and in other towns during daylight hours, from 15 January, and the lifting of all outstanding exclusion orders from Northern Ireland. The broadcasting restrictions were lifted on 16 September, and since December the Government have announced that Ministers will be prepared to meet council delegations including delegates from Sinn Fein, the Ulster Democratic party and the Progressive Unionist party.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Non-departmental Public Bodies (Pay)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: All the research councils sponsored by the Office of Public Service and Science expect to introduce independent pay arrangements:

1995

The Natural Environment Research Council

1996

The Economic and Social Research Council
The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
The Medical Research Council
The Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council
The Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils[1]

The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council introduces an independent pay scheme in 1994.

[1] The Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils will come into being on 1 April 1995.

Private Sector Lawyers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what assessment he has made of *(a)* the benefits and *(b)* the disbenefits of commissioning private sector lawyers to draft legislation.

Mr. David Hunt: The Chancellor of the Exchequer intends to conduct a pilot scheme in which private sector lawyers would draft part of the 1996 Finance Bill. The Government will assess carefully the results of this pilot to see whether the work of parliamentary counsel can usefully be supplemented in this way.

WALES

Mental Hospitals

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list in each remaining large mental hospital, by district and region, in Wales, how many in-patients are long stay, with over a year in hospital care and how many were admitted before 1971;

(2) if he will list the remaining large mental hospitals still open, by region and health district, in Wales, together with the number of patients, their age, the number of available beds and the estimated date of closure in each case;

(3) if he will list the large mental hospitals open, giving in each case the number of patients, their age, the number of available beds and the estimated date of closure by region and health district in Wales;

(4) how many in-patients *(a)* are long stay with over one year in hospital care and *(b)* where admitted before 1971 in each remaining large mental hospital, giving the figures by district and region.

Mr. Richards: Information on the number of resident patients, their length of stay and age, as at 31 March 1993, and the number of beds, as at February 1995, is given in the table.

	Resident Patients as at 31 March 1993						
		Duration of Stay		*Age (a)*			
DHA and Hospital	*Total*	*>1 yr*	*>25 yrs*	*>16*	*16-64*	*65+*	*Number of beds as at February 1995*
Clwyd:							
North Wales *(b)*	224	71	2	0	155	61	236
East Dyfed:							
St. Davids	225	105	3	1	128	95	284
Gwent:							
Pen Y Fal	277	184	1	1	84	180	130
St. Cadoc's	186	80	0	1	64	119	236
Mid Glamorgan:							
Glanrhyd	298	184	7	1	101	186	164
Powys:							
Mid Wales	172	104	10	0	61	104	156

DHA and Hospital	Resident Patients as at 31 March 1993						
		Duration of Stay		Age (a)			
	Total	>1 yr	>25 yrs	>16	16-64	65+	Number of beds as at February 1995
South Glamorgan:							
Whitchurch	240	107	2	8	121	110	266
West Glamorgan:							
Cefn Coed	265	83	0	1	126	133	298

Source: Psychiatric Census 1993, unpublished information provided by health authorities, 1995.
(a) Excluding age not known.
(b) North Wales is due to close in September 1995.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the large mental hospitals which have closed in Wales, by region and district, and the present use of their sites;

(2) if he will list any region and district those large mental hospitals which have closed in each of the last five years; and if he will give the present use of their sites.

Mr. Richards: Parc hospital, Mid Glamorgan closed in September 1994. The site was sold to the Home Office for use as a grade 2 prison.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, (1) if he will list the remaining large mental hospitals, by region and district, which are still admitting *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* acute admissions;

(2) if he will list the large mental hospitals which are still admitted *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* acute admissions by region and district.

Mr. Richards: All remaining large mental illness hospitals, listed as follows, are still admitting patients:

Clwyd—North Wales
East Dyfed—St. David's
Gwent—Pen y Fal
—St. Cadoc's
Mid Glamorgan—Glanrhyd
Powys—Mid Wales
South Glamorgan—Whitechurch
West Glamorgan—Cefn Coed

Bryn Alyn Hall School

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received concerning the deregistration of Bryn Alyn Hall residential school; on what date these representations began; what investigations his Department undertook into the proper running of the school under the Children Act 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I have not received specific representations concerning the registration of Bryn Alyn Hall school. The Welsh Office Education Department, through Her Majesty's inspectors of schools, has been monitoring standards at the school and is currently considering the report of HMI's latest inspection. The Welsh Office has not investigated the running of the school under the Children Act, but I understand that the Clwyd social services department has inspected the welfare of children accommodated there in the light of its responsibilities under section 87 of that Act.

NHS Staff Cars

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, if he will list for 1993–94 the expenditure on staff cars for *(a)* regional health authorities, *(b)* district health authorities and *(c)* hospital trusts in Wales.

Mr. Richards: The information requested is not held centrally.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement explaining how he took into account the teachers' pay award when allocating revenue support grant to county councils.

Mr. Richards: My right hon. Friend's 1995–96 local government settlement decisions took account of Welsh local authorities' need to spend and their ability to make efficiency savings. They also reflected the Government's view that public sector pay increases should be paid for through improved performance. Revenue support grant in support of spending is allocated between local authorities in accordance with distribution formulae agreed annually with the local authority associations. The formulae for county councils take account of pupil numbers and the relative costs of teaching them.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the cost of implementing the teachers' pay award for each local education authority in Wales; and if he will give figures for employers' contribution to *(a)* national insurance and *(b)* pensions in addition to the direct wage costs.

Mr. Richards: The teachers' pay award will cost local education authorities in Wales about £16 million. This excludes the cost of national insurance and pension contributions which cannot be separately identified. I have not estimated the cost to each LEA.

School Budgets

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the schools which are holding significant balances in their budgets without plans for how the money should be spent, by local education authority;

(2) if he will list those schools which had deficit budgets at the end of the 1993–94 financial year for schools, by local education authority.

Mr. Richards: Budgetary details of individual LEA-maintained schools are contained in financial outturn statements that LEAs are required to prepare under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988. Copies of the statements for the financial year ending 31 March 1994 have been placed in the Library of the House. Comparable figures for grant-maintained schools are given in the following table.

Grant-maintained school	£
Bryn Elian, Clwyd	77,480
Derwen, Clwyd	30,054
Eirias, Clwyd	214,357
Emrys ap Iwan, Clwyd	111,062
Maelor, Clwyd	34,670
Pen-y-Bryn, Clwyd	-1,546
Brynmawr, Gwent	6,918
Cwmcarn, Gwent	-18,510
Our Lady and St Michaels, Gwent	272
St. Albans, Gwent	35,095
Caergeiliog, Gwynedd	36,729
Llanerfyl, Powys	30,213
St. Cyres, South Glamorgan	100,993
Stanwell, South Glamorgan	118,129
Bishop Vaughan, West Glamorgan	69,542

Cardiff Bay

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further progress there has been on the acquisition of land for the purposes of a bird sanctuary, adjudged to be comparable with the loss of wetland wading birds' feeding grounds at Cardiff bay; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Cardiff Bay development corporation is discussing the statutory processes for acquiring land with the Land Authority for Wales.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Countryside Council for Wales concerning the progress on the bird mitigation measures proposed in consequence of the loss of wader wetlands feeding grounds at Cardiff bay.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the dates of instalment payments of urban investment grant paid by the Cardiff Bay development corporation to Grosvenor Waterside plc with respect to the development of accommodation for the relocation of NCM Ltd. from the Crown buildings, Cathays Park.

Mr. Redwood: Payment of UIG within the urban development area is an operational matter for the Cardiff Bay development corporation and the chief executive will respond to the hon. Member in writing.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the payment of urban investment grant to Grosvenor Waterside with respect to the provision of a pre-let office block to accommodate NCM Ltd. on its relocation from Crown buildings, Cathays Park.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Child Abuse

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, further to his press release of 10 February, what provision he will make for the Queen's counsel appointed under section 81 of the Children Act 1989 in respect of child abuse in north Wales to investigate his relevant departmental files.

Mr. Redwood: The QC will have full access to all relevant papers held by my Department.

University Hospital of Wales (Access Road)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of South Glamorgan health authority concerning the funding of the new access road and flyover connecting the Eastern avenue—A48—trunk road and the University hospital of Wales.

Mr. Redwood: I met with the chairman of South Glamorgan health authority on 8 March 1994 to discuss a wide range of issues.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to increase the percentage of aid money spent on children's health, educational and developmental needs.

Mr. Baldry: One aid programme priority objective is effective support for the development of education and basic health services. The activities we support will help meet the needs of children and young people.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of the United Kingdom aid budget is currently on *(a)* primary health care, *(b)* nutrition and malnutrition, *(c)* education, *(d)* immunisation programmes, *(e)* job creation and *(f)* infrastructure.

Mr. Baldry: The information requested is given in the table for 1993–94, the latest year for which information is available.

Percentage of ODA bilateral aid which is allocable by sector spent on selected sectors, 1993–94.

Primary Health Care—7.5 per cent.

Nutrition and Malnutrition—0.04 per cent.[1]

Education—17.6 per cent.

Immunisation Programmes—n/a[2]

Job Creation—n/a[2]

Infrastructure—n/a[2]

Notes

[1] Over £270,000 was spent on specific nutrition and malnutrition projects in 1993–94. Many other projects also contained a nutrition and malnutrition element, but are part of wider projects and thus not included in these figures.

[2] The ODA's management information system does not separately identify expenditure on immunisation, job creation and infrastructure. It is therefore not possible to identify expenditure on those sectors except at a disproportionate cost.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of development aid to the education sector is allocated to expanding non-formal education.

Mr. Baldry: In 1993–94, the latest year for which information is available, 0.5 per cent. of identifiable expenditure on aid to the education sector was allocated to non-formal education projects. This amounted to £569,000.

In addition, other significant bilateral project expenditure, for which figures are not centrally held, gave support to the non-formal education sector.

Overseas Projects

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures are taken by his Department to ensure the full participation of vulnerable groups in the design, implementation and evaluation of Overseas Development Administration projects.

Mr. Baldry: The Overseas Development Administration gives a high priority to issues of participation and ownership. A range of methods are currently being deployed to ensure that all stakeholders, including vulnerable groups, participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of projects.

Social Development Summit

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of the options under consideration in the current draft declaration of the world summit on social development contained in paragraph 88 and concerning the provision of aid resources for priority human needs the Government are intending to support.

Mr. Baldry: We support the aim of increasing resources for basic human development priorities. We welcome the recognition in the social summit draft declaration of the responsibilities of developing countries' Governments to provide services to their people, but we have doubts about the value of assigning specific targets to either donors or recipients of aid, not least because of data measurement and comparability issues. The quality of basic services is as important as their coverage. We shall therefore not be supporting options 1 or 2 of paragraph 88(c) of the draft programme of action.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the British delegation to the United Nations social summit in Copenhagen will support the proposal to reserve 20 per cent. of the aid given to developing countries by donor nations and 20 per cent. of the budgets of poorer nations for social projects such as improved access to education and health care.

Mr. Baldry: We support the aim of increasing resources for basic human development priorities. We welcome the recognition in the social summit draft declaration of the responsibilities of developing countries' Governments to provide services to their people, but we do not favour assigning specific targets to either donors or recipients of aid, not least because of data measurement and comparability issues. The quality of basic services is as important as their coverage.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will promote, at the world summit on social development, proposals that require donors to reduce the amount of tied aid in their programme.

Mr. Baldry: No. The world summit on social development has a different focus, and would not be a suitable forum for pursuing aid-tying issues.

Mr. Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will pursue at the world summit on social development the proposal for a limited sale of International Monetary Fund gold stocks to assist those developing countries for whom multilateral debt is a significant problem.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. and learned Friend the Chancellor of Exchequer proposed limited sale of IMF gold stocks as a part of his initiative on multilateral debt. We shall encourage participants at the summit to support the Chancellor's initiative.

We hope that further progress will be made when the initiative is discussed at the spring meetings of the IMF and World bank in April.

Poverty

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts his Department are making to support measures taken by developing countries to eradicate poverty; and how his Department will strengthen the capacity of poor countries to assess the impact of international policies and programmes on the poorest people.

Mr. Baldry: The main aim of the aid programme, as stated in ODA's mission statement, is to

"help people in countries poorer than our own improve their lives." Accordingly, all the UK's objectives for the aid programme are concerned with poverty reduction.

ODA assists poor countries to strengthen their capacity to assess the impact of international policies and programmes on the poorest people in a number of ways—for example:

(a) by participating in World Bank poverty assessments, which have been carried out in a number of countries, ODA aims to improve poor countries' information on poverty and promote increased ownership by countries of policies and programmes;

(b) by undertaking a three-year collaborative research project with the NGO Action Aid, ODA is developing output indicators for poverty projects from the perspectives of the intended beneficiaries, project managers and aid donors;

(c) by supporting a three-year research programme by the Institute of Development Studies on the relative impact on the poor of direct poverty reduction projects in comparison with economic reform policies.

European Bank for Reconstruction Development

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his share of voting power at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom's current share is 8.97 per cent.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in what ways the policy of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development differs from that of the World bank or other Government-funded development banks.

Mr. Baldry: The EBRD and the World bank work closely in the countries of central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to foster the transition towards open, market-oriented economies. The EBRD has a specific remit to promote private and entrepreneurial initiative and provides project finance only. It is not involved in policy-based sector or balance of payments lending.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent the

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development invests in projects of human resource development including education and health initiatives.

Mr. Baldry: The bank supports regional training institutions relevant to its project investments and provides consultancy support to individual enterprises to develop management capacity. The education and health sectors are not priority areas for the bank.

Tobacco

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds have been committed to tobacco growing and processing in developing countries in each of the past 10 years by *(a)* the World bank and *(b)* the Overseas Development Administration.

Mr. Baldry *[holding reply 22 February 1995]:* We are in touch with the World bank about the information requested and I will write to the hon. Member once we have a response.

As for the Overseas Development Administration, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for York (Mr. Bayley) on 25 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *425*.

International Development Association

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the recent international meeting to discuss the replenishment of the International Development Association.

Mr. Baldry *[holding reply 22 February 1995]:* This was the second in a series of meetings expected to continue throughout 1995. Donors discussed IDA's approach to development effectiveness, and the challenges faced by both donors and recipients in the poorest countries, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa. There was also a preliminary exchange of views on such issues as regional allocations, support for structural adjustment and multilateral debt.

Aid (Pakistan)

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total amount of United Kingdom aid to Pakistan in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Baldry: Britain provided £48.2 million of aid in 1993–94. This included £24.4 million of Commonwealth Development Corporation investment, £16.5 million of ODA project aid, £4.2 million of emergency aid and £3 million of debt relief.

Saharwi Refugees

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid has been given to the Saharwi refugees of Western Sahara in each of the last three years, and what is planned for the forthcoming year.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 9 February, *Official Report*, column *349*. Future allocations have not been decided.

SCOTLAND

Paediatricians

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total number of consultant paediatricians employed per regional health board; and what are the estimated required levels of staffing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is shown in the table:

Consultants in medical and surgical paediatrics as at 30 September 1994 for each health board area, whole-time equivalents (WTE)

Health Board Area	*Whole-time equivalent*
Argyll and Clyde	5.0
Ayrshire and Arran	4.4
Borders	2.0
Dumfries and Galloway	2.0
Fife	4.0
Forth Valley	1.0
Grampian	10.3
Greater Glasgow	25.6
Highland	3.0
Lanarkshire	4.0
Lothian	17.5
Tayside	9.5
Scotland	88.3

The figures do not take account of consultants in other specialties with a special interest in treating children.

In general, consultants are employed by NHS trusts. There is no establishment set; it is for individual trusts to determine local needs.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest estimate of the numbers of paediatricians currently in training; and if he will give a breakdown of the numbers per training establishment.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Provisional figures for 30 September 1994 show that there were 33 registrars and 21 senior registrars in training in paediatrics. Of these, five registrars and one senior registrar were overseas doctors. Information is not held centrally on the numbers employed in individual NHS trusts.

Taiwanese Inward Investment

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what efforts he has made in the past five years to attract Taiwanese investment; and what results he has had, giving the information by project, location, product and number of jobs created.

Mr. Kynoch: Taiwanese inward investment in Europe has generally been very low, and there are currently no manufacturing projects in Scotland which are Taiwanese owned. However, Locate in Scotland continues to be in touch with many Taiwanese companies, principally in the electronics sector. LIS is currently reviewing its operations in relation to Taiwan, taking into account the possibility that projects may be more likely to yield joint venture and licensing arrangements rather than direct inward investment.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications his Department has received for the first round of objective 1, financial instrument for fisheries guidance funding in the highlands and islands; and if he will list those that have been approved so far.

Sir Hector Monro: Sixteen applications were received by my Department for the first tranche of awards under the financial instrument for fisheries guidance in the highlands and islands objective 1 area.

Of these, 13 were eligible under the scheme for processing and marketing of fisheries and aquaculture produce, and three were eligible under the scheme for back-up facilities at fishing ports.

The following were approved in December 1994:

Company		*Project costs* £	*FIFG* £
Processing and Marketing			
Sco-Fro Ltd.	Provision of prawn processing equipment at Fort William	160,000	64,040
Macrae Gairloch Ltd.	Establishment of a shellfish processing factory at Gairloch	240,000	96,000
Johnston Seafayre Ltd.	Upgrading of building and provision of processing equipment at Stornoway	93,700	37,480
Westray Processors Ltd.	Upgrading of existing shellfish processing factory and development of processing facilities at Westray	480,000	192,000
Orkney Fishermen's Society Ltd.	Construction of a new shellfish processing factory at Stromness	719,683	287,873
Easdale Seafoods Ltd.	Construction of a replacement processing factory at Seil Island by Oban	69,500	27,800
Ports Facilities			
Hugh Simpson Contractors	Expansion of ice-making facilities at Scrabster	915,000	366,000

Heart Transplants

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were waiting for heart transplants at the latest available date.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There were 15 people on the waiting list at 16 February 1995 with a further 20 undergoing assessment.

Brunton Theatre

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what support was provided from *(a)* local and *(b)* national public funds for the Brunton theatre in Musselburgh for the last five years; and if he will make a statement on funding for that theatre in the future.

Sir Hector Monro: Funding for the Brunton theatre from local authorities and from the Scottish Arts Council, the main channel for Government support of the arts in Scotland, over the last five years was as follows:

	1989–90 £	*1990–91* £	*1991–92* £	*1992–93* £	*1993–94* £
Local Authorities	86,580	101,520	117,270	119,440	119,210
Scottish Arts Council (SAC)					
SAC—Revenue Funding	35,200	38,755	41,468	53,541	53,541
SAC—Project Funding	26,976	5,000	—	4,000	—

The reference to revenue funding in the foregoing table relates to SAC's contribution to normal running costs; project funding relates to one off initiatives.

The future funding of the Brunton theatre is for the Scottish Arts Council and the local authorities to determine.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Jazz and Dance

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what is the policy of his Department on the subject of the establishment of a national jazz centre in London and on the advancement, development and support of jazz;

(2) what is the policy of his Department *(a)* on the subject of the establishment of a national dance centre in London and *(b)* on the advancement, development and support of dance.

Mr. Dorrell: Under the long-standing "arm's-length" principle for arts funding and development, it is for the Arts Council to formulate strategies for each of the various art forms, including jazz and dance.

Media Concentration

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action he has taken on the EU Green Paper "Pluralism and Media Concentration" since 12 May 1993.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department has consulted widely within the UK media industry about the content of the EU Green Paper on pluralism and media concentration. The views expressed will be taken into account in preparing the Government's response to the Commission's imminent consultation exercise.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what parliamentary proceedings are envisaged in respect of the second round of consultation initiated by the European Union on the Green Paper, "Pluralism and Media Concentration"; and if a second document is expected from the EU on pluralism and media concentration in order to tie in with the second round of consultations now taking place.

Mr. Dorrell: A copy of the Government's response to the consultation exercise will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Preparation of the response will commence once we have received the further documentation promised by the Commission.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Set-aside Land

16. **Sir Ralph Howell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what voluntary schemes now exist to promote public access to set-aside land.

Mr. Jack: Last September, we launched a new voluntary countryside access scheme to encourage farmers who have suitable set-aside land to make that land available to the public for walking and other forms of quiet recreation.

Food Industry (Deregulation)

17. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps have been taken to encourage deregulation in the food industry.

Mrs. Browning: We have made significant progress since we published the food law deregulation programme in September 1993.

Animal Welfare

19. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to enforce animal welfare rules at an EC level.

Mrs. Browning: The European Commission has responsibility for overseeing the enforcement by member states of EC rules. We regularly remind the Commission of its responsibilities in this area, and draw its attention promptly to any apparent shortcomings in other member states of which we become aware.

Rhubarb

20. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what he is doing to encourage the development of the British rhubarb industry.

Mr. Jack: We encourage the development of all horticultural product in the United Kingdom, not least rhubarb, which I know many hon. Members regard with special affection.

Common Agricultural Policy

21. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the prospects for reform of the common agricultural policy following EU enlargement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden on 1 January is unlikely to have major implications for the common agricultural policy. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear to the House, however, fundamental changes to the CAP will be needed before the eastern European countries can join the European Union.

24. **Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Prime Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for tackling fraud in the CAP.

Mr. Waldegrave: Fraud against the CAP is a Community problem which must be tackled collectively by Community institutions and member states. Clearly, fraud must not be allowed to pay and the Government will continue to press the Commission for further reforms of the CAP, to reduce the scope for fraud, and for tougher penalties to be applied to those proved to have benefited from aid to which they were not entitled.

Live Animal Exports

22. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his most recent legal advice on the banning of live exports.

Mrs. Browning: As I announced on 1 February, *Official Report*, column *643*, the conclusion of the legal advice available to me is that a ban on live exports can not be reconciled with Community law, because it would be disproportionate.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what considerations underlay the issue of permits for the export of sheep and calves to Belgium from Brightlingsea on 10 February; what information was available from Nieuwpoort when the permits were granted as to when the animals would be able to be unloaded; how long the animals remained on the boat; how long the boat spent on the open sea; what assessment he has made as to the fulfilment of the requirement as to the feeding, watering and resting of the animals; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* In accordance with the requirements of the legislation protecting the welfare of animals during transport, our veterinary inspectors needed to be satisfied that the arrangements for safeguarding the calves during the voyage were in place, including suitable facilities for their feeding aboard the vessel. Officials were in close touch with the competent authorities in Belgium regarding this consignment of calves.

The ship sailed at 2100 hours on 10 February and arrived at Nieuwpoort at 0620 hours. It docked at 0930 hours. I understand that information was received from the customs clearance officer, shortly after docking, that the mayor of Nieuwpoort had served a notice preventing the landing of animals from the ship until Monday 13 February at 0900 hours. Following discussions at the town hall, the customs veterinarian requested the unloading of the calves to prevent unnecessary suffering. This commenced at 0940 hours and was completed at 1010

hours. The calves were fed abroad the vessel and at the Grotteheme lairage.

A Ministry veterinary officer accompanied the calves on their journey as far as the Grotteheme lairage and reported that the calves appeared to travel satisfactorily. They were subsequently moved to two premises in Holland where they were inspected by the Dutch veterinary authorities who report that the animals were in healthy condition.

Sugar

23. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he has made in negotiations with his EU counterparts on reform of the sugar regime.

Mr. Jack: In negotiations so far, my right hon. Friend has called for reductions in sugar prices, argued that if any quota cuts are needed to enable the Community to meet its general agreement on tariffs and trade obligations, these fall on those member states responsible for surplus Community production, and supported measures to maintain the viability of the cane refining sector. Substantive discussion is expected to continue at the Agriculture Council on 27 and 28 March.

Veal Exports

25. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on veal exports.

Mrs. Browning: Veal production in this country has been estimated by the Meat and Livestock Commission at under 500 tonnes in 1993 and, therefore, exports are very limited. I shall be opening a MAFF seminar tomorrow to look at the prospects for developing the market for veal from welfare-friendly husbandry systems like those in this country, including exports.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy have been confirmed in the United Kingdom for the latest available date.

Mrs. Browning: As at 3 February, a cumulative total of 144,437 cases of BSE have been confirmed in the United Kingdom. I am pleased to announce that, in the month to 3 February, the number of new suspected cases is down by 46 per cent. on the same period last year.

Potatoes

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with representatives of potato growers about recent price rises; what action he expects to take; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what recent representations he has received on the price of potatoes; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action he intends to take to prevent the price of potatoes rising above the rate of inflation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I have received eight letters from right hon. and hon. Members and one from a member of the public. I have explained that, in a free market, the price of potatoes is a function of supply and demand. A cold wet spring, summer drought and a wet harvest have resulted in a reduced potato crop with attendant quality problems throughout Europe this season. This has led to average retail prices rising by 61 per cent. in the 12 months to mid-January. Prices are now easing and are expected to continue to do so as supplies of the new crop from the Mediterranean arrive in Europe.

Mr. William O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what amount of potatoes were exported to each country from the United Kingdom in the past 12 months.

Mr. Jack: Provisional figures for exports of fresh potatoes during the period 1 January 1994 to 30 September 1994, the latest available information, are as follows:

Exports	*Weight tonnes*	*Value £000*
Total	101,693	18,842
of which		
to EC	70,419	12,980
to non-EC	31,274	5,862
Irish Republic	35,730	7,223
Portugal	18,019	2,679
Canary Islands	13,174	1,816
Spain	8,505	1,514
Sweden	3,030	1,320
Morocco	8,343	1,200
Netherlands	3,120	493
Germany	1,774	394
Italy	1,566	351
Egypt	1,405	299
Hungary	1,008	277
Slovenia	873	212
Algeria	1,114	173
St. Lucia	528	132
France	531	131
Belgium-Luxembourg	725	103
Other	2,248	526

Note:
Totals may vary due to rounding.
Source:
Customs and Excise.

Enzootic Bovine Leukosis

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of enzootic bovine leukosis have occurred; how many infected cattle have been identified in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement on the future of the cattle health scheme in respect of enzootic bone leukosis.

Mrs. Browning: The number of confirmed cases of enzootic bovine leukosis, and the number of cattle involved, over the past five years is as follows:

Year	*Cases*	*Number of cattle*
1990	0	0
1991	3	4
1992	1	4
1993	25	63
1994	9	26

More cases were identified during 1993 and 1994 because a national testing programme has been under way during this period.

A management review of the Ministry's animal health and veterinary group considered that the voluntary livestock health schemes, with the exception of the poultry scheme, were not central to MAFF's activities and that the Ministry should withdraw from them, leaving other bodies to take them on if desired. We issued a consultation document on 24 October 1994 indicating that we recognised the force of this argument and were minded to withdraw from or transfer responsibility for some of the schemes.

A considerable number of responses have been received from industry and professional organisations on the future of all of the schemes and these are currently being considered. An announcement will be made in due course.

Meat and Livestock Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what were the total earnings arising from the export of *(a)* calves, *(b)* veal, *(c)* live sheep and lambs, *(d)* lamb and mutton, *(e)* live cattle over six months of age, *(f)* beef, *(g)* other livestock and *(h)* other meat in each year since 1983;

(2) if he will list by type and purpose the number of livestock animals exported from Britain in each year since 1983.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* Information on the value of exports and on the number of livestock exported in the detail requested is available from the annual publication "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom". These were issued as DTI "Business Monitor" MA20 until 1988 and as CSO "Business Monitor" MA20 thereafter.

These publications are available in the Library of the House. The relevant data are currently presented in the parts of tables VI and VII of MA20 relating to SITC division 00 and 01.

Information on incomes arising from these exports is not separately available.

Non-departmental Public Bodies (Pay)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated option (i) from 1 April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Waldegrave: Of the bodies which MAFF sponsors, some jointly with the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales, departmental pay arrangements currently apply to three—the royal botanic gardens, Kew; Horticulture Research International and Food from Britain. All are in discussions with the Ministry on the timing and nature of the arrangements to apply in future.

Bobby Calves

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many bobby calves were slaughtered in Great Britain each year since 1970.

Mrs. Browning: The number of bobby calves that are slaughtered are not separately recorded. However, the information does allow the number of slaughtered calves to be split by weight as shown in the table.

Slaughter of calves in Great Britain (th.head)

	[1]Light calves	[2]Heavy calves	Total calves
1970[3]	—	—	350.0
1971[3]	—	—	254.5
1972[3]	—	—	149.4
1973[3]	—	—	140.4
1974	377.3	36.1	413.3
1975	470.6	50.4	521.0
1976	261.8	32.9	294.7
1977	231.3	32.0	263.3
1978	126.6	27.6	154.2
1979	122.7	21.5	134.9
1980	122.6	21.5	144.1
1981	93.7	25.2	118.9
1982	68.7	24.5	93.3
1983	85.9	31.2	117.1
1984	94.4	38.0	132.4
1985	69.9	31.0	100.8
1986	59.1	19.3	78.4
1987	46.0	19.7	65.7
1988	23.4	11.1	34.4
1989	20.9	6.7	27.6
1990	38.0	7.3	45.3
1991	40.7	8.3	48.9
1992	25.5	6.8	32.2
1993	14.7	3.8	18.4
1994[4]	18.8	3.5	22.3

[1] Less than 64 kg dressed carcase weight.
[2] Between 65 kg and 127 kg dressed carcase weight.
[3] Before 1974, figures were collected for total calves only.
[4] Provisional.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Expenditure on all forms of advertising on television, radio and in newspapers and magazines by MAFF for each year since 1979 was as follows:

	£
1982–83	3,000
1983–84	27,000
1984–85	26,000
1985–86	29,000
1986–87	54,000
1987–88	12,000
1988–89	380,000
1989–90	116,000
1990–91	53,000
1991–92	262,000
1992–93	494,000
1993–94	517,000
1994–95	[1]104,000

[1] To date.
Note: 1. All figures include expenditure on recruitment advertising.

Figures prior to 1982–93 are not available in this form, since they do not distinguish between expenditure on advertising and other forms of paid publicity.

Advertising by agencies is a matter for their chief executives. I have asked them to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Letter from T. W. A. Little to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 23 February 1995:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on all forms of advertising undertaken by the Agency since 1979 at 1994 prices.

CVL became an Executive Agency in April 1990 and our expenditure on advertising since that date is set out below:

	£
1990–91	24,011.00
1991–92	24,593.00
1992–93	63,686.00
1993–94	7,656.00
1994–95 (January)	9,367.00

Much of this expenditure was on appointment advertisements. The figures for 1991–92 and 1992–93 also include other associated costs of CVL's recruitment campaigns.

Letter from Guy Stapleton to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 15 February 1995:

The Minister has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on all forms of advertising undertaken by the Agency since 1979 at 1994 prices.

The Intervention Board has spent the following sums on recruitment advertising since 1989/90. Papers for earlier years have been disposed of under the Agency's records management policy.

1989/90: £60,847
1990/91: £22,711
1991/92: £15,541
1992/93: £ 1,727
1993/94: £ 2,150
1994/95: £ 4,469

In addition the Agency has once or twice a year placed notices in the trade press to inform farmers and traders of late changes in European Community deadlines. Figures for this expenditure are not separately identified.

Letter from A. M. Kerr to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 23 February 1995:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Pesticides Safety Directorate, to your Question about expenditure on advertising.

The Directorate was launched as an executive agency on 1 April 1993. The agency spent a total of £480.58 in 1993/94 on local advertisements to fill staff vacancies at junior administrative level. No expenditure on advertising has been directly incurred so far this financial year. Recruitment is more generally handled by the core Department and the advertisement costs associated with that will be included in the reply provided by the Minister.

Letter from Dr. J. M. Rutter to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 13 February 1995:

The Minister of State has asked me to reply to your question about expenditure on advertising in the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible as Chief Executive.

The Directorate was not established as a Next Steps Agency until 2 April 1990. Since that date, no expenditure has been incurred on paid advertising i.e. TV, cinema and radio commercials, press and outdoor advertisements.

Letter from Dr. J. M. Walsh to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 23 February 1995:

Parliamentary Question: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

I am responding on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to your Parliamentary question. The ADAS expenditure on all forms of advertising is as follows:

Year Ending	£
March 1993	108,967
March 1994	103,760
End Jan 1995	100,023

Letter by Dr. P. I. Stanley to Mr. Malcolm Bruce, dated 23 February 1995:

EXPENDITURE BY MAFF AND ITS AGENCIES ON ALL FORMS OF ADVERTISING

The Central Science Laboratory (CSL) was launched as an executive agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) on 1 April 1992. Expenditure on advertising for each financial year since that date is:

1992/93: £8,990.60
1993/94: £566.19
1994/95 (up to and including January '95): £12,594.23

These sums include the costs of staff recruitment advertising, which, in the current financial year, has amounted to £11,176.05 up to the end of January.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Atomic Energy Authority

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what change has been made to the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's external financing limit for 1994–95; and what corresponding change has been made to his Department's cash-limited vote.

Mr. Page: The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's external financing limit for 1994–95 has been increased by £22,000,000 from minus £8,800,000 to plus £13,200,000. The revised financing requirement reflects, first, an adjustment of £14,200,000 to cover additional restructuring costs and, secondly, a budgetary adjustment of £7,800,000 resulting from recent changes in trading arrangements between my Department and the UKAEA.

To accommodate the increase to the UKAEA's external financing limit, my Department's cash limit for class IV, vote 1 has been reduced by £22,000,000 from £1,184,893,000 to £1,162,893,000 following reductions in spending on other DTI programmes. The increase will not therefore add to the planned total of pubic expenditure.

Internet

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures currently exist for monitoring illegal or threatening material being placed on the Internet from *(a)* within the United Kingdom and *(b)* from outside the United Kingdom but being accessed from within.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 has updated existing legal controls on obscene and

pornographic material to take account of advances in computer technology. Although the monitoring of the Internet is an operational matter for the chief constable of each force, the Government have encouraged the National Council for Educational Technology to prepare guidance for teachers and parents on computer pornography. The overall question of monitoring the Internet is one that is being considered by relevant Government Departments.

Export Licences, Iraq

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if *(a)* Williams Holdings, *(b)* Leyland Trucks and *(c)* RB International have been issued with a communication licence to visit Iraq; and for what purpose.

Mr. Ian Taylor: It has been the policy of successive administrations not to comment on individual licence applications unless public interest outweighs the need for commercial confidentiality.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many export licences have been given to British firms to export to Iraq since sanctions began;

(2) how many export licences for export to Iraq have been refused since sanctions began.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The export control organisation within my Department issues licences for exports to Iraq within the procedures laid down by the UN sanctions committee. Licences may be granted for exports of foodstuffs, medicines and other goods deemed to be essential for humanitarian civilian needs.

As at 21 February 1995, a total of 791 applications for export licences to Iraq have been refused to British firms and a total of 2,370 applications for export licences to Iraq had been granted to British firms since August 1990. This computer-generated figure cannot be confirmed without disproportionate cost.

Mr. Stephen Crouch

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when Ministers or officials of his Department last met Mr. Stephen Crouch.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Neither Ministers nor officials of this Department have met Mr. Crouch in his capacity as director general of the Iraqi British Interests Group.

Angus Fire

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what purpose his Department issued Angus Fire with a communication licence to visit Iraq.

Mr. Ian Taylor: It has been the policy of successive Administrations not to comment on individual licence applications unless public interest outweighs the need for commercial confidentiality.

Child Labour

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals to exclude the use of child labour he plans to make to the World Trade Organisation.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government are fully committed to international action, for example through the UN and the International Labour Organisation, to stop exploitation of children, but do not consider that action through the WTO would be an appropriate means to achieve this.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations were made during the general agreement on tariffs and trade discussions on the use of child labour world wide; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The issue was not on the agenda for the Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations. At the conclusion of the round, certain delegations asked for the issue of the relationship between the trading system and internationally recognised labour standards to be added, among a number of others, to the agenda of the World Trade Organisation. No decision has been made on this suggestion.

Export Credit Licences

Mr. Godsiff: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the number and value of export credit licences issued in each year since 1990 in respect of *(a)* arms-related exports and *(b)* non-arms-related exports.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Details of the numbers and values of export licences are contained in the annual report of the Export Control Organisation for 1993, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. To provide greater detail than that which is included in the annual report would involve disproportionate cost.

Office of Electricity Regulation

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what further evidence, particularly on environmental matters, the Office of Electricity Regulation will be seeking before publication of the final results of the review of transmission security standards.

Mr. Page *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* This is a matter for Offer. I have asked the Director General of Electricity Supply to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has for monitoring the compliance by Offer and his departmental officials to fulfil their environmental duties under section 3(3) of the Electricity Act 1989 in connection with the proposed power lines in the vale of York.

Mr. Page *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* My right hon. Friend will comply with relevant duties under the Electricity Act 1989 when reaching his decisions on the applications before him. His duties under section 3 do not apply in considering the applications by virtue of section 3(6).

It is the responsibility of the Director General of Electricity Supply to ensure that his officials comply with his duties under the Act.

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how many people are currently employed by the UKAEA Government division at Dounreay;

(2) how many people are currently employed by AEA Technology at Dounreay.

Mr. Page: The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority currently employs 1,092.5 people at Dounreay, excluding members of the UKAEA constabulary. They are made up as follows:

	Number
UKAEA Government Division	663.5
AEA Technology	293
Other	136
Total	1,092.5

The UKAEA constabulary employs 485 staff in total, but for security reasons we do not disclose their location.

Non-departmental Public Bodies (Pay)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Heseltine: The question of which of those NDPBs sponsored by my Department having analogous pay arrangements with the civil service will decide to follow the pay arrangements of my Department or pursue an independent grading and pay system is still under consideration.

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was his Department's support for the aerospace industry in the last year for which figures are available; and what is his estimate of similar support provided in *(a)* the United States, *(b)* France and *(c)* Germany.

Mr. Page: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1036–37*.

TOPRAC

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations he has received concerning the proposed award of an investment grant to the Turkish company TOPRAC for the opening of a sanitary ware and tile manufacturing company on Merseyside; what is the value of the proposed grant; whether its award has been approved by the European Union; when it is expected the grant will be paid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Page *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* The Department of Trade and Industry has received a number of representations about this matter. An announcement will be made in due course and I will be writing to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what specific consultation he undertook with the British sanitary ware and tile manufacturing industry about the implications for existing companies of the proposed award of an investment grant to the Turkish company TOPRAC for the opening of a sanitary ware and tile manufacturing company on Merseyside;

(2) what assessment he has made of the impact on employment for existing companies in the sanitary ware and tile manufacturing industries of the proposed award of an investment grant to the Turkish company TOPRAC for the opening of a sanitary ware and tile manufacturing company on Merseyside.

Mr. Page *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the then Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 30 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *705*.

Trade (Sanitary Ware and Tiles)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the net balance of trade in sanitary ware and tiles between the European Union and the rest of the world in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Page *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* The information for sanitary ware products is published on the Eurostat Comext database which may be accessed via the Library of the House; sanitary ware products are defined as products 6975, 8122, and 89321 of the standard international trade classification. It is not possible separately to identify trade in tiles.

HEALTH

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average annual cost of caring for a person with learning difficulties in *(a)* the community and *(b)* hospital.

Mr. Bowis: The total national health service expenditure on hospital services for people with learning disabilities in 1992–93 was £750 million. The average expenditure per in-patient year in NHS directly managed units and trusts was £38,325. Total NHS and local authority expenditure on community services for people with learning disabilities was £945 million. The average cost per person is not available centrally.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will *(a)* the universities, *(b)* the hospitals and *(c)* other major institutions that are conducting research into multiple sclerosis; and if she will list the Government grants that have been *(i)* sought and *(ii)* granted in each case in the last 12 months for which figures are available.

Mr. Bowis: The Department of Health is currently funding a project entitled "Walking and mobility in patients with MS—is modification by physiotherapy effective?". The project is being undertaken by Professor Wiles at the university of Wales, Cardiff.

The main agency through which the Government fund medical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon.

Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The MRC is funding research into multiple sclerosis in:

(a) Its own establishments which are on university sites:

MRC cellular immunology unit, Oxford

MRC environmental epidemiology unit, Southampton—direct support for MRC's own establishment granted in 1993–94.

(b) Universities:

Institute of Neurology, university of London—Dr. L. Cuzner, Department of Neurochemistry, indirect support granted in 1993–94.

St. Georges's hospital medical school.

In addition, very large sums are invested by pharmaceutical companies in medical research, some of which may relate to multiple sclerosis.

Worcester District General Hospital

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when she expects the construction of the new Worcester district general hospital to be resumed.

Mr. Sackville: This is a matter for West Midlands regional health authority. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Mr. Bryan Baker, chairman of West Midlands regional health authority, for details.

Breast Cancer

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the arrangement governing the delivery of breast cancer surgery.

Mr. Sackville: No assessment has been made. Arrangements governing the delivery of breast cancer surgery is a matter for local decision.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response she has given to the Macmillan directory of specialist breast cancer services in the United Kingdom, a copy of which has been sent to her.

Mr. Sackville: None yet. We are studying the Macmillan directory of specialist breast cancer services in the United Kingdom with interest.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps she is taking to reduce the United Kingdom mortality rate from breast cancer.

Mr. Sackville: We were one of the first countries in the world to establish a national breast screening programme based on a call and recall system for women aged 50 to 64, through which we have promoted the production of guidance on the treatment of breast cancer.

In "The Health of the Nation—A Strategy for Health in England", the Government have set a target to reduce breast cancer mortality in women screened by 25 per cent. by the year 2000. The Government annually fund research into breast cancer and breast cancer screening; and have also funded health promotion material to increase breast awareness among women generally.

Additionally, the chief medical officers of England and Wales established an expert advisory group on cancer and commissioned it to review the delivery of cancer services, including breast cancer. Its consultative report "A Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services" published on 18 May 1994, recommends significant change in the provision of cancer care and treatment. Copies of the report are available in the Library.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards implementing Macmillan's 10 minimum standards of care for women with breast cancer.

Mr. Sackville: We welcome the Macmillan's 10 minimum standards of care for women with breast cancer; its campaign is entirely consistent with our desire to empower the patient and to have more choice in the treatment provided. The consultative document "A Policy Framework for Commissioning Cancer Services", published last year, recommends that all patients should have access to a uniformly high quality of care to ensure maximum cure rates and improve quality of life. The report, revised in the light of consultation, will be considered by Ministers shortly.

Spending Statistics

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if she will list spending per head of population by *(a)* each health authority and *(b)* each family health services authority for 1993–94; and if she will give the national averages for that period;

(2) how much is currently spent per capita on health services for residents in *(a)* London, *(b)* Birmingham, *(c)* Manchester, *(d)* Liverpool, *(e)* Leeds, *(f)* Newcastle, *(g)* Bristol and *(h)* England; and what proportion is spent on treatment in (i) hospitals and (ii) by community services excluding the element of cost which is attributable to medical education and research.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 12 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *465*.

In 1993–94, district health authorities spent £370 per capita on health services while family health services authorities spent £153. These figures do not include expenditure by regional health authorities, the Department of Health or other statutory bodies.

It is not possible to break these figures down further between spend on hospital and community services, nor is it possible to remove the cost element of research and education from the figures.

Comparisons of these per capita spend figures need to be treated with caution. First, not all the expenditure covered arises from population related activities. Secondly, crude population do not reflect the differences in age structure or relative health care need or in the cost of providing services. These differences feature in the formulae used to inform the main allocations made to DHAs.

NHS Executive and Policy Boards

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the general practitioners on *(a)* the NHS executive and *(b)* the policy board.

Mr. Malone: The national health service executive employs a number of professional staff from a general practice background including six currently working in the division responsible for primary care policy. None of the current members of the NHS policy board is a general practitioners.

General Practice Research Database

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many bids were received for the contract to manage the general practice research database.

Mr. Sackville: Twenty-six expressions of interest were received from organisations wishing to provide services connected with the regular collection, validation and supply of anonymised patient data for the general practice research database.

Lindane

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies her Department has carried out into the relationship between the use of lindane and the incidence of breast cancer.

Mr. Sackville: None. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. The MRC is an independent body deciding what research to support on its own expert judgment. The Department of Health expert committee on carcinogenicity has been asked to advise on any relationship between organochlorines, including lindane, and breast cancer when it next meets in March 1995, and will consider the latest available research.

Paediatricians

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, if she will list the number of consultant paediatricians employed per regional health authority; and what are the estimated required levels of staffing.

Mr. Malone: The information in the table shows the number of paediatricians in each region together with consultant child and adolescent psychiatrists since these are also involved in the treatment of children. Although the Government encourage consultant expansion, it remains for local employing bodies to decide how many additional consultants are needed and where those extra staff can best be placed. These decisions must be made in the light of local priorities.

Hospital medical consultants by region whole-time equivalent—30 September 1993

Region	*Paediatric group*	*Child and adolescent psychiatry*
Northern	60	20
Yorkshire	80	20
Trent	80	30
East Anglia	40	20
North West Thames	50	30
North East Thames	60	30
South East Thames	80	20
South West Thames	50	20
Wessex	50	20
Oxford	50	20
South Western	50	20
West Midlands	90	30
Mersey	50	20
North Western	80	20
Special health authorities	30	10
England Total	910	320

Notes:
1. Paediatric group consists of paediatrics, paediatric neurology and paediatric surgery.
2. Data rounded to the nearest 10.

Mr. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her latest estimate of the number of paediatricians currently in training giving a breakdown of the numbers per training establishment.

Mr. Malone: The available information relating to doctors in training in the paediatric group is shown in the table.

Doctors in the speciality of child and adolescent psychiatry also treat children. At 30 September 1993, there were 120 senior registrars, 40 registrars and 10 senior house officers in this speciality in England—whole-time equivalent, rounded to the nearest 10.

Junior Doctors in Paediatric Group by Region and Grade Whole-Time Equivalent—30 September 1993

Region	*Senior Registrar*	*Registrar*	*Senior house officer/ house officer*
Northern	10	20	80
Yorkshire	10	20	110
Trent	20	30	150
East Anglia	10	10	40
North West Thames	10	40	100
North East Thames	20	20	100
South East Thames	10	30	120
South West Thames	10	20	70
Wessex	10	20	70
Oxford	10	20	70
South Western	10	20	90
West Midlands	20	30	130
Mersey	10	20	80
North Western	20	40	130
Special Health Authorities	30	50	40
England Total	220	410	1,380

Note:
[1] Paediatric group consists of paediatrics, paediatric neurology and paediatric surgery.
[2] Data rounded to the nearest 10.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to her answer of 6 February, *Official Report*, column 27, if she will itemise the number of accident and emergency departments by region in each year.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the table.

Trusts and directly managed units[1] with accident and emergency department[2] by region in England.

	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Northern	20	19	16
Yorkshire	18	17	17
Trent	15	18	14
East Anglian	10	9	10
North West Thames	17	13	15
North East Thames	17	16	16
South East Thames	17	15	16
South West Thames	15	14	15
Wessex	15	14	12
Oxford	11	8	10
South Western	15	12	15
West Midlands	26	27	27
Mersey	12	11	12
North Western	26	29	20
SHAs	4	4	3

[1] A trust or directly managed unit may consist of a number of hospitals each with its own accident and emergency department.
[2] With medical staff on site and where the intention is to open 168 hours per week.

Frozen Embryos

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many frozen embryos are currently in store; how many belong to parents with whom there is no longer any contact; what representations she has received from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority or individual clinics about the storage and future of frozen embryos; and if she will make a statement;

(2) when she expects to receive the report she has requested from the HFEA on the freezing of embryos; and if she will make a statement;

(3) if she will place a copy of the final recommendations and report of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority embryo freezing working group in the Library;

(4) which groups she has consulted on the fate of frozen embryos stored for more than five years.

Mr. Sackville: The number of embryos stored by individual licensed centres changes daily. Information collected by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority shows that some centres experience difficulties in maintaining contact with patients for whom they have stored embryos, for a variety of reasons. The authority will look at the practicalities involved and will consider whether further advice to licensed centres will be helpful.

The authority's ethics committee intend to consult patients and licensed centres and will consider what further consultation is required. The committee will report to the full authority, which will let Ministers have its views as soon as the matter has been fully considered. Any action called for by Government will be taken in the light of the authority's report.

The working group on embryo freezing was an internal committee set up by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in 1993. The working group reported to the full authority in 1994. A report of its activities was included in the authority's annual report for 1994, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her policy regarding the fate of frozen embryos stored for more than five years.

Mr. Sackville: Parliament decided during the passage of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill that the maximum statutory storage period for embryos should be five years. The first statutory five-year period ends next year, on 31 July 1996.

Regulations may provide for the storage period to be shortened or lengthened in certain circumstances. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is considering this issue.

Royal Northern Hospital

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions she has had with North Thames health authority concerning the future use of the Royal Northern hospital; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: None. The future of the Royal Northern hospital site is a matter for North Thames regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir William Staveley, chairman of North Thames regional health authority, for details.

Ambulance Response Times

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the likely completion date of her departmental review into ambulance response targets.

Mr. Sackville: I expect the steering group to produce provisional conclusions in June for consultation over the summer. The review will be completed by the end of the year.

Children (Illegal Employment)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prosecutions have been made in each of the past five years against employers who employ children illegally; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: I understand that the number of defendants prosecuted under the relevant provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and the Education Act 1944 in the last five years was as shown in the table.

England and Wales

Offence Description/Legislation	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Causing or allowing person under 18 to go abroad to perform for profit [Children and Young Persons Act 1933, sections 25 and 26]	3	—	—	1	—

England and Wales

Offence Description/Legislation	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*
Offences against the Education Act 1944, [sections 58 to 60] including offences against byelaws as to employment of children [except offences relating to mines, factories or workshops]	4	—	2	—	2
Offences in connection with employment of children and young persons [Children and Young Persons Act 1933, sections 18 to 21 (Section 18 as amended by the Children Act 1972)]	23	25	15	12	5
Causing or allowing children to take part in entertainments without a licence [Children and Young Persons Act 1963, section 40(1)(all)]	—	1	1	—	—
Other	—	—	2	—	—
Total	30	26	20	13	7

In addition, I understand that the number of informations laid under the Employment of Women, Young People and Children Act 1920, which prohibits the employment of children in industrial undertakings, was as set out in the table.

England and Wales

Year of hearing[2]	*Information laid*
1989–90[1]	9
1990–91	2
1991—92	6
1992–93	1
1993–94[3]	8

Notes:
[1]Data prior to 1990–91 exclude proceedings taken by the quarries inspectorate.
[2] Years commencing 1 April
[3] Provisional
Source:
Health and Safety Executive

NHS Administration

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total actual expenditure on national health service administration for each year since 1979, in 1994 prices; and if she will provide a breakdown to show annual expenditure on central health and miscellaneous services.

Mr. Malone *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The annual expenditure on national health service administration for each year since 1979–80 at 1993–94 prices and rounded to the nearest £ million, was: £752 million, £785 million, £744 million, £712 million, £706 million, £713 million, £730 million, £764 million, £806 million, £820 million, £899 million, £1,059 million, £907 million, £992 million and £1,136 million, provisional, for 1993–94, the last year for which figures are available. The figures represent the total revenue expenditure on pay and accommodation costs of staff of all disciplines and their support staff employed at headquarters levels in regional health authorities, district health authorities, special health authorities, family health services authorities/family practitioner committees, the Dental Practice Board, and the Prescription Pricing Authority. They exclude administrative support in hospital departments and at other local levels which is regarded as operational expenditure. RHA, DHA and SHA costs are reported in the accounts as "Authority administration and purchasing expenses". This includes capital charges from 1991–92. FHSA/FPC administration costs are those reported in the annual accounts as revenue administration costs and represent that part of the total expenditure which is not medical, dental, ophthalmic or pharmaceutical. Changes over the years in the roles and responsibilities of FPCs—which became FHSAs in 1990—RHAs and DHAs—which started to transfer provider functions to NHS trusts in 1991–92—together with changes in accounting policies—particularly the inclusion of capital charges in health authorities' administration and purchasing expenditure—mean that the figures are not comparable.

For information on central health and miscellaneous services expenditure, I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State gave the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 20 February, *Official Report*, columns *28-29*.

Capital Projects

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the capital projects in the NHS with a works cost of over £1 million *(a)* in the primary sector, hospital sector and *(b)* in total in each financial year since 1990–91; if she will give the cost of each project; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* The national health service has invested over £1.265 billion in big building projects. The majority of these projects will be in the hospital sector. The information available does not distinguish between capital projects in the primary or hospital sectors. Information on the spending for each project with a works cost of over £1 million will be placed in the Library.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Restriction Orders

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons resident in the United Kingdom are currently subject to restriction orders requiring them to report to police stations when certain sporting fixtures take place in the United Kingdom or overseas.

(2) how many persons resident in the United Kingdom, currently subject to restriction orders, travelled to Dublin on the day before or on the day of the recent England *v.* Ireland match; and what action is being taken against such persons.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information received from the Restriction Orders Authority, which was established under the Football Spectators Act 1989 and is based in the national criminal intelligence service, indicates that two restriction orders are currently extant. I understand that one of those subject to such an order presented himself to a police station as required under section 19(3)(b) of the Act. The authority is not yet in a position to confirm whether the other person concerned reported to a police station as required. However, it has no immediate reason to believe that the order was not complied with.

It is a criminal offence to fail to comply with a restriction order and anyone found guilty of this offence is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one month or to a fine not exceeding level 3—£1,000—on the standard scale or both. It is an operational matter for the police, and ultimately the courts, to take action in this respect.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the powers available to United Kingdom carriers to refuse to carry those who are subject to restriction orders from the United Kingdom; what representations he has received from the police in this matter; and what representations he has received from United Kingdom carriers.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: It is a matter for United Kingdom carriers to decide the basis on which they might refuse to carry passengers. I have not received representations from the police or the carriers concerning this issue.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what are the total bids received for section 11 money by London local authorities as of 31 December 1994; what is the total allocated to meet these bids; and when he expects to be able to make a statement.

(2) what representations he has received on the funding of section 11 posts in London local authorities.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: My right hon. and learned Friend announced on 22 November, column *64* that the level of funding on offer was being doubled to around £30 million in each of the next two financial years, and that the deadline date was being extended to 30 December. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I subsequently gave to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 13 January at columns *250-52*, in which I provided information about bids from all authorities.

We are aware from various representations that we have received of concern in a number of local authority areas in London about continued funding under section 11. We are maintaining our target of announcing the results of the bidding round by the end of February.

African National Congress (Bombing)

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans the police have to interview Mr. Craig Williamson over his confession of responsibility for bombing the London offices of the African National Congress in March 1982.

(2) what plans the police have to interview those publicly named by Mr. Craig Williamson as being responsible for the bombing of the London offices of the African National Congress in March 1982.

Mr. Howard: I understand that the police are reviewing the evidence relating to the bombing of the London offices of the African National Congress in March 1982, in the light of the recently reported statements by Mr. Craig Williamson.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will institute extradition proceedings against those responsible for bombing the London offices of the African National Congress in March 1982.

(2) if he will instigate extradition proceedings against Mr. Craig Williamson in respect of the bombing of the London offices of the African National Congress in March 1982.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Extradition proceedings can be instigated only if the police have carried out an investigation which has resulted in a decision by the Crown Prosecution Service to bring a prosecution. The police are currently reviewing the evidence concerning the bombing of the London offices of the African National Congress in March 1982.

Electric Shock Equipment

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer on 9 February, *Official Report*, column *384*, if police forces are required to inform any Government Department if they possess, or intend to possess, electric shock equipment.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis would be required to obtain the Secretary of State's approval to possess such equipment, under the Metropolitan Police Act 1829. Otherwise there is no requirement for police forces to inform any Government Department if they possess, or intend to possess, such equipment.

Wheelclamping

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, when he now expects to publish his conclusions on the consultation paper on wheelclamping on private land.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: We are considering what action it might be appropriate to take. We will make an announcement as soon as possible.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people from Kenya sought refugee status in the United Kingdom in each year since 1989; and what were the reasons cited for seeking refugee status.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: During 1994, 1,130 applications for asylum were received from Kenyan nationals. Information on asylum applications for the years 1989 to 1993 is given in table 2.1 of the Home Office "Statistical Bulletin" entitled "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 1993", issue 17/94 published on 14 July 1994, a copy of which is in the Library.

Information on the reasons why applicants lodged claims is not separately identified in the available statistics.

Trials

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking with ministerial colleagues within the European Union to provide for EU nationals, and those ordinarily resident in an EU state, who are arrested and charged with particular offences, to be tried in their own state.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Government do not accept that trial in the state of nationality or the state of residence of the defendant is necessarily a desirable end in itself or that a person should be entitled to choose in which country to be tried. In principle, they believe that a person who offends against a country's laws should answer to those laws before the courts of that country and that, where necessary, extradition should be available to secure the presence of the defendant at the trial. In practice, moreover, that is where the evidence and the witnesses are most likely to be found.

Hong Kong

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the Governor of Hong Kong has submitted a further report on the discharge of his functions under the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Act 1990.

Mr. Howard: The Governor of Hong Kong submitted a fourth report to me on 16 January. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Data Protection

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the considerations underlying his decision no longer to oppose the EC draft data protection directive;

(2) what estimate he has made of the costs to British businesses of (a) implementing and (b) annually conforming to the provisions of the data protection directive;

(3) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Colchester, North (Mr. Jenkin) of 14 February, *Official Report*, columns *585–87*, if he will make a statement on the greater flexibility now obtaining in the application of the data protection directive to existing records held in paper filing systems; and what assessment he has made of the effect on the estimated costs of the directive to United Kingdom businesses of the amendments made to allay United Kingdom concerns.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There is now more scope for member states to determine which categories of paper records are covered by the directive; a new transitional period of 12 years from the date of adoption of the directive within which existing paper records must be brought into compliance with certain provisions of the directive; and clarification that such action is not required for certain paper records even after the transitional period if disproportionate costs would be involved. The implementation costs are now likely to be significantly lower than those of implementing the directive in the form in which it was brought forward by the Commission in 1992.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* The records available indicate that the Home Office received approximately 2,230 letters from hon. Members in January 1995, including those sent direct to agency chief executives and the immigration and nationality department board.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Howard *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* The information available in the number of letters sent by me and my ministerial colleagues to hon. Members during January 1995 is as follows:

Home Secretary:—151
Lady Blatch:—142
Mr. Maclean:—513
Mr. Forsyth:—143
Mr. Baker—762

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Women Ministers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, as representing the Church Commissioners, if he will list the current cost of the compensation Measure resulting from the ordination of women ministers; and what is the Commissioners' latest estimate and the final compensation cost.

Mr. Alison: As at 31 January 1995, 242 clergy eligible for financial assistance under the Measure had resigned and have so far received £2.7 million in resettlement grants and periodic payments. A further 48 clergy have notified us of their intention to resign. Based on a total of 290 resignations, the estimated total cost of such payments over the next 10 years, including the costs already incurred, is likely to be about £14 million.

DEFENCE

Farnborough

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the implications of administrative receivership of the Carroll Aircraft Corporation for the future of business aviation at Farnborough.

Mr. Freeman: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport indicated to the House, 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *1091–92*, the Government believe that it is important to retain capacity for business aviation at Farnborough. I have, nevertheless, decided that, in the light of the recent receivership of Urban Development Corporation, my Department should give Urban Development Corporation, which holds a lease under which business aviation operates from

Farnborough, five years' notice of our intention to end the flying agreement. This decision does not affect the Government's belief that Farnborough is important for the future of business aviation in the south-east of England. Nor does it affect the commitment to make Farnborough available to the Society of British Aerospace Companies for the biennial airshow at least until the year 2000, and I hope beyond.

Crown Servants

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances Crown servants may leave Ministry of Defence or military service employment and be re-engaged as consultants; and how many such consultants are currently engaged.

Mr. Freeman: All Crown servants within my Department, whether military or civilian, are subject to certain rules regarding business appointments following retirement. These regulations stipulate that, for a period of two years following retirement, individuals wishing to take up a position with a private sector employer must seek approval from the Department before accepting such an offer.

Subject to this restriction, any retired Ministry of Defence employee may set him or herself up as a consultant in their own right or may decide to join a firm of consultants. In either circumstance, it is possible that such individuals will, at some time in the future, be employed by my Department on a consultancy basis.

The direct employment by this Department of retired individuals on a consultancy basis tends to be restricted to short term, low-value work and, as such, is within the signing powers of individual top-level budget holders without the need for competitive tender action. No central records therefore exist of the employment of this type of consultant and the information required could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ammunition Contracts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion by value of ammunition purchases subsequent to the cessation of the explosives and propellants and related end products agreement were placed with Royal Ordnance.

Mr. Freeman: The EPREP agreement expired on 31 March 1993. Between 1 April 1993 and 31 December 1994, 95 per cent. by value of the Department's ammunition contracts were placed with Royal Ordnance.

Defence Lands Service

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current defence lands service budget; to what extent it covers planning and infrastructure costs prior to disposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The operating costs budget for the defence lands service was set at £22,800,000 for the present financial year. The allocation of funds for the purpose of preparing surplus land and buildings ready for disposal is made separately, and is £9,400,000 for the same period.

Defence Estate

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to preserve *(a)* the integrity and *(b)* the value of his Department's estate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: My Department's defence lands service is responsible for ensuring that the integrity of the estate is preserved. The value of the defence estate lies in its ability to meet the legitimate requirements of the armed forces; any property not required to meet this requirement in the most cost-effective way is passed for disposal.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what are the operational criteria for the proposed closure of Royal Air Force Finningley; and if he will make a statement;

Mr. Soames: The closure of RAF Finningley has been proposed following a thorough review of all flying training in the RAF. That review sought to identify the most cost-effective utilisation of the RAF training estate as a whole. The rationale for the proposed closure of Finningley is set out in paragraphs 11 to 18 of my Department's consultative document, published on 17 November 1994, copies of which were sent to the hon. Member and placed in the Library of the House.

Budget Holders

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* asset rent and *(b)* internal charging systems apply to budget holders in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Under the new management strategy introduced in 1991, budget holders have gained progressively greater authority for and control of resources they require to undertake the tasks set out in their management plan. More recently, one of the benefits of the proposals envisaged from the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his November 1994 Budget is the greater visibility of the investment in capital assets by central Government. Consequently, a number of project teams are developing appropriate mechanisms to assist budget holders to use defence assets more efficiently. Resource accounting and budgeting will provide budget holders with increased awareness of the cost of services provided by one subordinate formation to another so as to inform choices on resource mix and usage. This aligns with one of the objectives of the financial management reforms arising from the defence cost study. In support of this process, the use of charges for defence estate occupation is under consideration.

Cyprus

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the operational reasons for having two bases on the island of Cyprus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: As set out in the 1994 defence White Paper, under military task 1.15, the UK retains two sovereign base areas in Cyprus. British Forces Cyprus provide: strategic communications facilities; an airhead for reinforcement and evacuation if necessary; a forward

mounting base for operations in the middle east and north Africa; and training facilities for resident and non-resident forces.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the current operational running costs of having two bases on the island of Cyprus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The cost of British Forces Cyprus in 1993–94 was £190,000,000. In addition, the cost of the civil government of the sovereign base areas was £7,400,000.

Departmental Property

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discretion the defence estate is given in applying the rule that surplus property should normally be disposed of within three years to ensure that optimal value is achieved for property disposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 15 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *719*.

Convicted Personnel

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many serving members of the Parachute Regiment have been *(a)* convicted of criminal offences and *(b)* disciplined for offences involving violence in each of the last five years;

(2) how many serving members of the Army have been convicted of criminal offences during each of the last five years.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member and I will arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Accommodation

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many senior officers of the armed services are provided with accommodation of the size and scale which takes account of the need to accommodate guests; and how many guests were accommodated, and over what period, at each such residence in the latest available year.

Mr. Soames: I will write to the hon. Member and I will arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the link between possession and threat of use of nuclear weapons in the light of Her Majesty's Government's policy on their non-use.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom's nuclear forces provide a deterrent to aggression against us and contribute to NATO's strategy of war prevention.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of whether the financial reductions announced in respect of the Atomic Weapons Establishment will lead to a reduction in the rate of dismantling of nuclear weapons.

Mr. Freeman: The rationalisation proposals announced by Hunting-BRAE Ltd. on 20 January 1995 in no way affect plans for dismantling nuclear weapons.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if all nuclear depth bombs removed from service have now been dismantled.

Mr. Freeman: All such weapons have been withdrawn from service and are in the process of being dismantled.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has for a limited extension of the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Soames: None. The UK is fully committed to the unconditional and indefinite extension of the non-proliferation treaty at the conference of states parties in April and May 1995.

Non-departmental Public Bodies (Pay)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will list non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Soames: The rates of pay for staff employed in my Department's executive NDPBs are generally in line with those in the civil service. There are no plans at present to change these arrangements.

Common European Defence Policy

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what preparations he intends to make for the framing of a comprehensive common European defence policy statement following the declaration of the Council of Ministers of the Western European Union of 14 November 1994; what will be the priorities of the British Government in the preparation of such a policy statement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom is participating fully in WEU discussions on European security conditions and in work to elaborate the operational role and capability of WEU in a manner fully compatible with the Atlantic alliance.

Drug Testing

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have been dismissed from the forces arising from positive results since the introduction of compulsory drug testing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Four personnel have provided positive samples since the Army began compulsory random drug testing in January 1995. We expect all four to be administratively discharged.

Haymes Garth

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column *828*, what factors led to the delay of 12 months between giving incorrect information to the hon.

Member for South Shields and the admission that this information was incorrect; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The answer given by the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), to the hon. Member on 9 February 1994, *Official Report*, columns *362-63*, was based on the information available at the time. The corrected figure given to the hon. Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) on 4 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *85*, emerged from an audit examination then only very recently completed.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column *830*, on what precise date his Department was informed of allegations concerning expenditure at the official residence known as Haymes Garth; and from where these allegations originated.

Mr. Soames: The matter was first raised in a letter from a member of the public forwarded by an hon. Member on 22 June 1993. No precise location was mentioned, but it emerged that Haymes Garth was intended.

Dr. David Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column *830*, what action his Department took in response to allegations made in the summer of 1993 concerning expenditure at the official residence known as Haymes Garth.

Mr. Soames: A full report was commissioned from RAF Support Command, in the light of which a decision was taken to set in motion an internal audit investigation.

Army Regiments

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has to reform the Army's regimental system;

(2) if he will list the options under consideration by his Department for project BA2000;

(3) which of the options under consideration for project BA2000 involve reducing the current number of regiments.

Mr. Soames: BA2000 will be an internal and conceptual MOD document which addresses in general terms the requirements of the Army at the beginning of the next century. It is at an early stage of drafting. There are no plans to reform the Army's regimental system.

"Front Line First"

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of the management consultants used to advise the Department in the defence costs study process.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Milburn) on 12 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *458*.

Land Mines

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *465*, if finance is a factor in determining whether anti-personnel mines are used, as opposed to other military methods, during armed conflict.

Mr. Freeman: No. A decision to use anti-personnel land mines would be made by the operational commander based on military necessity within the limitations of international law, humanitarian considerations and the risk to British and allied forces.

Eurofighter 2000

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what figure is the maximum the United Kingdom is prepared to spend on a Eurofighter aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: The final cost of the Eurofighter 2000—EF2000—project will depend on a number of factors, including the precise number of aircraft ordered, the weapons selected and the logistic support arrangements. On current plans, decisions on entering the production phase of EF2000 are not required until the end of this year. Costs and affordability will be important factors in reaching those decisions.

Slovakia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations the Government of Slovakia made to him about defence relationships during his recent visit; and what response he made.

Mr. Soames: During his visit to Slovakia on 15 February, my right hon. and learned Friend had wide-ranging discussions on defence and other issues with a number of members of the Slovakian Government, including the President, Prime Minister and Defence Minister.

International Military Services Ltd.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the occasions on which he has used his powers under section 16 (1)(b) of the Ordnance Factories and Military Services Act 1984; and if he will place in the Library a table showing the aggregate sum outstanding in respect of the exercise of these powers in each year since 1981.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* No payments have been made under section 16 of the Ordnance Factories and Military Services Act 1984.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 24 February 1995

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Departmental Funding

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Lord President of the Council what changes are proposed to the Privy Council Office cash and running cost limit in 1994–95.

Mr. Newton: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XIX, vote 3 will be increased from £2,377,000 to £2,767,000. There is no change to the running cost limit. This change reflects the cost of the central drugs co-ordination unit for the current financial year and results from the correction of a fault in the vote structure. There is therefore no addition to the planned limit on public expenditure.

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how often his Department receives written evaluation reports on the training and financial performance of training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Paice: The Employment Department commissions a range of evaluation projects on aspects of the delivery of training by training and enterprise councils. The work is commissioned on a continuing basis and the written reports are received at various times throughout the year. Details of completed work appear in the Department's annual report on research. The Department does not receive written evaluation reports on the financial performance of TECs.

TREASURY

Building Societies Act 1986

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the Government's review of the Building Societies Act 1986.

Mr. Nelson: The Government have now completed the second and final stage of their review of the Building Societies Act 1986. A consultation document was issued last autumn, seeking views, in particular, on societies' accountability and powers. The Government are grateful to those organisations and individuals—some 72 in all—who responded. Their comments have helped to shape the outcome of the review. The Government have also taken careful note of the report on the building society sector, published by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on 19 December. The outcome of the review is broadly in line with many of the Committee's conclusions.

The Government place great importance on the role of building societies as a safe haven for people's savings and the major source of housing finance in the United Kingdom. At the forefront of our minds has been the objective of creating more competition and accountability in the provision of retail financial services. In drawing conclusions from the review, we have sought to:

- enable societies to expand the range of services they offer, while retaining their primary focus as providers of housing finance;
- improve societies' accountability to their members; and
- maintain a sound prudential framework.

On accountability, the Government consider that, although societies' present constitutional arrangements are, by and large 'satisfactory' more should be done to improve the information given to members and to bring greater transparency and fairness to the process of electing directors, so they will be bringing forward a 15-point package of measures, the most important of which will:

- improve the information given to members about their rights as shareholders on first joining a society; the state of their society, in the summary financial statements they receive each year; the duties of directors; and the nomination and election procedures, should they wish to stand for the board;
- remove the distinction between shareholders and retail depositors;
- give borrowing members wider voting rights;
- require elections to be held, even when the number of candidates equals the number of vacancies on the board, and the election results to be posted in all branches;
- require societies to seek the approval of their members before entering into a new area of business by making significant use of an existing power. The Government will, however, be giving further consideration to the possibility of permitting societies to adopt powers by board resolution once this new requirement takes effect.

The Government have decided not to proceed with a proposal put forward by the financial services deregulation task force as a candidate for enactment under the general power in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. The proposal would have removed the requirement for societies to send notices of meetings and summary financial statements to all members. Although it would have brought cost savings, it was widely criticised in the consultation process, as being inconsistent with the objective of increasing societies' accountability to their members, so we have decided to drop the measure.

However, the Government have accepted another task force proposal: to increase, from 1 to 5 per cent. of the total assets of a building society, the maximum bonus which can be paid to its members in the event of a merger with a larger society, without having to have a vote by the members of the latter. This change will be implemented through secondary legislation made by the Building Societies Commission.

We will now begin discussions with the building society sector on how the main parts of the accountability package can best be implemented. In the first instance, the Government favour a voluntary code or charter, which could be introduced quickly and amended in the light of experience. When a legislative opportunity arises, the more important provisions can be put on a statutory basis.

In order to allow building societies to develop and play their full part in the competitive provision of financial services, the Government believe that the current prescriptive legislative framework governing their powers should be replaced by a more permissive regime. The new approach would give societies the freedom—within their principal purpose—to pursue any activities set out in their memorandum, subject only to overall limits on assets and liabilities, and the prudential control of the Building Societies Commission. To retain their distinctive character as mutual housing finance institutions, the Government consider that societies should raise no more than 50 per cent. of their funds from the wholesale market, and that they should have at least 75 per cent. of their lending secured on residential property—mortgage loans to individuals, housing associations and private landlords. Further flexibility would be built into the new legislation to allow the 75 per cent. limit to be reviewed in future, if circumstances warranted it, but societies' housing-related business should continue to account for a clear majority of their assets. The additional statutory restrictions placed on the activities of small societies under the 1986 Act will be removed.

The Government will introduce legislation to amend the Building Societies Act when a suitable opportunity arises. In the meantime, we will continue to implement, by secondary legislation, the changes announced last July. These will: allow societies to lend to incorporated businesses; raise the wholesale funding limit to 50 per cent. and permit societies to own general insurance companies writing buildings and contents policies and mortgage protection plans. These measures, inter alia, will facilitate the provision of funding for small and medium-sized businesses and encourage the growth of private mortgage payments protection insurance—both key objectives of Government policy.

Finally, we have decided to bring the limits on dealings between societies and their directors into line with those applying under section 338 of the Companies Act 1985, as amended by section 138 of the Companies Act 1989; and to increase the limit above which certain shares and deposits must count as wholesale funding. These changes will also be implemented through secondary legislation.

I have issued a press statement today, giving full details of the review. I have also responded to the Select Committee report of 19 December. Copies of the press notice and the response have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Taxation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the latest estimated level of uncollected *(a)* corporation tax, *(b)* schedule D tax and *(c)* capital gains tax for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices; and what these amounts represent as a percentage of total tax payable in each category.

Sir George Young: The board of the Inland Revenue allows individual remissions of tax as an aspect of their responsibilities for the "care and management" of the direct taxes under section 1(1) of the Taxes Management Act 1970.

Sound management requires that tax which is not collected and which cannot practicably be collected—for example, because the taxpayer is insolvent or his whereabouts are unknown—should be written off. Similarly, it is on occasions necessary to remit tax which it would be unconscionable to collect—for example, because the payment would cause gross hardship to the taxpayer.

The level of remissions fell for account 93 and is expected to fall again in 1994.

(a) The amounts of corporation tax uncollected and consequently remitted or written off as irrecoverable since 1979 are as follows:

Year	*Amount in thousands*	*As a percentage of total corporation tax collected*	*Amount expressed in 1993 prices*
1979	15,182	0.50	47,079
1980	16,214	0.49	44,116
1981	20,688	0.70	51,295
1982	34,396	0.89	77,888
1983	40,912	0.11	85,409
1984	58,051	1.23	113,034
1985	75,342	1.27	133,725
1986	91,365	1.11	150,489
1987	92,830	0.93	137,960
1988	225,597	1.92	301,357
1989	151,368	1.05	186,209
1990	184,725	1.17	210,984
1991	320,929	2.09	351,891
1992	542,233	4.64	571,717
1993	417,814	4.21	417,814
1994	n/a	n/a	n/a

Note:

The figures for 1994 are not sufficiently complete to allow the necessary comparison to be made and, consequently, the information is not available in the form requested. Therefore, the figures are expressed in accordance with 1994 prices.

(b) The amounts of schedule D tax uncollected and consequently remitted or written off as irrecoverable since 1979 are as follows:

Year	*Amount in thousands*	*As a percentage of total Schedule D collected*	*Amount expressed in 1993 prices*
1979	n/a	n/a	n/a
1980	33,081	0.79	90,010
1981	41,552	0.75	103,028
1982	52,763	0.84	119,479
1983	68,536	1.04	143,078
1984	91,229	1.32	177,636
1985	90,196	1.18	160,090
1986	124,297	1.29	204,732
1987	133,878	1.88	198,964
1988	252,424	3.06	337,193
1989	242,024	2.53	297,731
1990	254,989	2.35	291,237
1991	383,566	3.17	420,571
1992	703,422	5.16	741,670
1993	701,787	5.58	701,787
1994	n/a	n/a	n/a

Notes:

1 The figures for 1994 are not sufficiently complete to allow the necessary comparison to be made and consequently the information is not available in the form requested. Therefore, the figures are expressed in accordance with 1993 prices.

2 Separate figures for schedule D are not available for 1979.

(c) The amounts of capital gains tax uncollected and consequently remitted or written off as irrecoverable since 1979 are as follows:

Year	Amount in thousands	As a percentage of total CGT collected	Amount expressed in 1993 prices
1979	3,048	0.73	9,452
1980	3,591	0.71	9,771
1981	2,734	9.61	6,779
1982	4,868	0.78	11,023
1983	6,496	1.01	13,561
1984	5,998	0.84	11,679
1985	7,562	0.93	13,422
1986	10,064	0.99	16,576
1987	8,822	0.79	13,111
1988	12,680	0.80	16,938
1989	10.864	0.47	13,365
1990	12,002	0.64	13,708
1991	29,721	1.58	32,588
1992	57,836	4.69	60,981
1993	50,397	4.56	50,397
1994	n/a	n/a	n/a

Note:
The figures for 1994 are not sufficiently complete to allow the necessary comparison to be made and, consequently, the information is not available in the form requested. Therefore, the figures are expressed in accordance with 1993 prices.
Insolvencies, where the Inland Revenue has very little control over the amount recoverable, account for the vast majority of remissions of tax.

VAT-registered Companies

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many VAT-registered companies are currently trading in northern England; and what was the figure in 1978.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Based on the latest available information, the number of VAT-registered companies currently trading in northern England, and those trading in 1978, is as follows:

Year	Number
1978	29,086
1995	92,464

Amusement Machines

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total installed base of video, pinball and amusements with prizes machines; and what are the numbers of those machines which will be liable to duty if the play price duty exemption is fixed at *(a)* 20p, *(b)* 30p, *(c)* 40p and *(d)* 50p.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The total numbers of installed machines are as follows: 75,000 video, 30,000 pinball and 20,000 skill with prizes machines. There are about 205,000 amusement with prizes machines. It is not possible to predict the numbers of machines which would be liable to duty at the stated play prices. It would be a matter for individual operators to take advantage of any exemption in the light of the licence cost measured against the income from the machine.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the current political balance of magistrates in each municipal borough in South Yorkshire.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The political balance of magistrates in Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield, on the latest information available, is as follows:

	Conservative	Labour	Liberal/ Democrat	Independent/ not known
Barnsley	46	53	16	3
Doncaster	97	57	25	11
Rotherham	44	53	8	39
Sheffield	103	114	59	86

TRANSPORT

Vehicle Registration

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the purpose of levying a fee on new vehicle registrations which are not notified to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency under the automated first registration scheme; what agency or Government Department will be the recipient of the fee; and what the fee will be.

Mr. Norris: The automated first registration and licensing system is designed to enable motor dealers to register and license new vehicles without leaving their premises, saving costs and improving service to customers.

The purpose of the fee would be to charge for first registrations where the automated first registration system was available to manufacturers and importers but they chose not to adopt it.

The provision has not yet been activated and no fee level has been set. If it is introduced, the fee would be set at a level to offset the additional cost of any manual system which had to be provided.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he intends to introduce to ensure that vendors of vehicles, with particular reference to secondhand vehicles, are given correct and full details of the buyer's name and address in connection with the proposed move to joint notification.

Mr. Norris: A consultation paper on the proposed new vehicle registration system will be issued shortly. It will specifically invite views on how best to ensure the accuracy of the information provided by buyers and sellers of vehicles. Decisions will be taken in the light of the comments received.

Taxis

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about future plans for regulating taxis and private hire vehicles.

Mr. Norris: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. Butler) on 22 February, *Official Report*, column *189*.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Data and Video Network

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee (1) when he expects the parliamentary data and video network to be available to all hon. Members; and how much this would cost;

(2) what are the annual running costs for the parliamentary data and video network.

Mr. Waller: By the end of the 1995 summer recess, it is expected that some 550 hon. Members, including all hon. Members with offices in the outbuildings will have access to the video service, which includes the clean feed of proceedings of the House. Because the installation of cabling and trunking on the parliamentary estate is a complex exercise which can only be undertaken during summer recesses, full cabling of all Members' offices is not expected to be completed until the end of 1997. Hon. Members who wish to have access to the network and who have offices in areas of the parliamentary estate which have not yet been cabled may do so by means of a modem. On the matter of costs, I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the first report from the Information Committee in Session 1993–94 on "The Provision of a Parliamentary Data and Video Network"—House of Commons Paper No. HC237—which was approved by the House on 30 June 1994.

Computers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee what is the size of the budget available to the House for the provision of computer technology to its hon. Members.

Mr. Waller: Members may use the office costs allowance to fund their individual use of computer technology. On 30 June 1994 the House approved a report from the Committee—first report "The Provision of Members' Information Technology Equipment, Software and Services", Session 1992–93, HC737—which proposed a modest range of supporting IT services to be available to Members from the next general election, the costs of which will be paid for by Members from their office costs allowance. Special provision can be made for computer equipment for Members with disabilities.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee (1) what is his estimate of the date by which hon. Members will be able to access the Internet through the PDVN;

(2) what estimate has been made of the expenditure required to make the Internet available to users of the parliamentary data and video network;

(3) if hon. Members who access the Internet via the parliamentary data video network will be charged for the time for which they are on-line.

Mr. Waller: Subject to endorsement by the Finance and Services Committee, it is hoped that hon. Members connected to the parliamentary data and video network and who request it, will be able to access the Internet on an experimental basis from May. A fixed charge line connection to the Internet is planned and access via this link would not be charged to individual Members. The expenditure issue is not yet fully resolved and I shall write to the hon. Member.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Aid (Human Development)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy that 20 per cent. of aid is to be allocated to priory needs for human development.

Mr. Baldry: The purpose of the British aid programme is to help people in countries poorer than our own to improve their lives. To that end, we have established seven priority objectives, one of which is to promote human development. We do not favour setting spending targets for individual objectives for this can reduce the quality of activities undertaken and because the objectives are mutually supporting.

A substantial proportion of our bilateral aid is devoted to basic needs such as education, health care, clean water and safe sanitation. In 1993–94, 15 per cent.—£147 million—of the bilateral aid programme, excluding emergency relief, was spent in these areas. If emergency relief, most of which was used to meet basic needs in crisis situations, is included, the figure rises to 28 per cent.—£321 million. These figures are conservative since they omit expenditure in support of volunteers and that under the pound for pound scheme for non-governmental organisations—other than block grants—which is not categorised by objective in ODA statistics.

Low-income Countries (Debt)

Mr. Worthington : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support proposals at the world summit on social development that seek immediate implementation of the Trinidad terms proposal to reduce by two thirds the eligible debt stock of severely indebted low-income countries as a first step towards a comprehensive write-off of between 80 per cent. and 100 per cent. of the debt stock of those countries.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* Implementation of Trinidad terms was agreed by the Paris Club in principle in December 1994. We pressed for an increase from 50 per cent. up to 80 per cent. debt reduction, but there was no consensus among other creditors to go beyond 67 per cent.

We welcome agreement by the Paris Club on 20 February to extend these terms to Uganda. I am delighted that that Commonwealth country is the first to benefit from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's initiative.

Structural Adjustment Programmes

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will support proposals at the world summit on social development that require structural adjustment programmes to have social development goals.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* We will continue to stress the need for economic reform programmes to take full account of the social dimensions of development in their design and implementation.

Development Bank Policies

Mr. Worthington : To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will be supporting objectives at the world summit for social development that would require international financial institutions to promote macro-economic policies that put the alleviation of poverty as a central objective.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* The primary objective of the World bank and other multilateral development banks is to assist borrowing member countries in their efforts to alleviate poverty and to promote sustainable economic development.

ENVIRONMENT

Right to Buy

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many former local authority tenants have purchased their homes under the right-to-buy legislation in the northern region of England and in each local authority in the northern region.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Between October 1980 and September 1994 an estimated 116,000 local authority tenants purchased their homes in the north statistical region under the right-to-buy legislation.

A table showing information on total right-to-buy sales for each local authority in England from 1980 to March 1994 is available in the Library.

House Building

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new homes were built in the northern region of England by *(a)* private sector, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* local authorities, by individual local authority (i) since 1979 and (ii) between 1974 and 1978.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Tables have been deposited in the Library showing cumulative totals of house building completions, by sector, for each local authority in the north standard statistical region. The first table shows activity for the period 1974 to 1978, the second shows activity between 1979 and 1994.

Cemfuel

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those instances in 1994 where permission to burn cemfuel was refused.

Mr. Atkins: Only two plants, Castle Cement at Clitheroe and Barrington, use cemfuel. Limited trials have taken place at these sites. There has been no other formal application to burn cemfuel.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the use of cemfuel by Castle Cement at Clitheroe.

Mr. Atkins: During the last two years, a number of representations have been received both from those who oppose and those who support the use of cemfuel. In addition, Members of Parliament have asked questions in the House, in particular the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans).

In February 1995, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution started a public consultation exercise to precede any decision whether to allow continued burning of this fuel at Clitheroe. This consultation period will last until 29 March.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of the amount of cemfuel burnt *(a)* in England and *(b)* in Lancashire in 1994.

Mr. Atkins: The total estimated quantity of cemfuel used in England in 1994 was 4,700 tonnes, of which 3,400 was used in Lancashire.

Chicken Farm, Throckmorton

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contact his Department has had with the European Commission over the grant of planning permission for a chicken farm at Throckmorton in Worcestershire.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Commission wrote to the United Kingdom Government concerning the application of the directive 85/337/EEC—"the EIA directive"—to this proposal on 19 February 1992 and again on 12 July 1993. On both occasions, the Government replied to the letters. No further communication has been received.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made in calculating the standard spending assessment of the extra costs placed upon local authorities by the implementation of the habitual residence test; and how much he estimates local authorities will save in housing benefit and council tax benefits as a result of the test.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The local government finance settlement takes account of all new burdens on local authorities, together with other service pressures and the potential for increased efficiency and other savings as well as, more broadly, what the country can afford.

Housing benefit and council tax benefit savings resulting from the implementation of the habitual residence test are estimated to be about £4 million in a full year. These benefit savings accrue mainly to the Department of Social Security; there will be a small reduction in that part of the cost of benefit which falls on local authorities and this was taken into account in the settlement for 1994–95.

Homelessness

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has regarding grants to homeless voluntary organisations under section 73 of the Housing Act 1975; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My Department has completed its review of the section 73 grant programme. This incorporated the findings of research by York university, which was commissioned to assess the programme's effectiveness and consider its possible future direction. York found that the programme has been successful in providing assistance to a large number of single people. This confirms my own conclusions that the programme represents good value for money. I am pleased to announce that I have decided that the grant programme should continue.

The Government are to make £6.9 million available in 1995–96. In addition to the applications for funding we have received from existing projects, we anticipate bids to start new schemes in 1995–96. These grants will assist voluntary organisations around the country to meet the running costs of schemes which provide practical help for single people in need of accommodation. They will also enable Shelter, SHAC—the London housing aid centre—and the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux to maintain and develop the national homelessness advice service.

Dioxin Emissions

Ms Ruddock: To aks the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the most recent data evaluated by his Department on dioxin emissions from all sources.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 21 February 1995]:* Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will be publishing a report this spring which will detail the most recent estimates of dioxin emissions.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many changes there have been to benefit law since 1988 which relate to the qualification for benefit, age of qualification, disqualification rules and other changes related to periods of entitlement.

Mr. Hague: There have been over 100 changes which have affected entitlement to benefit since 1988. A list of these changes has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Harold Fair

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, up to what date Mr. Harold Fair will be entitled to payment of incapacity benefit; from what date he will be entitled to an old age pension; to what benefit he will be entitled in the intervening period; and if he will make a statement on the consideration underlying the interval in payment of contributory benefits.

Mr. Hague: Entitlement to incapacity benefit will cease on 1 June 1995, the day before Mr. Fair's 65th birthday. Retirement pension will be payable from the first pension payday, on 5 June 1995. Additionally, he is entitled to disability living allowance which remains unchanged. Retirement pension is paid weekly, on Mondays, and is not paid for odd days. However, because it is paid in advance and incapacity benefit is paid in arrears, the first pension payment will be received within one week of the final payment of incapacity benefit.

Income Support (Mortgage Interest)

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he next intends to meet with representatives of the House Builders Federation to discuss his proposed changes to the arrangements for income support for mortgage interest payments.

Mr. Roger Evans: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has a meeting arranged with the House Builders Federation on Monday 6 March.

Contribution Conditions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, columns *433–35*, if he will publish the calculations of his Department on the number of claimants who lost *(a)* unemployment benefit, *(b)* sickness benefit or *(c)* retirement pension as a result of the changes in the contributory conditions since 1975.

Mr. Arbuthnot *[holding answer to February 1995:]* The change in the unemployment and sickness benefit contribution conditions in 1975 were the result of the restructuring of the national insurance scheme so that wholly earnings-related contributions were collected along with income tax under the pay-as-you-earn procedures. It is unlikely that anyone lost benefit as a consequence.

As a result of the abolition of reduced rates of unemployment benefit in October 1986 it was calculated that about 28,000 unemployed people would lose benefit in a full year. Some 10,000 sickness benefit claimants were affected, although a large proportion of these received supplementary benefit. Existing benefit recipients were transitionally protected.

At the time of the changes to the contribution conditions in 1988, it was estimated that 350,000 people would no longer qualify for unemployment benefit in a full year. Of those, about 300,000 would qualify for income support or for increased income support. It was estimated that about 8,000 people would not qualify for sickness benefit in a full year, and of those about 90 per cent. would qualify for income support. Those in receipt of benefit at the point of change received transitional protection.

PRIME MINISTER

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to raise the question of Indonesia's illegal occupation of East Timor at future meetings of the Group of Seven.

The Prime Minister: None.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister if Lord Justice Scott's inquiry has now finished taking new evidence or information; if interview sessions have now ceased; and on what date the last interview was held.

The Prime Minister: The last public hearing of Sir Richard Scott's inquiry was held on 7 July 1994, while the last evidence taken in private was on 14 February 1995. Sir Richard Scott has made it clear that, as he compiles his report and as the need arises, he will seek further evidence or information.

"Back to Basics"

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what have been the results of his "back to basics" campaign.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member has misunderstood. "Back to basics" is a principle based on the common-sense values of the British people—in particular, individual responsibility.

HEALTH

Day Surgery

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action she has taken or plans to take to ensure that day surgery is undertaken only by surgeons fully trained to do so.

Mr. Sackville: We have no such plans. It is for individual provider hospitals to ensure high standards of practice for all patients and for purchasing authorities to ensure their populations have access to high-quality care. Surgeons carrying out day surgery should be experienced in the practice and junior trainees should be closely supervised by experienced staff.

Financial Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the costs of NHS financial services at *(a)* regional health authorities, *(b)* district health authorities and *(c)* family health services authorities in 1989–90; and what were the costs of such services at (i) regional health authorities, (ii) district health authorities, (iii) family health services authorities and (iv) NHS trusts in 1993–94.

Mr. Sackville: Figures for regional and district health authorities are shown in the table. Costs of national health service financial services are not available for family health services authorities or NHS trusts.

Cost of NHS financial services 1989–90 and 1993–94

	1989–90 £000	1993–94 £000
Regional Health Authorities	13,529	22,935
District Health Authorities	164,492	50,194

Source:
Annual financial returns of regional and district health authorities.
Notes:
1. Figures include all expenditure on the provision of a finance and accounting function for the authority including any elements recharged from units or common services.
2. The appropriate proportion of non-finance staff carrying out accounting duties relating to the standing financial instructions of the authority are also included.
3. The amount spent by NHS trusts and FHSAs is not separately identifiable.
4. 1993–94 figures are provisional.

Part-time NHS Employees

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps she has taken to notify former part-time NHS employees of the decision of 4 March in the House of Lords;

(2) what financial provision she has made to meet claims for compensation from former part-time NHS employees following the decision of 4 March in the House of Lords;

(3) what guidance she has issued to employers within the NHS in respect of claims for compensation from former part-time NHS employees following the decision of 4 March in the House of Lords;

(4) what estimate she has made of the number of former part-time NHS employees who have ceased employment during the last 16 years who are potentially affected by the decision of 4 March in the House of Lords.

Mr. Malone: The "decision of 4 March in the House of Lords" is taken to mean the decision by the Judicial Committee of the House of Lords on 3 March 1994 in R. v. Secretary of State for Employment ex parte Equal Opportunities Commission and another.

Employment issues affecting individual employees, such as claims for redundancy payments are the responsibility of health authorities and national health service trusts as autonomous employers.

It is not possible, from the information available centrally, to estimate the number of former part-time employees who may be affected by the House of Lords' judgment.

Child Care

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's latest estimate of the total level of public expenditure on child care for children under the age of five years; what this sum is per child under the age of five years; what this sum is as a percentage of gross domestic product; and what this sum is as a percentage of public expenditure.

Mr. Bowis: The information is not available in the form requested.

Delegated Pay

Mr McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the non-departmental public bodies

sponsored by her Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Sackville: According to current plans, the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Department which will introduce new pay arrangements are as shown:

Department of Health

National Radiological Protection board—operative date as yet to be decided.

From April 1995:
None

From April 1996
None

Delegated pay option
From April 1995:

Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

From April 1996:
None.

Breast Screening

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what positive results have arisen from the programme of breast screening.

Mr. Sackville: Between 1988 and 1993, 3,246,174 women have been screened and 19,667 breast cancers detected.

Primary Care

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the role of primary care in developing the NHS and purchasing.

Mr. Malone: Guidance issued by the Department EL(94)79, developing NHS purchasing and GP fundholding, sets out our policy for involving primary care practitioners more closely in national health service purchasing. In particular, this will be through the extended options for general practitioner fundholding and the development of stronger partnerships between health authorities and primary health care teams. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

Statistics

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the five health areas in England which had the highest annual figures for *(a)* birth rates, *(b)* new cases of tuberculosis, *(c)* the incidence of pregnancies in women aged under 20 years, *(d)* the incidence of HIV–AIDS and *(e)* perinatal mortality rates; and what are the average figures for England in each category in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Sackville: The information is shown in the tables.

(a) The five regional health authorities with the highest crude birth rates in 1993 were:

	Crude birth rate[1]
North East Thames	14.8
North West Thames	14.2
South East Thames	13.6
North Western	13.5
Oxford	13.4
England	13.1

[1] Number of births per 1,000 population of all ages.

(b) The five regional health authorities with the highest number of notifications of tuberculosis in 1993 were:

Health Authority	*Number*
North West Thames	851
North East Thames	806
West Midlands	788
North Western	608
Trent	518

Note:
The total number of notifications of tuberculosis in England in 1993 was 5,721.

(c) The five regional health authorities with the highest conception rates to women under 20 in England, 1991, were:

Health Authority	*Conception rates*[1]
North Western	79.2
West Midlands	74.0
Yorkshire	73.0
Northern	72.5
North East Thames	69.3
England	64.8

[1] All conceptions to women under 20 per 1,000 females aged 15 to 19.

(d) The five regional health authorities with the highest number of cases of AIDS reported in 1993 were:

Health Authority	*AIDS cases reported*
North West Thames	483
North East Thames	343
South East Thames	214
South West Thames	68
Oxford	54

Note:
The total number of cases of AIDS reported in England in 1993 was 1,463.

(e) The five regional health authorities with the highest rates of perinatal mortality[1] in 1993 were:

Health Authority	
West Midlands	9.9
North East Thames	9.7
Yorkshire	9.6
North Western	9.6
South East Thames	9.3
England	8.9

[1] per 1,000 live and still births.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many accident and emergency departments have been relocated in England in 1995; and what were the corresponding figures in each year since 1986.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of breast cancer have been diagnosed in the NHS for each year since 1990 for women aged *(a)* 21 to 30, *(b)* 31 to 40, *(c)* 41 to 50, *(d)* 51 to 60, *(e)* 61 years and older and *(f)* all women.

Mr. Sackville: The latest available figures can be found in the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys publication MB1 No. 22 "Cancer statistics, England and Wales 1989", copies of which are available in the Library.

The statistics do not distinguish whether or not the diagnosis was made in the national health service.

Medical Staff

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical staff are currently employed in the NHS; and what was the figure in 1979.

Mr. Malone: The figures are shown in the table.

Hospital and Community Health Service Staff and General Medical Practitioners in 1979 and 1993—England

	1979	*1993*
Hospital and Community Health Service (whole-time equivalent)	34,900	46,400
General Medical Practitioners (numbers)	23,100	28,500
Total of the above	58,000	74,800

Note:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100. 2. The figures in the table may not sum to the total because of rounding.

Mental Health

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, when she intends to publish or place in the Library the follow-up report by Dr. John Yates on the closure of psychiatric hospitals and beds for the mentally ill.

Mr. Bowis: The report of the 1994 survey of the remaining large mental illness hospitals in England, commissioned by the mental health task force, is to be submitted to Ministers shortly. A decision will then be taken on its publication.

Dispensing Doctors

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what provisions are currently made by the Prescription Pricing Authority in respect of dispensing doctors who receive substantial reductions from their suppliers concerning their value added tax reimbursements;

(2) what research her Department *(a)* has conducted, or *(b)* plans to conduct, into the relationship between the discounts which dispensing doctors receive from their suppliers and dispensing doctors' value added tax reimbursements; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The terms on which general practitioners are reimbursed for the cost of drugs which they have dispensed or personally administered to patients, are set out in paragraph 44 of the "Statement of Fees and Allowances Payable to General Medical Practitioners in England and Wales", copies of which are available in the Library. An independent confidential inquiry was conducted jointly by the British Medical Association and the health Departments of England, Scotland and Wales in 1993 into the rates of discount obtained by dispensing doctors on their purchases of drugs and appliances. A new discount rate is to be introduced in England and Wales from 1 April 1995 for calculating the level of doctors' reimbursement. The level of value added tax reimbursement is based on the discount rate. The profession as a whole receives only the level of expenses actually incurred in providing general medical services.

Steriliser Testing Service

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation she has commissioned of the advantages and disadvantages of having an independent steriliser testing service carried out by *(a)* private sector and *(b)* public sector agencies; what proposals she has to publish a report of her evaluation; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has not commissioned an evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of independent steriliser testing by the private sector and the public sector, but we are aware of the continuing need for competent personnel to carry out this work.

In order to ensure this, the Department has established, under the auspices of the Institute of Hospital Engineering, a register of steriliser engineers. To become registered, it will be necessary to acquire appropriate professional skills and experience. The Department will monitor closely the effectiveness of the scheme.

Abortions

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abortions have now been performed in total under the provisions of the Abortion Act 1967; and how many and what percentage of those abortions were performed in an emergency to save the life the mother.

Mr. Sackville *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* Up to 31 December 1992, a total of 3,911,680 abortions had been performed in Great Britain under the Abortion Act 1967, as amended by section 37 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990, since its implementation. Of these, the number performed in emergency and certified by the operating practitioner as immediately necessary to "save the life of the pregnant woman"—ground 5 prior to April 1991, ground F subsequently—was 154, or 0.004 per cent.

SCOTLAND

Accidents

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* fatal and *(b)* non-fatal accidents have occurred on the A947 in each year since 1985.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the table. Information on non-injury accidents is not held centrally.

Number of reported injury accidents on or at a junction with the A947, 1985 to 1994.

Year	Fatal Accidents	Non-Fatal Injury Accidents
1985	6	110
1986	4	122
1987	5	112
1988	5	123
1989	3	102
1990	1	89
1991	3	72
1992	2	72
1993	0	62
1994[1]	1	42

[1]1994 statistics are provisional.

HOME DEPARTMENT

European Prison Rules

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions the United Kingdom has been criticised by the Council of Europe for failure to comply to the minimum standards laid out in the European prison rules; on what factors non-compliance was identified; and if he will make a statement on the steps he is taking to ensure compliance in future.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The European prison rules are not binding on signatory states and consequently there has been no criticism of the Prison Service in England and Wales by the Council of Europe for failure to comply with its terms.

Prisons (Drugs)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how may drug and related finds by type of drug were made in gaols in England and Wales in each year since 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 24 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many drug and related finds by type of drug were made in jails in England and Wales in each year since 1990.

Information on drug finds was not recorded centrally until 25 September 1990.

The tables below list the drug and related finds for the calendar years 1991, 1992, 1993 and 1994.

Items	1991	1992	1993	1994
Heroin	72	99	158	348
Cocaine	50	65	65	108
LSD	12	32	41	49
Amphetamines	23	36	71	119
Barbiturates	22	24	30	69
Cannabis	2,333	2,081	3,388	4,850
Cannabis Plant	80	81	158	242
Crack	3	4	4	10
Other	101	183	203	403
Authentic Syringe	92	156	228	275
Improvised Syringe	57	41	79	168
Authentic Needle	21	16	27	64
Improvised Needle	3	7	2	9
Pipe(s)	445	317	417	595
Roach	72	56	117	185
Total	3,386	3,198	4,988	7,494

It should be noted that increases in the numbers of finds may reflect more effective searching, as a result of the priority being given to the control of drugs, and are not necessarily an indication that there has been a corresponding increase in the presence of drugs.

Fire Service

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response he will be making to the Audit Commission report on the fire service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Government shall be asking the local authority associations and individual fire brigades to give urgent consideration to the recommendations which fall to them to take forward. Where the recommendations affect Government responsibilities, we shall ensure that they are considered either by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council or in conjunction with the other Government Departments concerned.

Inquests

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the average length of time families of victims have to wait for an inquest;

(2) what is the average number of hours worked weekly by coroners.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I regret that this information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what services victims' families can receive from coroners courts.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Coroners are appointed by local authorities to investigate sudden and unexplained deaths in the general interest of the community. The provision of coroners courts is a local authority responsibility, but the Home Office publishes a free explanatory leaflet, "The Work of the Coroner", which coroners are encouraged to make widely available and which describes the responsibilities of the coroner and offers guidance to those who may be involved in an inquest. I am placing a copy in the Library.

Greater Manchester Probation Service

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the effect of the November 1993 statement on the budget of Greater Manchester probation service;

(2) what will be the effect of the 1994 probation budget reduction on staffing levels within each grade of staff;

and what assessment he has made of the likelihood of redundancies within each grade of staff in the Greater Manchester probation service;

(3) what assessment he has made of the effect of the 1994 probation budget reduction on the implementation of national standards for the supervision of offenders in the Greater Manchester probation service;

(4) what assessment he has made of the effect of the 1994 probation budget cut on staff terms and conditions of service in the Greater Manchester probation service;

(5) what will be the effect of the November 1994 Budget statement on the Greater Manchester probation service;

(6) what assessment he has made of the effect of the 19945 probation budget reduction on liaison with victim support and work with victims in the Greater Manchester probation service;

(7) what reduction in hostel provision will result from the 1994 budget reduction to the Greater Manchester probation service;

(8) what reduction in probation centre provision will result from the 1994 budget reduction to the Greater Manchester probation service.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The 1993 Budget statement resulted in a specific grant cash limit for 1994–95 for the Greater Manchester probation service of £18.9 million, 6.3 per cent. higher than for 1993–94. The 1994 Budget statement resulted in a specific grant cash limit for 1995–96 of £18.8 million, plus a further £900,000 to support probation service partnerships with the independent sector previously funded separately by the Home Office.

It is for the Greater Manchester probation service to decide how these resources are best used and to determine what specific changes within the service, including staffing levels, should be undertaken with the total expenditure limit implied by this level of grant support and within the terms and conditions of service of probation officers as determined by the Home Secretary.

Grant support should be sufficient to enable the Greater Manchester service to carry out its responsibilities in relation to the enforcement of national standards and working with victims.

Approved hostels are separately funded by the Home Office; and no changes in hostel provision in the Greater Manchester area are planned as a result of the last Budget.

Sudbury Prison

Mrs. Roche: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards a prisoner at Her Majesty's prison, Sudbury, serving eight years for major fraud being granted home or temporary leave after serving 12 months of his sentence.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Barbara Roche, dated 24 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the policy towards a prisoner at Sudbury prison serving eight years for major fraud being granted home or temporary leave after serving 12 months of his sentence.

We have been unable to identify a prisoner at Sudbury prison serving an eight year sentence for major fraud although there is one prisoner serving a ten year sentence for fraud.

Prisoners allocated to Sudbury prison would normally be eligible for the "compact weekend" scheme. In November 1994, the Home Secretary announced changes in the Home Leave and Temporary Release schemes for prisoners. Under the new rules, which will come into effect in the Spring, a prisoner serving such a sentence would not be released on temporary licence at that stage in his sentence.

Prisoners (Repatriation)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking with ministerial colleagues within the Europe Union to provide for EU nationals, and those ordinarily resident in EU states, who are convicted of certain offences to serve their sentences in their own state.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* Under the Council of Europe convention on the transfer of sentenced persons, a prisoner sentenced to imprisonment in one jurisdiction may be repatriated to the jurisdiction of which they are a national to serve their sentence. The United Kingdom ratified the convention in 1985. We have been joined in the convention by all but one of our partners in the European Union with which prisoner repatriations are conducted regularly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Life Assurance Companies

Mr. Stephen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his Department's approach to the balance between the policyholders' and shareholders' interests in the long-term funds of life insurance companies.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: A number of with-profit life offices have accumulated amounts within their long-term funds whose allocation between the shareholders and policyholders may not be clearcut; and there has been a growing interest among relevant companies in the scope for clarifying shareholders' interest in the long-term fund.

The Department is in principle in favour of greater clarity in the attribution of the long-term funds of proprietary insurance companies. In any such attribution, it has a responsibility to ensure that the reasonable expectations of policyholders are fulfilled.

The Department considers that policyholders' reasonable expectations in respect of attribution of surplus are influenced by a range of factors, notably:

The fair treatment of policyholders vis a vis shareholders;

Any statements by the company as to its bonus philosophy and the entitlement of policyholders to a share in profit, for example, in its articles of association or in company literature;

The history and past practice of the company;

General practice within the life insurance industry.

The Department is concerned that any restructuring of funds for the purpose of clarification should preserve a proper balance of interests as between policyholders and shareholders. In this connection, it considers that the proportion of policyholders' and shareholders' interests in the surplus are unaffected by whether or not the surplus is actually distributed—that is, if in any year surplus is not distributed but is retained in the fund, the policyholders as a class retain their interest in that element of the fund.

A life office may make distributions from surplus in the long-term fund as shown by the statutory annual actuarial valuation. It is common practice to make distributions to policyholders and shareholders in the proportion 90:10. In assessing policyholders' reasonable expectations, the Department would expect this ratio to be used as the basis of attribution between the policyholders and shareholders, unless there was clear evidence, based on a company's circumstances, statements or practice, that a different proportion was appropriate in respect of the surplus arising from some particular part of the business.

The Department considers that the proposal announced today by United Friendly Insurance to restructure its long-term funds is consistent with these principles. It has reached this view on the basis of information provided about the history and practice of the company, the amount of accumulated reserves to be set aside for the benefit of with-profit and other policyholders—a part of which is being used immediately to declare a special bonus to policyholders—and the intended arrangements for the future distribution of surplus arising in the long-term funds.

The Department will assess any similar proposals from other life offices having regard to the facts of the case and the principles described above. The outcome in any specific case will depend on the history and circumstances of the fund, which may differ widely from company to company.

Information Technology

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects to consider specific proposals stemming from the Commission's document "Europe's way to the information society", No. 15486.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The European Commission has already brought forward a number of proposals listed in the annexe to its communication "Europe's way to the information society"— COM(94)347 final. These are being considered closely by Government, and some are already under discussion in Brussels. I would expect the Commission to bring forward further proposals over the next 12 months, in line with the timetable set out in the annexe.

The UK has played a major role in co-ordinating two projects: global interoperability for broadband networks, building on the success of Super JANET; and government on-line, developing the CCTA's ideas for electronic communication within government.

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what different forms of scrutiny by the United Kingdom Parliament will apply to the European Commission document 15486, "Europe's way to the information society".

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Commission communication in response to the Bangemann group report, "Europe's way to the information society: an action plan" was a depositable document and fell within scrutiny arrangements. I submitted a full explanatory memorandum to Parliament on 29 September 1994 and the document was scrutinised according to agreed procedures.

Telecommunications

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) when he expects to present to Parliament the official text of part II of the European Green Paper on telecommunication liberalisation.

(2) when he expects to produce the explanatory memorandum from the Government on the implications of the European Commission Green Paper, part II of telecommunications liberalisation.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I expect to submit to Parliament shortly the official text of part II of the European Commission's Green Paper on the liberalisation of telecommunications infrastructure and an explanatory memorandum on it.

Exports (Gibraltar)

Mr. Bennett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the export licence application refused for the export of goods to Gibraltar in 1993 was for equipment specified as ML1 in group 1 of part III of schedule 1 of SI, 1992, No. 3092.

Mr. Ian Taylor: No.

Land Mines

Mrs Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what casing or components for anti-personnel mines have been exported by United Kingdom firms since 1982.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I am not aware of any export of specially designed components for anti-personnel mines, but this could be established only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many licences to manufacture British designed anti-personnel mines have been sold to foreign firms since 1982.

Mr. Ian Taylor: This is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. My Department does not maintain such records.

United Projects Co. Ltd.

Mrs Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if United Projects Co. Ltd. has been granted a licence to communicate with Iraq since sanctions began.

Mr. Ian Taylor: It has been the policy of successive Administrations not to comment on individual licensing cases unless the public interest outweighs the need for confidentiality.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will identify the sites and locations where foreign direct investment has created 300 or more jobs from 1984 onwards; and if he will provide a regional assessment of the total employment created by such investment as at 1 January.

Mr. Eggar: I regret that information in the detail requested by the hon. Member is available only at disproportionate cost.

However, from 1984–85 to 1993–94, the latest year for which complete figures are available, 154 projects expected to create 300 or more new jobs were notified to my Department's Investment in Britain Bureau. These were expected to create nearly 106,000 new jobs, the regional breakdown of which was expected to be as follows:

Region	*Number of new jobs*
North East	9,235
North West	5,747
Yorkshire/Humberside	6,275
West Midlands	14,941
South West	5,123
East Midlands	6,966
South East	16,950
Northern Ireland	7,106
Scotland	22,517
Wales	10,809
Total	105,669

In addition, a total of 5,281 jobs were expected to be safeguarded.

These figures are based on information provided to the Invest in Britain Bureau by companies themselves at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest. There is no requirement to notify the Department, so the figures include only those projects where the Invest in Britain Bureau and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice. They take no account of subsequent developments.

Personal Security Equipment

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade under which headings of the successive export control orders from 1988 batons and personal security equipment designed to blind, stun or disable were included.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Such equipment has been classified under one heading—PL5001.

Suppression Coatings

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which sections of the export of goods control orders cover "stealth" coatings and materials; and whether export of designs and expertise related to such coatings are also licensable exports.

Mr. Ian Taylor: "Stealth" coatings and materials are controlled in entry ML17(c), fittings, coatings and treatments for signature suppression of group 1 and entries 1C001, materials specially designed for use as absorbers of electromagnetic waves, and 1C101, materials and devices for reduced observables of group 3 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994—EG(C)0.

Software specially designed for such materials is controlled in entry 1D103 of group 3 of the EG(C)0. Technology, which covers documents detailing design and expertise, for such materials is controlled in entries PL5028, of group 1 and 1E001, 1E101 and 1E102 of group 3 of the EG(C)0.

In addition, entry PL5032—goods coated or treated for signature suppression specially designed for military use, other than those specified elsewhere in this group—of group 1 controls military goods with signal suppression coatings not controlled elsewhere in group 1.

Northern Region

Mr. Devlin: To aks the President of the Board of Trade how many jobs have been safeguarded in the northern region through offers of regional and regional selective assistance since 1979.

Mr. Ian Taylor: For the region covered by the Government office for the north-east, 43,071 jobs were safeguarded through the operation of the regional selective assistance scheme between 1979 and 1994. The principal criteria for the regional development grants schemes related to the level of capital expenditure not the number of jobs safeguarded. The first RDG scheme closed for applications on 28 November 1985 and the second on 31 March 1988.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many trading companies are based in the northern region of England; and what was the figure in 1978.

Mr. Ian Taylor: For the region covered by the Government office for the north-east, there were 43,222 VAT registered companies trading on 31 December 1993, the latest available figures. On 31 December 1979—the first year that figures were collated—there were 37,436 VAT registered companies trading in the region.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if he will list the companies which have located in the northern region since 1979 which have received Government assistance together with the amount of Government assistance each received at 1995 prices and an estimate of the jobs created or safeguarded, and from which country each company came;

(2) if he will list the overseas inward investment in the northern region since 1979 by *(a)* company, *(b)* amount of Government assistance at 1995 prices and *(c)* direct jobs created.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The information for the period 1985–94 is in the tables. The figures cover all new investments, a total of 67 projects, which received regional selective assistance, regional development grants and/or regional enterprise grants. These projects were drawn from a list of 376 projects including new investment, expansions, joint ventures and acquisitions.

It has not been possible to produce figures for 1979 to 1985 as records for that period are incomplete, unavailable or have been destroyed.

Company	*Country of origin*	*Original assistance offered £000*	*Value at * 1995 prices*	*Jobs expected New*	*Safeguarded*
Year 1985					
Tabuchi Electric (UK) Ltd.	Japan	2,983	4,602.8	185	
Superbadge	Hong Kong	383	591.0	116	
Komatsu	Japan	1,200	1,851.6	262	
Shulton (GB) Ltd.	United States America	300	462.9	66	

Company	Country of origin	Original assistance offered £000	Value at * 1995 prices	Jobs expected New	Jobs expected Safeguarded
Labelling Dynamics Ltd.	Denmark	137	211.4	23	
Multiman (N'cle) Ltd.	Norway	40	61.7	25	
Ikeda Hoover	Japan	483	745.3	161	
Microclad	France	500	771.5	88	
Tomado	Belgium	10	15.4	6	
	Totals	6,036	9,313.5	932	0
Year: 1986					
Helena Laboratories (UK) Ltd.	United States America	100	149.3	25	
Transfer All Purpose Foils	United States America	819	1,222.8	130	
RB Bolton(Mining Eng) Ltd.	Europe	150	224.0	35	
Grorud Industries	Norway	335	500.2	75	
Calsonic	Japan	33	49.3	11	
	Totals	1,437	2,145.4	276	0
Year: 1987					
Amdega	Isle of Man	70	100.3	20	
Fox Valley Systems	United States America	130	186.3	12	
Key Tech	United States America	1,980	2,837.3	260	
Mitsumi	Japan	894	1,281.1	298	
SMK (UK) Ltd.	Japan	690	988.8	230	
F. Fill and Sons	Sweden	80	114.6	377	
Prom	Denmark	976	1,398.6	60	
	Totals	4,820	6,907.1	1,257	0
Year: 1988					
BHK (UK) Ltd.	West Germany	200	273.2	50	
TRW Repa	West Germany	750	1,024.5	250	
Intertractor	West Germany	500	683.0	50	
Jotron (UK) Ltd.	Norway	115	157.1	30	
Lintron Electronics	Sweden	90	122.9	30	
Glassfibre Flagpoles Ltd.	Sweden	20	27.3	5	
North Salmon Smokery Ltd.	Norway	387	528.6	162	
Gliderol Roller Doors	Australia	144	196.7	48	
Winchmore Knitting	Hong Kong	1,050	1,434.3	350	
Sanyo	Japan	1,407	1,922.0	469	
Goldstar	South Korea	1,171	1,599.6	330	
Swilynn	Hong Kong	4,550	6,215.3	505	
Cookson Enteck	United States America	660	901.6	66	
	Totals	11,044	15,086.1	2,345	0
Year: 1989					
TRW Transportation Electronics	United States America	360	456.1	120	
Fujitsu	Japan	30,000	38,010.0	1,626	
Cookson Fukuda Ltd.	Japan	1,010	1,279.7	115	
Hashimoto Forming Co. Ltd.	Japan	1,500	1,900.5	135	
T T Coil UK Ltd.	Denmark	460	582.8	75	
	Totals	33,330	42,229.1	2,071	0
Year: 1990					
Magneco Metrel	United States America	300	347.4	51	
TRW Valves	United States America	4,500	5,211.0	225	
Schurpack UK) Ltd.	Denmark	850	984.3	104	
Marley Kansei Ltd.	Japan	846	979.7	77	
Calsonic Automotive Products	Japan	427	494.5	48	
Inkel Corporation	Korea	553	640.4	60	
	Totals	7,476	8,657.2	565	0
Year: 1991					
Manhattan Kids	United States America	25	26.4	17	
Lego Fact	Sweden	12	12.6	12	
Lite-On (NPE) Ltd.	Taiwan	90	94.9	85	
	Totals	127	133.9	114	0

Company	Country of origin	Original assistance offered £000	Value at * 1995 prices	Jobs expected New	Jobs expected Safeguarded
Year: 1992					
Tallent Eng Ltd.	Germany	700	737.8	199	
Vynapoint Ltd.	Germany	15	15.8	6	
Samsung Electronic Manuf (UK) Ltd.	Korea	3,000	3,162.0	290	
Onwa Electronics	Hong Kong	3,250	3,425.5	280	
	Totals	6,965	7,341.1	775	0
Year: 1993					
Starpak Inc.	United States America	95	98.6	70	
Whiting Co.	United States America	90	93.4	10	
Production Services	United States America	25	26.0	10	
Technotype Ltd.	United States America	6.7	7.0	5	
Matrixx Marketing Inc.	United States Amercia	95	98.6	65	
Europa Magnetics Corporation	Korea	8,250	8,563.5	550	
Siam Furniture	Thailand	3	3.1	22	
Linerald Ltd.	Hong Kong	160	166.1	89	
	Totals	8,629.7	8,957.6	751	0
Year: 1994					
Camrex Inc.	United States America	500	506.5	56	
TRW Transportation Electronics Ltd.	United States America	1,500	1,519.5	136	
Nippon Silica Glass	Japan	250	253.3	18	3
L. N. P. Plastics	Japan	450	455.9	40	
Lucas SEI Wiring Systems Ltd.	Japan	980	992.7	650	
Goldstar Electric (UK) Ltd.	Korea	4,000	4,052.0	431	44
Samsung Electronics Manuf (UK) Ltd.	Korea	10,500	10,636.5	900	
	Totals	18,180	18,416.3	2,231	47

Fire Safety

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will publish a cost-benefit analysis of the proposals contained in the report of the interdepartmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement which transfer to building control authorities the role of the fire authorities in determining fire safety standards in new and altered or extended buildings.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In considering the way forward on the review of fire safety legislation and enforcement, the Government recognise the need for the costs and benefits of any possible changes to be properly assessed.

The Government hope to come to decisions on the report in the coming weeks, taking account of comments received during the consultation process. We will look at the case for publication at that time.

UK Investment

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current level of British investment in *(a)* the United States of America, *(b)* the EEC excluding the United Kingdom, *(c)* Japan and *(d)* south America; and what it was in 1979, at 1995 prices.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The available information, in current prices, is as follows:

UK direct investment: book value of net assets

	£ million, current prices 1978	1981	1993
United States of America	3,559	7,979	57,420
EC	4,926	5,910	52,778
Japan	112	187	1,909
Caribbean, central and south America	957	1,711	12,216

Note:
Until 1987, the inquiry into overseas transactions was conducted triennially. Consequently, data are available for 1978 and 1981, but not 1979.

Military Technology (Export Licences)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *609*, what factors led him to conclude that the information requested on export licences granted for temporary export of military technology for display at exhibitions could be put together only at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ian Taylor: As I said in my original reply, the required information could only be extracted by examining original case papers. This is because that information—in the degree of detail that was asked for—is not itemised on my Department's databases. The manual search would breach the guidelines on disproportionate cost.

Postal Services

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will state the position of Her Majesty's Government on *(a)* liberalisation of postal services and *(b)* implementation of the single market in postal services.

Mr. Eggar: The Government made it clear in their consultation document "The Future of Postal Services"—Cmnd *2614*, June 1994—that they favoured the progressive introduction of further competition in postal services, provided this did not put at risk the Royal Mail's ability to maintain a universal service at a uniform and affordable tariff.

As regards the European single market, the European Commission itself produced a Green Paper—Com(91)476, June 1992. This acknowledged that a fully harmonised market in postal services was unlikely as each member state would wish to impose restrictions on competition in postal services, in order to ensure the continued ability of the national postal service to meet its social obligations. It made a number of proposals, however, which were intended to ensure that restrictions on competition were no greater than necessary to fund these social objectives.

The Commission is currently preparing draft directives on postal services as a basis for further discussion. While Her Majesty's Government have no formal position on those directives until they have been published, the United Kingdom has one of the more liberalised postal markets in the European Union and would support moves which would bring similar liberalisation in other member states.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if Her Majesty's Government support the use of article 90(3) EU to define the list of reserved postal services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The Government would prefer that all directives implementing the single market in postal services should have as their legal basis article 100A of the treaty of Rome.

Nirex

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what liability the Government have for future routine or accidental contamination to the environment as a result of the construction and operation of the proposed Nirex nuclear waste repository.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The Government have already announced their intention to introduce regulations to provide for the licensing of radioactive waste repositories. The provisions of the Nuclear Installations Act 1965, as amended, will then apply to claims for compensation for third party damage to property or injury in accordance with the arrangements in force at the time. For details of the current arrangements I refer to the hon. Member to the answer given by the then Under Secretary of State for Industry and Energy to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, (Mr. Smith) on 10 January 1995, *Official Report*, columns *29–30*.

Albert Company Plumbing

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will refer the charging practices of Albert Company Plumbing of Middlesex to the Director General of Fair Trading.

Mr. Jonathan Evans *[holding answer 21 February 1995]:* The Consumer Protection Act 1987 provides a means for individuals to complain about misleading pricing to their local trading standards office.

Dounreay

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many on-site contractors have been engaged at Dounreay over the last six months; and what services they have provided.

Mr. Page *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* This is a management matter for the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority.

WALES

Public Appointments

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each non-departmental public body in Wales to which he appoints members *(a)* the title of the organisation, *(b)* the number of non-executive members which represents the full complement and *(c)* the actual current number of non-executive members which have been appointed.

Mr. Redwood: The information given in the following table relates to all executive NDPBs and NHS bodies in Wales. In each case, the figures show (i) the maximum—and, where applicable, the minimum—number of members who may be appointed, including the chairman and vice-deputy chairman; and (ii) the number of appointments which were current at 1 December 1994.

Details of these and all other appointments made by me are listed in "Appointments by the Secretary of State for Wales" which is updated quarterly. Further details about public bodies in Wales is provided in "Public Bodies 1994" HMSO. Both publications are available in the Library of the House.

	Full membership complement	*Appointments held at 1 December 1994*
Executive NDPBs		
Agriculture Wages Committee[1]		
Clwyd	15	2
Dyfed	21	2
Glamorgan	15	2
Gwent	15	2
Gwynedd	21	2
Powys	21	2
Arts Council of Wales	18	16
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	13	13
Countryside Council for Wales	8–12	10
Curriculum and Assessment Authority	10–15	15
Development Board for Rural Wales	11–13	13
Further Education Funding Council	8–12	11
Higher Education Funding Council	8–12	10
Housing for Wales	6–8	6
Land Authority for Wales	6–9	8
National Library of Wales: Council[1]	20	3
National Museum for Wales: Council[1]	16	4
Sports Council for Wales	24	14
Wales Tourist Board	7	5

	Full membership complement	Appointments held at 1 December 1994
Wales Youth Agency	15	10
Welsh Development Agency	9–11	8
Welsh Language Board	15	15
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting	7	7
Health Bodies		
District Health Authorities		
Clwyd	6	6
East Dyfed	6	6
Gwent	6	6
Gwynedd	6	6
Mid Glamorgan	6	5
Pembrokeshire	6	5
Powys	6	6
South Glamorgan	7	6
West Glamorgan	6	6
Family Health Services Authorities		
Clwyd	10	10
Dyfed	10	9
Gwent	10	10
Gwynedd	10	10
Mid Glamorgan	10	9
Powys	10	10
South Glamorgan	10	10
West Glamorgan	10	9
Health Promotion Authority for Wales	8	8
NHS Trusts		
Bridgend and District	6	6
Carmarthen and District	5	5
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	5	5
Clwydian Community Care	6	6
Derwen	5	5
East Glamorgan	5	5
Glan Clwyd	5	5
Glan Hafren	6	5
Gwent Community Health	6	6
Gwynedd Community Health	5	5
Gwynedd Hospitals	6	5
Llandough Hospital	6	5
Llanelli/Dinefwr	6	6
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance	5	5
Morriston Hospital	6	5
Nevill Hall and District	6	6
North Wales Ambulance	5	5
Pembrokeshire	6	6
Powys Health Care	6	5
Rhondda Health Care	5	5
South and East Wales		
Ambulance	6	6
Swansea	6	5
Velindre	6	5
Wrexham Maelor	6	6
Welsh Health Common Services Authority	4	4

Notes:

[1] Agricultural wages committees—Secretary of State appoints two members to each Committee. The other members are nominated by groups representing the industry.

[2] National Library—Secretary of State appoints only three of the maximum of 20 members.

[3] National Museum—Secretary of State appoints only four of the maximum of 16 members.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the introduction of total fundholding for general practitioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I will encourage any suitable projects for piloting total fundholding in Wales which are supported by the health authorities and GP fundholders.

Urban Investment Grant

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the circumstances in which clawback arrangements will apply to urban investment grants paid or part-paid both directly by his Department and by the Cardiff Bay development corporation.

Mr. Redwood: Each development assisted with urban investment grant is assessed for potential clawback liability, either when the developer disposes of it, or after five years, whichever comes first. If the value of the development has increased in real terms, discounting any inflation in the building cost index, clawback will be payable. The rate of clawback will usually be the rate of the urban investment grant which was awarded.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the aggregate level of savings achieved by general practitioner fundholders in each family health services authority in the years 1991-92, 1992–93 and 1993–94.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is as follows:

FHSA	*1991–92*	*1992–93 £000*	*1993–94 £000*
Clwyd	nil	24	[1]845
Dyfed	nil	nil	239
Gwent	nil	234	1,[1]156
Gwynedd	nil	nil	[1]13
Mid Glamorgan	40	139	414
Powys	nil	[1]36	876
South Glamorgan	nil	19	219
West Glamorgan	nil	38	459

Note:

[1]Included are savings in respect of pilot projects. These were £36,000 in Powys in 1992–93. In 1993–94 they were £8,000, £80,000 and £13,000 in Clwyd, Gwent and Gwynedd respectively. All such savings were surrendered and reallocated by the Department for Health spending generally.

In accordance with regulations all savings are available for spending on patient care.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many GP fundholders have submitted their fundholder health plans to the relevant family health services authority.

Mr. Redwood: I understand that nine out or 10 GP fundholders in Wales have submitted health plans to family health services authorities, and that the remaining fundholders are expected to do so shortly.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many general practitioner fundholders have so far been removed from the scheme and for what reasons.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Crown Buildings, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he will make for the occupation of those sections of his main departmental accommodation

at Crown buildings, Cathays Park, Cardiff, when NCM Ltd. leaves.

Mr. Redwood: My Department plans to use the space to be vacated by NCM for the relocation of Welsh Office staff currently housed in other buildings in Cardiff.

Steriliser Testing Services

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what independent evaluation he has carried out of the advantages and disadvantages of steriliser testing services carried out by *(a)* public sector and *(b)* private sector agencies.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Market Testing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those sections of his Department's responsibilities which have been market tested; on what date each was advertised for market testing; what was the outcome of the market-testing exercise; and, where appropriate, what was the name of the winning outside company.

Mr. Redwood: The information is as follows:

Welsh Office responsibility	*Date first advertised/published*	*Tender outcome (awarded to)*
Building maintenance management	November 1992	Kirkham, Williams and Lewis of Newport, Gwent
Catering services	August 1992	Forward Catering
Security guarding	Candidates identified on basis of research conducted by external advisers.	In-house team
Reprographic services	November 1992	In-house team
Support services	November 1992	In-house team
Staff training	November 1992	Training Services (Wales) Ltd., of Bridgend
Cartographic and desk top publishing	November 1992	In-house team
Internal audit services	November 1992	In-house team
Records management	March 1994	In-house team
Typing services	March 1994	In-house team

DEFENCE

Royal Navy Hospital, Haslar

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what considerations underlay his decision to retain the Royal Navy hospital at Haslar in Portsmouth; which military hospitals are scheduled for closure between the present time and 1996; and which will still be open in 1996.

Mr. Soames: A mix of defence-related medical training, operational and cost criteria, all of which were contained in the consultative document, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, led to the conclusion that Haslar would best meet the future medical support needs of the front line. Details of the future secondary care organisation of the defence medical services were given in my answer to the hon. Member for Scarborough (Mr. Sykes) of 8 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *304-305.*

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for improvements to the Royal Navy hospital, Haslar; and what assessments he has made of the costs of improving this hospital and Wroughton hospital.

Mr. Soames: Under our announced plans for reorganising service hospitals in the United Kingdom, the Royal Navy hospital, Haslar is to be expanded to become the tri-service core hospital. The anticipated costs in 25-year discounted cash flow investment appraisal terms are some £146,000,000. Costs for a similar expansion of the Princess Alexandra's RAF hospital, Wroughton would have been some £119,000,000 although not all facilities could have been created and insufficient patient flows would have been generated to fulfil the defence medical services' essential training requirements.

Medical Staff

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many medical staff were serving in the armed forces in each of the past five years; and what is the projected figure for 1996.

Mr. Soames: The total personnel of the defence medical services during the years in question are as follows:

1990—9,461

1991—9,335

1992—9,100

1993—9,220

1994—7,305

Current plans indicate a requirement for 5,722 posts from April 1996.

Military Hospitals

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the costs in each of the last five years for improvements to all military hospitals.

Mr. Soames: Figures are not available in the form requested.

Captain Chris Kelly

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the committee of inquiry into the death of Captain Chris Kelly will commence.

Mr. Soames: The board of inquiry will reconvene once the commanding officer has taken any disciplinary action which may be required as a result of the findings of the inquest into Captain Kelly's death. My Department requires a copy of the transcript of the inquest from the coroner's court before any further action can be taken. A copy of this is awaited.

Burtonwood

Mr. Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future use of Burtonwood air base.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 16 February, *Official Report*, column *724.*

Nerve Agents

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the assessment drawn from the research into the ease of acquisition of the precursors for GD mentioned in his answer of 24 June 1994, *Official Report*, column *378–79*.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 February 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what was the assessment drawn from the research into the ease of acquisition of the precursors for GD mentioned in his Answer of 24 June 1994, Official Report, columns 378–9, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. The work carried out into the ease of acquisition of the precursors for GD was to determine whether the precursors were or were not available and what the costs were likely to be, whether it would be cheaper or easier to synthesise them and to assess which particular process was cheapest, easiest and safest. This work showed that the precursor methyl phosphonic dichloride was of particular importance and could be prepared by several chemical processes.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leyton on 20 December, *Official Report*, column *1173*, in which years since 1965 CR gas was synthesised and produced at *(a)* Porton Down and *(b)* Nancekuke.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 February 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking pursuant to his Answer to the Honourable Member for Leyton on 20 December, Official Report, column 1173, in which years since 1965 CR gas was synthesised and produced at (a) Porton Down and (b) Nancekuke has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The synthesis of CR was first reported in the Journal of the Chemical Society in 1962 by two scientists, Higginbottom and Suschitzsky, working in academia. Our records indicate that it was synthesised at Porton Down in the early to mid 1960s and small quantities were synthesised between 1965 and 1975 for research studies. Work on producing CR also began at Nancekuke in the early 1960s and continued until 1977.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the conclusions of the studies on CR gas on service volunteers mentioned in his answer of 24 June, *Official Report*, column *383*, in relation to the physiological tests to determine the effects on the respiratory and cardiovascular systems; with which other countries the results of these studies were shared; and under which defence agreement the results were exchanged.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 February 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what were the conclusions of the studies on CR gas on Service volunteers mentioned in his Answer of 24 June, Official Report, column 383, in relation to the physiological tests to determine the effects on the respiratory and cardiovascular systems; with which other countries the results of these studies were shared; and under which defence agreement the results were exchanged, has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

a. Assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures.

b. Develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel, and

c. Evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. The conclusions of the studies into CR carried out at CBDE Porton Down have been largely reported in the article entitled "Riot control agents: biomedical and health aspects of the use of chemicals in civil disturbances" by Bryan Ballantyne and published in the Medical Annual 1977; John Wright, Bristol. As CR solution has a negligible vapour pressure, few effects on the respiratory tract would be expected after the use of liquid formulations. Studies into the pulmonary function of volunteers exposed to vaporised CR showed no significant change in the respiratory capability. Cardiovascular studies using vaporised CR showed no significant effect.

4. The results of this work were part of the chemical and biological defence programme and would have formed part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with the United States, Australia and Canada under the Technical Cooperation Programme and its predecessors and with the United States and Canada under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the purpose of research on the nerve agent GF at the nerve agent plant at Nancekuke, Cornwall; what quantities of nerve agent GF were used in this research; whether the results of this research were shared with any other countries; and under which defence agreements these results were exchanged.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 February 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking what was the purpose of research on the nerve agent GF at the Nerve agent plant at Nancekuke, Cornwall; what quantities of nerve agent GF were used in this research; whether the results of this research were shared with any other countries; and under which defence agreements these results were exchanged has been passed

to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the United Kingdom Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them. As part of this work the potential hazard of possible chemical and biological warfare agents is assessed and the effectiveness of British protective measures evaluated.

3. The programme of research on GF was part of the research into the processes which would be involved in the production of any of the G series of agents. The chemistry of GF is similar to that of GB and production would be dependant upon the same intermediate. Since GF was slightly more toxic than GB by the percutaneous route, and also more persistent with a volatility intermediate in the G series, there were good reasons for continuing the evaluation started by Germany. GF has been made on the laboratory scale at Nancekuke. Work continued at Nancekuke until 1976. The quantities of GF used in this work are not readily available; they are likely to have been pounds.

4. The results of this work were part of the chemical and biological defence programme and would have formed part of the technical database drawn upon in collaboration with the United States, Australia and Canada under the Technical Cooperation Programme and its predecessors and with the United States and Canada under the Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence.

Chemical and Biological Defence Memoranda of Understanding

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates the 1980 memorandum of understanding on chemical and biological defence between the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada has been amended; why these amendments were made; and when the existence of this memorandum was first notified to Parliament.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment. I have therefore asked him to reply.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 February 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking on what dates the 1980 Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence between the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada has been amended; why these amendments were made; and when the existence of this memorandum was first notified to Parliament has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The Memorandum of Understanding on Chemical and Biological Defence between the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Canada has been amended on eight occasions:

(a) October 1984 to extend the MOU.
(b) March 1985 to clarify an aspect of the MOU.
(c) November 1988 to add an Annex to the MOU.
(d) October 1989 to replace this Annex to the MOU.
(e) October 1989 to extend the MOU.
(f) October 1991 to add an Annex to the MOU.
(g) June 1994 to add an Annex to the MOU.
(h) November 1994 to extend the MOU.

The additional Annexes provide details about areas of collaboration between the three countries concerned.

3. Our records do not indicate when the existence of the Memorandum of Understanding was notified to Parliament. However, it has been referred to in the answer to many Parliamentary Questions during the past five years.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many memoranda of understanding covering the research, development, production or procurement of chemical and biological defence equipment have existed between the United Kingdom and the United States of America since 1965.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment. I have therefore asked him to reply.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 24 February 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking how many Memoranda of Understanding covering the research, development, production or procurement of chemical and biological defence equipment have existed between the United Kingdom and the United States of America since 1965 has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to carry out work to ensure that the UK Armed Forces are provided with effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. A single Memorandum of Understanding exists which was signed in 1980. This Memorandum of Understanding has been very effective in promoting cooperation and collaboration between the three countries enabling resources to be shared and more robust conclusions to be drawn arising from peer review by the three countries.

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Ms Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested for 1991 and 1992 is contained in the civil service commissioners' reports for the relevant years, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. The proportion of women entering the fast stream in the Ministry of Defence in 1993 and 1994 is shown in the table. These figures include successful in-service candidates.

	1993	*1994*
Number of women	5	5
Total number of men and women	24	13

Export Finance House

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Treasury gave its approval to the creation of the state-owned export credit operation of IMS Export Finance House; and if there are any other such state owned export credit operations.

Mr. Freeman: Formal Treasury approval was not required for this commercial initiative by International Military Services Ltd. Our understanding is that the Export Credits Guarantee Department is the only state-owned export credit institution currently operating.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the activities of IMS Export Finance House run by the Ministry of Defence are covered by the limits of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development consensus on export support; and whether they are included in the fixed rate export finances scheme.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 21 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *101*.

Works of Art

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Minister within his Department has the responsibility for ensuring the safe keeping of works of art in Ministry of Defence properties.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence is the Minister responsible.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how often the works of art kept in Ministry of Defence properties have been the subject of an inventory in the last 20 years for which information is available.

Mr. Soames: The staff in my Department who manage works of art in our London headquarters buildings carry out frequent inspections as well as asking all senior staff to account for the works in their offices twice each year. In addition, the government art collection inspects each London building about once a year and other lenders of works will inspect their loans whenever necessary.

Outside London, local managers will carry out inspections as they deem necessary and as lenders of works of art require. In recent years, the government art collection has carried out an inventory check of its works of art on loan to my Department's properties outside London every 12 or 15 months.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the approximate value of the paintings entitled *(a)* "Woman Carrying a Goat", *(b)* "Crete" and *(c)* "A Court Martial Case at Deptford".

Mr. Soames: I believe the hon. Member is referring to a print by Michael Ayrton entitled "Woman Carrying a Goat, Crete" which the government art collection values at about £100. The work entitled "A Court Martial Case at Deptford" is a print taken from a publication; the government art collection doubts that it has any commercial value.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what system is in operation for the allocation of works of art from the government art collection to Ministry of Defence properties.

Mr. Soames: Ministers and staff of civil service grades 1 to 3 and their service equivalents with offices in central London buildings may borrow works from the government art collection. In general, officials below grade 1, permanent secretary, are allocated only prints. Works of art are allocated subject to the environmental conditions of the rooms in which they will hang satisfying the government art collection's standards. The government art collection will also lend works of art for display in conference rooms within Whitehall office buildings, reception rooms in official residences and the public areas of the Royal College of Defence Studies.

With a few exceptions, the government art collection ceased lending additional works to my Department's properties in the regions and abroad in 1981, and has since been implementing a policy of withdrawing existing loans for use elsewhere whenever the opportunity arises.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have been prosecuted for crimes of dishonesty involving works of art kept in Ministry of Defence properties in the last 20 years for which information is available.

Mr. Soames: In the past five years, Ministry of Defence police have solved eight cases where works of art, both Government and privately owned, were stolen from Ministry of Defence properties. Central records are not kept of the number of prosecutions resulting from these cases and this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. A detected case of theft would, however, almost certainly result in prosecution.

Information on cases dating back further than the last five years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Land Mines

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research he has carried out to investigate weapons systems which could act as alternatives to anti-personnel land mines.

Mr. Freeman: The need for anti-personal land mines is kept under review. Such reviews include the investigation of possible alternative ways of carrying out the important defensive role which is currently fulfilled by anti-personnel land mines. Recent operational analysis has not identified any weapon system which could act as an effective alternative to anti-personnel land mines.

War Pensions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel who served in Operation Granby have been given war pensions arising out of illness as a result of the immunisation programmes carried out during the operation.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have been asked to reply.

Records show that a war pension award has been made in one case for a condition related to immunisation.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Integrated Electronic Systems

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* service, *(b)* functions and *(c)* duties are carried out by the Integrated Electronic Systems group for or on behalf of (i) his Department or (ii) its agencies.

Mr. Goodlad: Integrated Electronic Systems, of West Malling, Kent supplied the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with minor amounts of consumable products in 1987 and supplied four items of electronic equipment in 1993.

Salamat Masih

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with *(a)* the Pakistani Muslim community in Britain and *(b)* the Pakistani Government regarding the death sentence imposed on Salamat Masih; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: We have made representations to the Pakistani high commission over the Salamat Masih case and initiated action in Islamabad by the European Union. We have not raised the issue with Muslims of Pakistani origin in Britain. Salamat Masih is now reported to have been acquitted on appeal.

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will impose sanctions against Pakistan in response to the Salamat Masih case.

Mr. Baldry: We do not intend to impose sanctions against Pakistan in response to this case. Salamat Masih is now reported to have been acquitted on appeal.

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the response from the British Pakistani Muslim community to the Salamat Masih case and sentence.

Mr. Baldry: Our efforts have been directed towards events in Pakistan and the protection of human rights for minorities there. We have not raised the case with Muslims of Pakistani origin in Britain.

Software Counterfeiting

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Governments of *(a)* the United Kingdom or *(b)* Hong Kong about the counterfeiting of software products or software-based products; and what assessment he has made of whether the actions being taken by the Government of the USA or the People's Republic of China as a result of concerns about counterfeiting have had, or could have, any impact on Hong Kong.

Mr. Goodlad: We receive from time to time expressions of concern about piracy of software in countries overseas. We recognise the seriousness of piracy of intellectual property and use all means available to encourage other countries to introduce and enforce acceptable standards of intellectual property protection.

The Hong Kong Government have received representations from the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry on the need to strengthen controls against compact disc piracy by increasing the maximum statutory penalty for copyright infringement offences.

If Sino-American talks on the protection of intellectual property rights do not produce agreement, the US Government's proposed tariffs on certain Chinese merchandise imports are implemented. The Hong Kong Government estimate that this could lead to the loss of up to 4,700 jobs in Hong Kong, affect 2.3 per cent. or HK$4.5 billion of Hong Kong's re-exports from China to the United States, and reduce GDP growth by 0.14 per cent.

Somalia (Land Mines)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British manufactured Mk.2 anti-personnel mines have been discovered in northern Somalia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Nations mine-clearance and policy unit informs us that, to the best of its knowledge, no land mines of this type have been found in northern Somalia.

Mr. Shahia Iqbal

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mr. Shahia Iqbal—Ref: IMM/89155—made his latest application to join his wife in the United kingdom; when he was interviewed; when a decision will be taken on his application; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: If the hon. Member would let me know at which post Mr. Shahia Iqbal applied, I will arrange for him to receive a substantive reply from the migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as soon as possible.

Mozambique (Land Mines)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received that British manufactured anti-personnel mines became available to and were used by combatants in Mozambique; to which types of mine these refer; where they were made; and what further inquiries he has instituted.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have no record of any reports that British anti-personnel mines have been used in Mozambique. We announced on 27 July 1994 an indefinite moratorium on the export of anti-personnel mines which do not have a self-destructing or self-neutralising mechanism.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 27 February 1995

SOCIAL SECURITY

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 apply to all regulations for which his Department is responsible, past, present and future, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him today by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the statutory instruments which his Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Mr. Hague: The 72 statutory instruments introduced by this Department in the past 12 months are as follows:

SIs completed during period 20 February 1994 to 20 February 1995

SI Number	*Title*
1994/470	The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (Amendment) Regulations 1994
1994/500	The Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 1994
1994/506	The Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/523	The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (Subsidy) Order 1994
1994/527	The Income-related Benefits Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1994
1994/542	The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1994
1994/544	The Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating and National Insurance Fund Payments) Order 1994
1994/559	The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Regulations 1994
1994/561	The Statutory Sick Pay (Small Employers' Relief) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/562	The Statutory Sick Pay (Rate of Payment) Order 1994
1994/563	The Social Security (Contributions) Amendment Regulations 1994

SIs completed during period 20 February 1994 to 20 February 1995

SI Number	*Title*
1994/578	The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1994
1994/579	The Housing Benefit (Permitted Totals) Order 1994
1994/592	The Statutory Maternity Pay (Compensation of Employers) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/667	The Social Security (Contributions) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1994
1994/671	The Workmen's Compensation (Supplementation) (Amendment) Scheme 1994
1994/704	The Social Security Pensions (Home Responsibilities) Regulations 1994
1994/715	The Personal Injuries (Civilians) Amendment Scheme 1994
1994/726	The Social Security (Categorisation of Earners) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/730	The Statutory Sick Pay Act 1994 (Consequential) Regulations 1994
1994/731	The Child Support Act 1991 (Consequential Amendments) Order 1994
1994/771	The Home Guard (Amendment) Order 1994
1994/772	The Naval, Military and Air Forces etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions Amendment Order 1994
1994/773	The Ulster Defence Regiment (Amendment) order 1994
1994/781	The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (Subsidy) Regulations 1994
1994/895	The Occupational Pension Schemes (Deficiency on Winding up etc.) Regulations 1994
1994/1003	The Housing Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/1004	The Income Support (General) Amendments Regulations 1994
1994/1062	The Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Consequential Amendments) Regulations 1994
1994/1082	The Social Security (Adjudication) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/1101	The Social Security (Sickness and Invalidity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1994
1994/1105	The Social Security Revaluation of Earnings Factors Order 1994
1994/1230	The Maternity Allowance and Statutory Maternity Pay Regulations 1994
1994/1367	The Social Security Maternity Benefits and Statutory Sick Pay (Amendment) Regulations 1994
1994/1553	The Social Security (Contributions) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1994
1994/1608	The Income-related Benefits Schemes (Miscellaneous) Amendments (No. 2) Regulations 1994

SIs completed during period 20 February 1994 to 20 February 1995

SI Number	*Title*
1994/1646	The Social Security (Cyprus) Order 1994
1994/1661 (C.30)	The Social Security Act 1989 (Commencement No. 5) Order 1994
1994/1751	The Protected Rights (Transfer Payment) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/1779	The Social Security (Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance) (Amendment) Regulations 1994
1994/1807	The Income-related Benefits Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 3) Regulations 1994
1994/1832	The Social Security Benefit (Persons Abroad) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1994
1994/1837	The Social Security (Credits) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/1882	The Statutory Maternity Pay (Compensation of Employers) and Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/1906	The Naval, Military and Air Forces etc. (Disablement and Death) Service Pensions Amendment (No. 2) Order 1994
1994/1924	The Income-related Benefits Scheme (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 4) Regulations 1994
1994/1925	The Housing Benefit (Supply of Information) and Council Tax Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/2021	The Personal Injuries (Civilians) Amendment (No. 2) Scheme 1994
1994/2137	The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 2) Regulations 1994
1994/2138	The Council Tax Benefit (Permitted Total) Order 1994
1994/2139	The Income-related Benefits Scheme (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 5) Regulations 1994
1994/2194	The Social Security (Contributions) Amendment (No. 3) Regulations 1994
1994/2299	The Social Security (Contributions) Amendment (No. 4) Regulations 1994
1994/2319	The Social Security (Claims and Payments) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/2343	The Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Prescribed Diseases) Amendment Regulations 1994
1944/2556	The Social Security (Severe Disablement Allowance and Invalid Care Allowance) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/2593	The Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/2686	The Social Security (Adjudication) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1994
1994/2802	The Social Security (Jersey and Guernsey) Order 1994
1994/2891	The Occupational Pensions (Revaluation) Order 1994

SIs completed during period 20 February 1994 to 20 February 1995

SI Number	*Title*
1994/2926(C.65)	The Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994 (Commencement) Order 1994
1994/2943	The Social Security (Claims and Payments) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1994
1994/2944	The Social Security (Claims and Payments) Amendment (No. 3) Regulations 1994
1994/2945	The Social Security (Incapacity Benefit—Increases for Dependants) Regulations 1994
1994/2946	The Social Security (Incapacity Benefit) Regulations 1994
1994/2947	The Social Security (Severe Disablement Allowance) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/2975	The Social Security (Medical Evidence) Amendment Regulations 1994
1994/3061	The Income-related Benefits Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 6) Regulations 1994
1994/3196	The Social Security (Claims and Payments) Amendment (No. 4) Regulations 1994
1995/35	The Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1995
1995/74	The Social Security (Widow's Benefit and Retirement Pensions) Amendment Regulations 1995
1995/123	The Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 1995

Correspondence

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what pilot project his Department intends to initiate at the central correspondence unit following the report by Coopers and Lybrand reviewing the support work within DSS headquarters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: A review of support services in our headquarters offices in London recommended that the Department should pilot the use of more centralised teams to provide replies to correspondence from Members of Parliament and members of the public. A pilot project will start in April and will be evaluated in the autumn.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants have won an appeal against refusal of income support under the habitual residence test.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what separate sub-categories are used under the habitual residence test to identify those people who are to be refused income support.

Mr. Roger Evans: The habitual residence test applies to all income support claimants who satisfy the conditions of entitlement for that benefit. No separate sub-categories

are used to identify those people who are refused income support because of the habitual residence test. As part of our monitoring of the change, we collect information on the numbers of British Citizens, European Economic Area nationals and others who pass or fail the test.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much invalidity benefit was paid to *(a)* men and *(b)* women in the latest available year; and what is the latest available number of (i) male and (ii) female claimants.

Mr. Hague: The available information is in the table.

	IVB beneficiaries incapacitated on 3 April 1993	*Percentage of estimated annual IVB expenditure*[1]
Men	1,156,000	78 per cent.
Women	424,000	22 per cent.

[1] estimated invalidity benefit—IVB— paid in the final week of the 1992–93 statistical year.

Notes:
1. All information in the table is based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants to benefit within Great Britain, rated up by 100 and rounded to the nearest thousand.

Supplementary Benefit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in which years the Comptroller and Auditor General decided to qualify his audit opinion of the supplementary benefit scheme before it was replaced by income support in 1988.

Mr. Roger Evans: The Comptroller and Auditor General has never qualified his audit opinion of the supplementary benefit scheme before it was replaced by income support in 1988.

Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the total amount of council tax benefit annually given to families with *(a)* one adult working, *(b)* two adults working and *(c)* three or more adults working, specifying the amount given to people aged 18 to 24 years in each category; and how much was given to single parents in category *(a)*.

(2) what is the total amount of housing benefit given annually to families with *(a)* one adult working, *(b)* two adults working and *(c)* three or more adults working, specifying the amount given to people aged 18 to 24 years in each category; and how much is given to single parents in category *(a)*.

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* The available information is set out in the table.

Housing benefit and council tax benefit estimated expenditure at May 93: by the number of working adults in a family unit and whether the claimant is aged between 18 and 24.

£ Millions

	Housing benefit *Annual housing benefit expenditure (£) estimated from a sample taken in the last week of May 1993*			*Council tax benefit* *Annual council tax benefit expenditure (£) estimated from a sample taken in the last week of May 1993*		
	Claimant aged between 18 to 24	*Others*	*Total*	*Claimant aged between 18 to 24*	*Others*	*Total*
No-one in the benefit unit working	425.1	1855.8	2280.9	58.3	347.7	406.1
(a) One adult in the benefit unit working	41.2	359.3	400.6	5.0	80.2	85.3
Single parents included in (a)	n/a	n/a	222.2	n/a	n/a	39.0
(b) Two adults in the benefit unit working	0.6	17	17.6	0.1	6.4	6.5
(c) Three or more adults in the benefit unit working	[1]	[2]	[2]	[1]	0.5	0.5

Source:
Housing benefit management information system, 1 per cent. sample May 93.
Symbols and abbreviations:
[1] Nil or negligible
[2] Amount rounded to zero
n/a not appropriate
Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred thousand.
2. Adults in work can include claimants, their partners and non-dependants.
3. The figures are for family benefit units which may be a single person or couple, with a dependant aged up to 16, or 19 if the dependant is in full-time non-advanced education.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families currently receiving housing benefit have *(a)* one adult working, *(b)* two adults working and *(c)* three or more adults working, specifying the number of people aged 18 to 24 years each category includes: and how many single parents are included in *(a)*.

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* The available information, as at the end of May 1993, is set out in the table:

Number of families in receipt of housing benefit where at least one adult is working.

May 1993 *Thousands*

Number of adults working	*Total number of families*	*Number of people aged 18–24 in the family*					*Total number of people aged 18–24*
		0	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	
1	382	268	89	22	2	1	142
2	29	12	13	4	—	—	23
3 or more	2	1	—	—	—	—	2
Total	413	281	102	27	3	1	167

The number of single parent families in receipt of housing benefit, with one adult working is 134,000.

Source:

Housing benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample enquiries taken at the end of May 1993.

Notes:

1. For the purpose a family has been defined as a household where there are dependants or non-dependants. It is not possible to separately identify non-dependants who are not part of the family.
2. The number of people aged 18 to 24 includes the claimant, partner, dependants and any non-dependants, regardless of whether they are working or not.
3. Adults working could possibly be the claimant, partner or any non-dependants.
4. Figures are for GB and have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
5. "—" represents less than 500 rated-up cases.

Council Tax Benefit

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families currently receiving council tax benefit have *(a)* one adult working, *(b)* two adults working and *(c)* three or more adults working, specifying the number of people aged 18 to 24 years that each category includes: and how any single parents are included in *(a)*.

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 16 February 1995]:* The available information, as at the end of May 1993, is set out in the table:

Number of families in receipt of council tax benefit where at least one adult is working

Thousands

Number of adults working	*Total number of families*	*Number of people aged 18–24 in the family*					*Total number of people aged 18–24*
		0	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	
1	514	367	118	26	3	1	182
2	63	25	27	10	1	—	50
3 or more	10	3	2	4	1	1	14
Total	587	395	147	39	5	2	247

The number of single-parent families in receipt of council tax benefit, with one adult working is 137,000.

Source:

Council tax benefit management information system annual 1 per cent. sample enquiries taken at the end of May 1993.

Notes:

1. For the purpose, a family has been defined as a household where there are dependants of non-dependants. It is not possible separately to identify non-dependants who are not part of the family.
2. The number of people aged 18 to 24 includes the claimant, partner, dependants and any non-dependants, regardless of whether they are working or not.
3. Adults working could possibly be the claimant, partner or any non-dependants.
4. Figures are for GB and have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
5. "—" represents less than 500 rated-up cases.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Civil Justice Review Committee

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the members of Lord Woolf's civil justice review committee and its working groups.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Lord Woolf is assisted in his inquiry into access to justice by a team of assessors. They are: John Bolton, solicitor and arbitrator; Dick Greenslade district judge; Rupert Jackson QC; Phillip Sycamore, solicitor; and Robert Turner, Master of the Queen's Bench Division. Professor Ross Cranston, professor of commercial law at the London School of Economics and Political Science, is acting as academic consultant to the inquiry. Professor Richard Susskind has just been appointed as an information technology consultant.

A sub-group comprising Master Turner and District Judge Greenslade, with representatives of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and the National Consumer Council, is working on a single code of rules. Mr. James Rennie, a retired Parliamentary Counsel, has been engaged as draftsman.

Legal Aid

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment of legal needs in respect of *(a)* social security, *(b)* housing, *(c)* debt, *(d)*

employment, *(e)* matrimonial law, *(f)* the Children Act 1989 and *(g)* immigration in different pats of the country his Department is making; and when he expects to publish these assessments.

Mr. John M. Taylor: For a number of years, the Legal Aid Board has been undertaking pioneering work in establishing methods for predicting legal need in some of these areas of work. Details of this work—which is continuing—are contained in the Legal Aid Board's annual reports. This work will need to be built upon as the ideas outlined by the Lord Chancellor earlier this year are developed further. The results of such work will be published in due course if it seems appropriate to do so.

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. John M. Taylor: For information in respect of 1991 and 1992, I refer the hon. Member to the Civil Service Commissioners' Reports for 1991–92 and 1992–93 respectively. Copies of both reports are available in the Library of the House. In 1993 and 1994, there were 10 new fast-stream entrants to the Lord Chancellor's Department, as shown in the table.

Parliamentary question for written answer on Monday 27 February

Year	*Number appointed*	*Females*	*Males*
1993	6	2(Grade 7)	4
1994	4	3	1
Totals	10	5	5

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he plans to publish the report of Lord Woolf's review of the civil justice system.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor expects to receive the first report of Lord Woolf's inquiry into access to justice after Easter this year.

Civil Justice Reform

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to establish a permanent standing committee on civil justice reform.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor has no plans at present to establish a permanent standing committee on civil justice reform.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken to institute an inquiry into the Balibo killings of 16 October 1975.

Mr. Goodlad: We have no plans to institute an inquiry. The Australians took the lead at the time in investigating the deaths of five members of an Australian television team working in East Timor in October 1975. In view of the circumstances then prevailing in East Timor, there was no means of ascertaining the precise circumstances in which they died. No firm evidence was discovered of who was responsible for their deaths. It is most unlikely, at this distance from the events, that another inquiry would shed any new light on the matter.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response his Department has made to the report of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights concerning the killings at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Rili in November 1991 and the subsequent investigation by the national commission of inquiry.

Mr. Goodlad: We welcomed Indonesia's decision to invite the UN special rapporteur to visit East Timor last July. With our EU partners we are considering his report, and Indonesia's response, at the present session of the UN Commission on Human Rights.

Peru

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place an English translation copy of the Interamerican Human Rights court ruling on the massacre of prisoners in the Peruvian El Fronton prison on 18 and 19 June 1987 in the Library.

Mr. David Davis: We have not received a copy of the ruling. However, we shall try to obtain one in order to place it in the Library.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report*, column *884*, if the representations about banning of three journals by the Government of Indonesia were made privately.

Mr. Goodlad: Yes.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests have been made to the Indonesian Government for information on the location and use of defence equipment exported from Britain.

Mr. Goodlad: Any such requests are made on a confidential basis. It is not our practice to disclose such exchanges.

Border Controls

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will be presenting oral legal argument before the European Court of Justice in the action between the European Parliament and the Commission of the European Countries, case C-445/93, 18 March 1993, regarding the abolition of border controls.

Mr. David Davis: We have submitted written observations to the ECJ in this case. An oral hearing has been requested by the Commission. In due course, we will receive notification of the date of that hearing.

Surinam

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Government of Surinam concerning the rights of indigenous and Maroon peoples to be consulted over land use divisions covering the areas in which they live.

Mr. Baldry: I am not aware of any recent problem concerning the Maroon people in Surinam and we have received no other request to make representations on their behalf. However, if the hon. Member would care to write about his concerns, I would be happy to look into the matter.

Overseas Students

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many overseas students currently studying in the United Kingdom are in receipt of funding from his Department; and what expenditure this creates.

Mr. Baldry: In the current financial year, ending on 31 March 1995, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is providing funding for some 11,500 overseas students studying in the United Kingdom. The total costs will be approximately £97.6 million.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ensure the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 apply to all regulations for which his Department is responsible, past, present and future, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the statutory instruments which his Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Mr. Baldry: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly to provide him with a list of the 29 statutory instruments sponsored by my Department in 1994.

Defence Exports

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions since 1979 his Department sought information from a recipient country on the location and use of defence equipment which was exported to that country from Britain.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Any such requests are made on a confidential basis. It is not our practice to disclose such exchanges with other Governments.

South Africa (Nuclear Weapons)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will authorise the United Kingdom permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency board of governors in Vienna to request that the agency investigates whether manufactured nuclear warheads were hidden from the IAEA investigation team which verified South Africa's non-nuclear status in connection with South Africa's application to become a member state of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. David Davis: The International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed South Africa's non-nuclear weapon status in 1993. We have no plans to request another investigation.

Civil Servants

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 1 December to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), *Official Report*, column *897*, if he will detail applications to join defence, security and/or security defence-related companies approved by his Department for employees who had left his Department of its agencies within the last two years.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

Since my answer of 1 December to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), the following applications from staff in my Department have been approved for employment with defence-related companies. Only one application to join a security company—an Air Vice Marshal to join TNT Express (UK) Ltd—has been approved during the last two years.

Company	*Rank/Grade*
Action Information (Management)	1 x Lt. Colonel
Aramark plc	1 x Captain
BAe plc	1 x Grade 3
BAe Sema Ltd.	1 x Commander RN
BMT Defence Services Ltd.	1 x Grade 7
Cray Systems Ltd.	1 x Lt. Colonel
Data Sciences (UK) Ltd.	1 x Squadron Leader
EDS Scicon Defence Ltd.	1 x HEO
	1 x SPTO
	1 x PTO
	1 x Lt. Commander RN
	1 x Major General
	1 x Group Captain
Hewlett Packard Ltd.	1 x Lt. Commander RN
Hiller Parker May and Rowden	1 x HEO
IBM (UK) Ltd.	1 x Group Captain
M L Douglas Equipment Ltd.	1 x HPTO
NPBI	1 x Colonel
Olin Ordnance	1 x HPTO
Pennine Services	1 x Major
Racal Radar Defence Systems Ltd.	1 x Squadron Leader
Siemens Plessey Electronic Systems Ltd.	1 x Grade 6

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Lord President of the Council what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993 and *(d)* 1994 were women.

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council Office, which comprises only 38 staff, does not employ fast-stream entrants on their first civil service appointment.

TREASURY

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what are the criteria used for classifying grant-maintained schools as private sector institutions for the purpose of national income accounts;

(2) if he will make a statement on the status of *(a)* grant-maintained schools and *(b)* universities and colleges as private sector institutions for the purpose of national income accounts; and what are the differences between them.

Mr. Nelson: The national accounts are constructed by the Central Statistical Office in accordance with internationally agreed standards. Current practice is described in the CSO publication "United Kingdom National Accounts: Sources and Methods", third edition, available in the House of Commons Library.

At present, grant-maintained schools, universities and colleges are all classified as private non-profit-making bodies serving persons. There is no difference in their national accounts status.

The main criterion for determining whether an organisation is classified to the public or private sector is who controls it. Grant-maintained schools are classified to the private sector primarily because they are considered to be run independently by governors appointed by the private sector.

CSO will be reviewing the sector classification of these bodies as part of a wider review to identify whether any changes are necessary to meet recently revised international standards.

Housing Associations (Discounted Securities)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the implications of his plans to stop the tax loophole between companies in banking groups in respect of discounted securities on housing associations which are partly financed by the use of discounted securities.

Sir George Young: I assume that the hon. Gentleman has in mind the proposals at clauses 76 and 77 of the current Finance Bill. These are not directed solely at transactions between companies in banking groups, and I understand from representations that about a dozen housing associations have issued securities on discounted or indexed terms that they believe will be affected by my right hon. and learned Friend's proposal. It appears that these associations have given indemnities to the holders of their securities against the effects of changes to their tax treatment. It follows, if the clauses in question pass into law, that these borrowings and any further borrowings on similar terms will cease to offer reduced borrowing costs compared with more conventional borrowing. We have, however, proposed that existing borrowings by housing associations should not be subject to the new basis of charge until 1 April 1996. This will give the associations concerned a breathing space in which to rearrange their financial plans.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he and the Secretary of State for the Environment have made into how much of the private finance raised by the housing associations has been achieved via the use of discounted securities.

Sir George Young: I understand from representations received and from press reports that about £130 million of borrowing in aggregate may have been raised by housing associations' issuance of discounted securities, and about a further £30 million by issuance of indexed securities which may also be affected by the measure I believe the hon. Gentleman has in mind. These figures total some 2.5 per cent. of estimated total private sector borrowing by housing associations.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has had discussions with the Secretaries of State for Health and for the Environment, following the Department of Health's approving the use of discounted securities for a housing association to finance low-rent accommodation for student nurses and junior doctors in 1989.

Sir George Young: My right hon. and learned Friend took the views of ministerial colleagues fully into account in deciding to extend a degree of transitional protection to existing borrowings by housing associations.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy *(a)* to amend his proposals to exempt housing associations in his proposed plan to curb tax avoidance with discounted securities and *(b)* to issue advice to the Housing Corporation and other relevant bodies on alternative means to raise private finance.

Sir George Young: We have proposed amendments to this year's Finance Bill granting a degree of transitional relief for existing borrowings by housing associations. For the future, these bodies already know of alternative means of raising private finance to those affected by our Budget proposals, and have used them for the overwhelming majority of their borrowing.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Environment about ensuring that housing associations' issue of discounted securities will not be affected by any action to curb tax avoidance in respect of discounted securities between subsidiaries in a banking group.

Sir George Young: My right hon. and learned Friend's proposal is not directed solely at transactions between subsidiaries in a banking group, and it is appropriate that securities issued by housing associations should come within its scope if they have the relevant characteristics. We have, however, concluded that it is appropriate to extend a degree of transitional protection to existing borrowings by housing associations.

Delegated Pay

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Nelson: None of the NDPBs sponsored by the Treasury falls into the categories listed. One NDPB follows its own pay arrangements; for the remainder, remuneration is on a fee paid basis.

Housing (Negative Equity)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what help is being given to home owners with negative equity.

Mr. Nelson: The Bank of England estimates that the number of households with negative equity has fallen by over 44 per cent. since the end of 1992. The Government are pursuing sound economic policies designed to sustain economic recovery. That is the surest route to rising prosperity for all, including home owners who currently have negative equity.

St. John's House, Bootle

Mr. Benton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the demolition of St. John's house in Bootle; how many civil servants are currently employed there; and what provision is being made for the continuation of their functions.

Sir George Young: St. John's house in Bootle is occupied by 1,650 Inland Revenue staff and 200 Home Office staff. The building is in need of major refurbishment and staff have had to put up with poor working conditions for a number of years. Detailed option studies were undertaken by Property Holdings and the Inland Revenue to consider how the problems associated with the building could be resolved. Having considered all the options, including value for money, the decision has been taken to demolish the whole of St. John's house and to put in its place a new, but smaller, building which will house 850 of the existing occupants. The other 1,000 Inland Revenue staff will move to private leased accommodation elsewhere in Bootle. There are no plans to move work out of Bootle and the Inland Revenue remains committed to retaining a substantial presence in Bootle.

Value Added Tax (Sports Clubs)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for refunding VAT paid on sports supplies which have been purchased by non-profit-making sports clubs; if it is the responsibility of sports clubs to consult their members on how any refund should be used or distributed to its members; and what discussions he has had with HM Customs and Excise regarding the payment of *(a)* VAT and *(b)* VAT refunds.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In June 1994 Customs and Excise invited all non-profit-making sports clubs to claim repayment of VAT on certain sporting and physical education services supplied by them to members during the period 1 January 1990 to 31 March 1994. many of the repayments have now been made. Sports supplies purchased by clubs are generally not exempt from VAT.

Whether or not sports clubs have a responsibility to consult members concerning allocation of the refunds is for the clubs and their members to determine between themselves. It is not a matter in which it would be appropriate for the Government or customs to intervene. VAT accounting arrangements fall within the statutory responsibilities of the Commissioners of Customs and Excise for managing the tax.

National Lottery

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements are in place for the timing of payments of 12 per cent. tax to the Exchequer by the organisers of the national lottery; and what provision has been made of the payment of interest to the Exchequer.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Payments of lottery duty are made on the 15th of the month following the month in which the liabilities arises. There are no arrangements for the payment of interest to the Exchequer in relation to the lottery duty.

Civil Service Job Losses

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of job losses in the civil service in the next two years.

Sir George Young: The statistical supplement to the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", published on 24 February, shows Departments' civil service staff plans as follows:

Outturn	*Planned Figures*			
1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
548,000	527,000	516,000	494,000	477,000

This accords with the expectation, announced in the civil service White Paper—Cm 2627—that numbers would fall significantly below 500,000 in the next few years.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what changes he plans to implement in the number and the location of Customs and Excise officers in Wales; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many Customs and Excise officers were based in Wales dealing with *(a)* VAT, *(b)* import controls, including checking passengers at airports and ports, *(c)* coastal surveillance and *(d)* general intelligence in September 1979, September 1990 and September 1994; and what is the planned number in September 1995.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* As part of the implementation of the fundamental expenditure review, Customs and Excise currently plans the following changes in Wales which will take place over the next five years:

Locations	Officers at 23 February 1995	Officers at 31 March 2000
Cardiff	205	275
Merthyr	22	0
Newport	17	0
Swansea	96	40
Haverfordwest	12	0
Carmarthen	49	79.5
Bangor	0	18
Colwyn Bay	26	0
Pembroke Dock Excise	7	0
Aberystwyth	5	4
Newtown	6	0
Customs	98	47.5
Total	543	464

Over recent years, customs enforcement strategy has progressively moved away from a static presence at all ports and airports towards more flexible, better targeted checks operated by fast response teams. Accordingly, customs staff are deployed flexibly throughout Wales and it would not be in the public interest to identify their location in greater detail.

Customs and Excise does not keep reports of local resource deployment for 1979. Its planning system does not easily allow it to identify staffing levels at a mid-point in the year and the figures in the schedule are, therefore, for fiscal years. The import control figures in the schedule include a small element of export freight resources which cannot easily be identified and excluded. Coastal surveillance is not a separately identified activity within Customs and Excise's operational planning system, so the figures requested under categories *(c)* and *(d)* are included as a global figure headed "Intelligence" in the schedule.

Customs and Excise officers based in Wales

	1990–91	1994–95	1995–96
VAT	357.0	306.0	256.5
Import controls[1]	186.0	88.5	70.5
Intelligence[2]	16.0	29.0	51.0

[1] Includes a small element of export freight resources

[2] Includes both coastal and other intelligence.

Fraud

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *576*, if he will itemise by year the level and number of frauds from each Department, indicating those involving *(a)* agencies and *(b)* non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Aitken *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* The data which are gathered centrally on fraud are used primarily as a means of promoting awareness of fraud risks, and to identify trends in the types of fraud committed. The data are not kept in the form requested in the question.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Banbridge Sewage Treatment Works

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the nature of and the need for the proposed remedial work to Banbridge sewage treatment works contained in the May 1993 programme of the water service; and what is the current cost of that remedial work and the date on which the work is planned to start and be completed.

Mr. Moss: Two stages of improvements to Banbridge sewage treatment works were contained in the May 1993 programme.

The first stage, costing an estimated £450,000, involves construction of a new inlet works and improvements to treatment units and the outfall. This work will commence in mid-March 1995 and is due for completion in early 1996. These planned improvements are required to replace and upgrade plant and to cater for increased loading on the works.

The second stage will involve a further increase in the capacity of the works. This stage is currently programmed to commence in late 1997. The contract period is likely to be 1 year and current estimated cost is £500,000.

Small Firms Employment Scheme

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *679–80*, on what basis consultants were selected for the small firms employment scheme; and if he will list the experience and qualifications of those consultants.

Mr. Ancram: The Fair Employment Commission formed a panel of consultants who were engaged under the small firms employment scheme to provide consultancy advice to companies. Applications for inclusion on the panel were invited from established management consultants or consultancy firms who had at least five years proven experience in human resources/personnel consultancy with specific expertise in one or more of the following areas: selection and recruitment systems; use of psychometric instruments; and promotion of equality of opportunity in employment.

Applicants were also required to demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Acts and the Fair Employment in Northern Ireland code of practice.

Although information regarding the experience and qualifications of individual consultants is available, it could be provided in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Northern Ireland Boundary Commission

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *167–68*, and the answer of 1 December 1994 given by the Minister of State—the hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram)—to the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), *Official Report*, column *1326*, if he will clarify the number of occasions on which Irish Government Ministers sought to influence the work of the Northern Ireland Boundary

Commission, and the dates on which any meetings took place.

Sir Patrick Mayhew *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* My answer of 7 February explained that at the intergovernmental conference held on 28 January 1994 the Irish side was advised that there were statutory procedures for interested parties to make representations in respect of the Boundary Commission's published provisional recommendations. The Government's practice is that details of their exchanges with the Irish Government remain confidential, but I can confirm that when the Irish side referred again to the issue at the intergovernmental conference held on 10 March 1994 they were reminded of the independence of the Boundary Commission. My hon. Friend the Minister's answer referred to both these occasions.

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *167*, if he will list the occasions on which Northern Ireland constituency boundaries were raised by the Irish members of the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental secretariat after the publication of the provisional recommendations of the Northern Ireland Boundary Commission.

Sir Patrick Mayhew *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* The Government's practice is that details of its exchanges with the Irish Government remain confidential. As is reflected by the communiqué issued following the intergovernmental conference on 28 January 1994, the Irish have been consistently advised that there are statutory procedures for interested parties to make representations in respect of the Boundary Commission's published provisional recommendations.

Abattoirs

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the throughput of abattoirs in each year since 1990, showing *(a)* overall units, *(b)* sheep, *(c)* pigs, *(d)* calves under six months and *(e)* bovines over six months.

Mr. Ancram *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Livestock units*	*Sheep*	*Pigs*	*Bovines over six months*
1990	968,400	754,608	1,085,647	498,717
1991	941,285	631,494	1,034,357	506,286
1992	958,569	970,891	963,914	498,565
1993	935,759	1,003,623	1,079,172	432,660
1994	922,269	803,472	1,089,777	444,229

Throughput of calves under six months was negligible. (Council directive 91/497/EEC).

Note:

1. Livestock unit = one bovine, seven sheep or three pigs.

HOME DEPARTMENT

National Lottery

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider the position of those charities which appear not to be approved in the disbursement of the moneys provided from that part of the receipts of the national lottery available for the support of good causes.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: No. Within the framework of my general directions on the matters that should be taken into account, it is for the National Lottery Charities Board to determine its own priorities in relation to individual charities.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 apply to all regulations for which his Department is responsible, past, present and future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him today by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs in response to a similar question.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the statutory instruments which his Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Mr. Howard: A list of the 102 statutory instruments sponsored by the Home Office in the 12 months from February 1994 to January 1995 has been placed in the Library.

Data Protection

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been undertaken under the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984 for the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The number of prosecutions brought by the Data Protection Registrar for alleged offences under the Data Protection Act 1984 is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1990	30
1991	17
1992	27
1993	68
1994	32

Note:

Year ending 31 May

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum were received from citizens of the Ivory Coast in each month of 1994; how many have been *(a)* granted asylum and *(b)* refused; of those refused, how many have been given exceptional leave to remain; and how many are still awaiting determination.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The available information on nationals from the Ivory Coast is provided in the table. As at 31 December 1994, an estimated 1,150 applications for asylum from the Ivory Coast were outstanding.

Applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, by location of application, and decisions, nationals of the Ivory Coast, January to December 1994.

Number of principal applicants

	Applications received			Decisions [1,2,3]					
							Refusals		
	Total applications	Applied at port	Applied in country	Total decisions	Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave	Total refused	Refused asylum and exceptional leave after full consideration	Refused on safe third country grounds	Refused under para. 180F of Immigration Rules[4]
1994										
January	25	15	10	20	—	—	20	20	—	*
February	45	10	35	10	—	—	10	5	*	*
March	40	25	15	15	—	—	15	10	—	5
April	70	50	20	20	—	—	20	15	*	*
May	65	50	20	25	—	—	25	15	5	5
June	95	55	40	25	—	—	25	25	*	*
July	50	35	15	20	—	—	20	15	*	—
August	110	80	30	35	—	—	35	25	*	10
September	135	95	40	35	*	—	35	20	*	10
October	30	5	25	35	—	—	35	20	5	10
November	25	5	20	45	—	—	45	40	—	10
December	10	—	10	30	—	—	30	25	—	10
Total	705	425	280	320	*	—	320	240	20	60

[1] Provisional and estimated figures rounded to the nearest 5 with '*'= 1 or 2.
[2] Information is of initial determination decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
[3] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same period.
[4] For failure to provide evidence to support the asylum claim within a reasonable period.

Electronic Surveillance

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are in place within the European Community for the protection of employees in the workplace who may be subject to electronic surveillance without their prior authorisation or consent; and what legislation relates to the unlawful use of electronic monitoring equipment with respect to privacy and data protection.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: As to the first part of the question, I am aware of no such measures. As to the second part, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to a question from him on 21 February, *Official Report*, column *158*.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigations have been undertaken in relation to organisations involved in electronic bugging of offices or other workplace premises in the last 10 years.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: No such records are held.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, columns *158–59*, if he will outline the nature and extent of complaints lodged with his Department in relation to the operation and practices of companies or organisations involving electronic surveillance services.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Advertisements offering information-gathering services, which may or may not involve electronic surveillance devices, attracted about 40 letters of complaint from hon. Members and others in 1994. The main point of concern was that confidential personal information could be obtained without authority and advertised for sale. The amendment to the Data Protection Act 1984 made by section 161 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 addresses this concern.

Mr. Colin Dunning

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will release to solicitors acting for Mr. Colin Ivor Dunning the expert evidence referred to in the letter dated 11 January from his Under-Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I am arranging for this evidence to be sent to Mr. Dunning's solicitors without further delay.

Theft

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the value of property stolen in theft by an employee in 1992, excluding the offence involving a pension fund referred to in table 2.20 of the 1992 "Criminal Statistics for England and Wales" Cm *2410*.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Excluding the offence involving the pension fund, the value of property stolen was £55.7 million.

Campsfield House

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many detainees at Campsfield house detention centre are currently on hunger strike; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: On 23 February 1995, two detainees at Campsfield house were refusing meals; both were taking milk and water.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the annual cost to Her Majesty's Government of Campsfield detention centre.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The total cost to the immigration service of running its detention accommodation at Campsfield house in the financial year 1993–94 was £1,913,872.

Miscarriages of Justice

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *214-15*, how many of the 188 cases under consideration at the beginning of 1995 had been with C3 division for *(a)* six months, *(b)* 12 months and *(c)* 18 months or longer.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Of the 188 cases under consideration with C3 at the beginning of 1995, 106 had been with the division for over six months, 38 for over 12 months, and 25 for over 18 months.

Drug-related Deaths

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deaths in the United Kingdom resulted directly from addiction to *(a)* heroin and *(b)* other drugs in each year since 1985.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The only clearly identifiable direct cause of death from addiction to drugs is from overdose, and the relevant information is contained in table 14 of the Home Office "Statistical Bulletin" entitled "Statistics of drug addicts notified to the Home Office, United Kingdom, 1993", a copy of which is in the Library.

Gloucestershire Police

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what factors were taken into account before refusing a special grant to the chief constable of Gloucestershire for the exceptional costs of the Cromwell Street inquiry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Applications for special grant are considered against the following criteria: the expenditure must be exceptional, unforseen and of a scale likely to threaten the efficiency of the force.

The application by Gloucestershire police authority was carefully considered against these criteria, taking into account advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, but was not judged to meet the criteria.

Drug Action Teams

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in setting up regional drug action teams as set out in "Tackling Drugs Together".

Mr. Michael Forsyth: "Tackling Drugs Together" is a consultation document. The Government are considering the responses to its proposals, which include the setting up of local drug action teams in 1995–96. Definite proposals will be published in a White Paper in the spring.

Football Spectators

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many restriction orders have been made under the Football Spectators Act 1989 in each year since its introduction.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Part II of the 1989 Football Spectators Act, which provided the courts with the power to make restriction orders to prevent certain convicted hooligans from travelling to key football matches outside England and Wales, came into force on 24 April 1990. The number of restriction orders is as follows:

Year	*Number of orders*
1990	19
1991	4
1992	2
1993	0
1994	1

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many restriction orders made under section 15 of the Football Spectators Act 1989 were enforced with regard to the Ireland *v.* England football match of 15 February.

Mr. Michael Forsyth : Two.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers exist to enable him to restrain within the United Kingdom people subject to a restriction order preventing them from attending certain sporting events in the United Kingdom or overseas who seeks to breach that order even though they are not suspected of committing any other offence.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Section 15 of the Football Spectators Act 1989 gave the courts power to impose restriction orders on those convicted of football-related offences to prevent them from attending key matches outside England and Wales. Those subject to such orders are required to report to a police station—of their choice—usually at a time when such a match is taking place. It is an offence to fail to do so without good reason. There is no separate power to prevent a person subject to a restriction order from leaving the country at the stipulated time.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action was taken by the football unit of the national criminal intelligence service to reduce the likelihood of crowd violence in advance of the Ireland *v.* England football match on 15 February.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to my written reply of 22 February, *Official Report*, column *234*.

Immigration (Non-NATO Forces)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what records are kept, and what approval procedures are required, for the entry into the United Kingdom of members of non-NATO armed forces.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Separate records are not kept of the entry of members of non-NATO armed forces. Those coming for official duties or training who are subject to control under the Immigration Act must satisfy the immigration officer that they qualify under the immigration rules.

Prisons (Drugs)

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the extent of drug abuse in prisons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Frank Cook, dated 27 February 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Question on the extent of drug abuse in prisons.

The information currently available on prisoners is limited to that provided by the Home Office Addicts Index which relates to those assessed as being addicted to Class A drugs. During 1993, 3,764 drug addicts were identified by prison medical officers in England, Scotland and Wales. Not all of these prisoners were, however, necessarily misusing drugs while in prison. In addition, it is known that a significant number of prisoners use Class B drugs but no statistical information is currently available.

However, this year the Prison Service will be introducing a mandatory drug testing programme for prisoners. As part of the programme prisoners will be required to participate in random drug testing. This will provide a better indication of the extent of drug misuse in prison and the Service will be able to use this information to monitor the effectiveness of local drug strategies.

The presence of drugs in prison is unacceptable and tackling drug misuse is a high priority for the Service.

A new prison Service drugs strategy has been developed as part of the Government's strategy against the misues of drugs, as set out in the Green Paper "Tackling Drugs Together". The new strategy will be issued to all Prison Service establishments in the near future.

The reduction in the level of drug misuse will be achieved through the implementation of local drug strategies which will have the objective of reducing the supply of drugs; reducing the demand for drugs; rehabilitating drug misusers; and reducing the potential for damage to health arising from the misuse of drugs.

Mandatory drug testing is an important part of the strategy. The first phase of implementation has already started in eight establishments. This will be carefully monitored and evaluated and the results will provide the basis for testing throughout the Prison Service. Prisoners who test positive will be liable to the usual range of disciplinary action on adjudication including additional days, loss of privileges and fines. Other measures to be taken will include imposition of closed visits and removal of home leave. Prisoners who test positive will be offered treatment for their drug misuse problem.

The strategy also contains measures to prevent drugs entering prisons. These include the increased use of drug dogs; more effective searching of prisoners, staff and visitors; the use of closed-circuit television cameras during visits; and the imposition of closed visits for prisoners found guilty of drug offences in prison.

The Prison Service will also be substantially expanding the number and type of drug treatment programmes available to prisoners. Careful monitoring and evaluation of these programmes will help to determine the development of drug treatment in other establishments.

Greater Manchester Probation Service

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many staff were employed and at what grades by the Greater Manchester probation service on 30 June 1992, 30 June 1993 and 30 June 1994;

(2) how many court reports were completed by the Greater Manchester probation service during 1992 and 1993;

(3) how many offenders were supervised by the Greater Manchester probation service on 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshaw (Mr. Morris) and the hon. Member for Rochdale (Dr. Clark) on 21 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *157*.

Ernest Saunders

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *585*, what reasons the parole board gave for its recommendation to release Ernest Saunders.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Under the parole arrangements existing at the time when Mr. Saunders was released, the parole board was not required to give reasons for its recommendations.

Prisons (Alcohol)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many finds of illicit alcohol were made in gaols in England and Wales for each year since 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Dr. Lynne Jones, dated 27 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many finds of illicit alcohol were made in jails in England and Wales for each year since 1990.

This information is not routinely kept by the Prison Service.

Non-departmental Public Bodies (Pay)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Howard: No decision has yet been taken on future pay arrangements for NDPBs sponsored by the Department.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will list by European Union member state the most recent estimate of illegal immigrants living in that member state.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There are no official data on the numbers of illegal immigrants in EU member states, because, by its very nature, illegal immigration is very difficult to measure and any estimates, including any for the United Kingdom, would be highly speculative.

Pucklechurch Remand Centre

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *503*, about Pucklechurch remand centre, what were the appropriate arrangements that were put into effect to hold the category A prisoners; what has been the cost of putting these arrangements into effect to date; and how long they will remain in force.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Doug Hoyle, dated 27 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the arrangements for holding category A prisoners at Pucklechurch.

As these arrangements concern the security of an establishment, it would not be appropriate for me to publish any details. Staff were diverted from elsewhere for this work. Additional costs of approximately £12,000 were incurred for travel and subsistence, excluding the cost of staff time which would have been incurred anyway.

The prisoner was transferred to another prison on 15 February.

PRIME MINISTER

Border Controls

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will inform the European Commission that he will ask Parliament to amend article 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 to make unenforceable in the United kingdom any directive or judgment of the European Court which diminishes the control on the movement of persons which the United Kingdom at present exercises at its frontiers.

The Prime Minister: No. I have already made it clear that we will take whatever action is necessary to maintain our frontier controls. However, amendment of section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972 would not have the effect suggested.

Social Development Summit

Miss Lestor: To ask the Prime Minister what criteria he will use when deciding whether he will attend the world summit on social development.

The Prime Minister: I will not be attending. My right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Chalker will represent the United Kingdom.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Dining Rooms

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chairman of the Catering Committee what is the current waiting time for booking dining rooms A,B,C, and D for *(a)* dinners, *(b)* lunches and *(c)* afternoon events.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: This is a matter for the Director of Catering Services. I have asked her to write to the hon. Member.

EDUCATION

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will ensure that the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill apply to all regulations for which her Department is responsible, past, present and future; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the statutory instruments which her Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Mr. Boswell: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

School Curriculum (Swimming)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the status of swimming in the school curriculum and what is her Department's guidance to local education authorities and schools regarding charging for swimming lessons.

Mr. Forth: Swimming is a compulsory part of the national curriculum. The national curriculum for physical education requires that, by the age of 11, all pupils should be able to swim unaided at least 25 m and demonstrate an understanding of water safety. Local education authorities and schools should not charge for swimming lessons. They may, however, request voluntary contributions provided that it is made clear that these are optional and that registered pupils are not treated differently depending on the level of contributions made.

Nursery Education

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what discussions she has had with councillors in Lancashire concerning nursery education for four-year-olds and the funding of such provision.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has received representations from councillors in a number of local authorities, including Lancashire, concerning nursery education for four-year-olds and the funding of such provision.

Learning Difficulties

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what action her Department is taking to improve facilities in schools for children with moderate learning difficulties.

Mr. Forth: Annual capital guidelines for 1995–96 include notional allocations of over £7 million for special education projects. No specific sums are earmarked for schools for children with moderate learning difficulties: it is for local education authorities to decide their own capital expenditure priorities and to make the best use of the resources available to them through ACGs. Further sums will become available through supplementary credit approvals for specific special education projects in the course of the financial year.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what action her Department is taking to bring up to the standards set out in "Building Bulletin 77" the schools for pupils with severe learning difficulty in Kirklees.

Mr. Forth: The guidance in "Building Bulletin 77" is not mandatory. It sets out good practice in the design of accommodation for new special school buildings and for the adaptation of existing special schools. My right hon. Friend takes account of how closely proposals for new construction in special schools—in Kirklees, and elsewhere—comply with the bulletin when considering the approval of premises under section 185 of the Education Act 1993.

Staff Transfers

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, columns *783–84*, how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time staff responsible for sport were transferred to the Department of National Heritage in July 1992.

Mr. Forth: A total of 22 full-time staff.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, columns *783-84*, how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time staff responsible for science were transferred from her Department to the Cabinet Office in July 1992.

Mr. Forth: A total of 42 full-time staff.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 16 February, *Official Report* columns *783-84*, how many staff responsible for Her Majesty's inspectorate and support for Her Majesty's inspectorate still remain in her Department following the transfer of the majority of those staff to Ofsted in September 1992.

Mr. Forth: On the establishment of Ofsted in September 1992, 86 HMI and support staff remained in the Department and have since retired. Three HMI became DFE staff and remain in the Department, as do 20 former HMI support staff. Seventeen DFE staff remain on loan to Ofsted and may return to the Department in due course.

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, pursuant to her answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, columns *783–84*, how many of her staff responsible for Her Majesty's inspectorate and support for Her Majesty's inspectorate transferred to the Office for Standards in Education in September 1992.

Mr. Forth: A total of 493 full-time and 52 part-time staff.

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which her Department is responsible in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993 and *(d)* 1994 were women.

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the civil service commissioner's report for 1991 and 1992 which gave the required information for these years.

In 1993, the Department recruited seven staff to fast-stream grades of whom two were women. In 1994, there were 10 recruits, of whom six were women.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Eritrea

44. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what overseas aid has gone to Eritrea in the last two years; and what plans there are for future aid.

Mr. Baldry: Bilateral aid to Eritrea, including emergency assistance, totalled almost £2 million in 1992–93 and £6 million in 1993–94. Since 1992 we have also contributed more than £6 million through the EC. We expect to continue our bilateral technical co-operation programme of about £1 million a year. Future emergency assistance will reflect needs as they arise.

Syria

45. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total aid that the European Union has agreed to provide to Syria; why the aid package was agreed; and how much will be contributed by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: Since 1978 the European Community has provided to Syria a total of 461 mecu, or £362.9 million—exchange rate February 1995, 1 ecu equals £0.7889—of which the UK share was approximately 16 per cent. This support forms part of the EC's programme of assistance for all Mediterranean non-member states.

Rwanda

47. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposal he has to reduce suffering in Rwanda.

Mr. Baldry: We continue to support the Rwandan Government's programme of reconciliation and socio-economic rehabilitation and recovery, which is the agreed framework for accelerating economic and social development in Rwanda. Donors have already pledged $583 million in support of the programme.

Amazonian Rain Forest

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to discourage the destruction of the Amazonian rain forest.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom has taken a leading role in promoting the implementation of the forest principles agreed in Rio. We have also provided more than £14 million for bilateral forest protection projects in Amazonia since 1989 and are supporting the joint G7-European Union pilot programme to conserve the Brazilian rain forest. We have provided £1.5 million to the pilot program trust fund managed by the World bank, and plan to provide additional assistance.

South American Street Children

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support is currently being given to help South American street children.

Mr. Baldry: The Overseas Development Agency has committed over £800,000 to projects with street children in Brazil, Ecuador and Peru. This assistance is largely channelled through UK non-governmental organisations such as Childhope, the International Children's Trust, CAFOD and Oxfam. British partnership schemes, run by our embassies in the region, provide additional support to local NGO projects.

Contracts

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the contract value, in pounds sterling, to *(a)* Coppee (UK) Ltd., *(b)* Westinghouse Brake and Signal, *(c)* NEI, *(d)* GEC Alsthom, *(e)* Cegelec, *(f)* Crown Agents, *(g)* Brecknell Willis, *(h)* Balfour Beatty and (i) Thorn EMI from the Ankara Metro project.

Mr. Baldry: *(a)* Coppee (UK) £51 million *(b)* Westinghouse Brake and Signal £8.15 million.

The following companies are subcontractors of the contract awarded to Coppee (UK):

	Companies	*£ million*
(c)	NEI	3.2
(d)	GEC Alsthorn	17.1
(e)	Cegelec	8.9
(f)	Crown Agents	4.2
(g)	Brecknell Willis	4.7
(h)	Balfour Beatty	5.7
(i)	Thorn TTSI	1.9

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made to the external finance limit for the current year for the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

Mr. Baldry: The external finance limit for CDC set out in the statistical supplement to the "Financial Statement and Budget report 1994–95", Cm 2519, has been increased from zero to £30.56 million. The increase is made up of £22 million due to a classification change, £2.7 million to allow for investment of cash balances held at the end of 1993–94 and £5.86 million in respect of continuing interest payments made by CDC.

The classification change has no consequences for public expenditure and the other elements of the increase will be met by a decrease in the cash limit for, and reallocation of provision within class II, vote 5. The increase will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Victims' Families

31. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Attorney-General to what extent the families of victims are taken into account by

the Crown Prosecution Service during the prosecution process.

The Attorney-General: When taking a decision to prosecute, the interests of the victim and his or her family are an important factor in determining the balance of the public interest.

Racial Attacks

33. **Ms Abbott:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last met the head of the Crown Prosecution Service to discuss racial attacks.

The Attorney-General: I meet the Director of Public Prosecutions on a regular basis. Cases with a racial element are discussed as and when they arise.

Public Order Act 1986

34. **Ms Lynne:** To ask the Attorney-General how many applications from the Crown Prosecution Service to bring prosecutions under section 18 of the Public Order Act 1986 he has turned down.

The Attorney-General: Since the Public Order Act 1986 came into force, consent to prosecute under section 18 has been granted in five applications out of seven. I have also received 12 applications for consent to prosecute under other sections of part III of that Act, of which 10 have been granted and two have been refused.

Crown Prosecution Service

35. **Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Attorney-General how many regional offices of the Crown Prosecution Service are below their recommended manning levels; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Nationwide the Crown Prosecution Service has its full complement of lawyers and close to its full complement of administrative staff.

Crime Victims (Compensation)

36. **Mr. Donald Anderson:** To ask the Attorney-General what role he played in the considerations by the Government of plans to alter the principles of compensation for victims of violent crime.

The Attorney-General: By convention the Law Officers do not normally disclose whether they have given advice on a particular subject or the substance of any advice that they may have given.

Increased Sentences

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to introduce an incentive pay scheme for his staff based on the number of times they obtain an increase in sentence on appeal.

The Attorney-General: None.

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Hutton: To ask the Attorney-General how many successful prosecutions were concluded by the Serious Fraud Office in the last year; and what was the total value of all payments to prosecuting counsel instructed by the Serious Fraud Office over the same period.

The Attorney-General: During the period 1 April 1994 to 31 January 1995, 13 defendants were prosecuted to conviction by the Serious Fraud Office.

The total payments on fees to prosecuting counsel during this period was £2,655,000. That amount includes some payments in relation to professional services carried out prior to that period but excludes costs incurred within the period where payment has not yet been made.

Scott Inquiry

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Attorney-General what was the agreed cost of legal services to the Ministry of Defence by the Treasury Solicitor's Department in respect of the Scott inquiry; and what other or later invoices than those cited in his answer to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) of 13 May 1994, *Official Report*, column *251*, in respect of the Scott inquiry have been sent by the Treasury solicitors to the Ministry of Defence and all other Departments.

The Attorney-General: The agreed cost to date of legal services provided to the Ministry of Defence by the Treasury Solicitor's Department in respect of the Scott inquiry is £137,306.18.

Invoices sent by the Department since 13 May 1994 are as follows:

Department	*£*
Ministry of Defence	2,311.38
Department of Trade and Industry	25,840.71
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	15,490.62

Non-departmental Public Bodies (Pay)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

The Attorney-General: There are no NDPBs sponsored by the Departments for which I am responsible.

HEALTH

Surgery

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to restrict the performance of keyhole surgery to surgeons trained in the specialty.

Mr. Sackville: Minimally invasive techniques have been used safely and effectively in various surgical specialties for many years. There is no one branch of surgery specifically devoted to these techniques.

We are now talking to the royal colleges about a new system which will bring together groups of experts under the auspices of the royal colleges to evaluate major advances in surgery and medicine.

It is for individual provider hospitals to ensure high standards of practice for all patients and for purchasing

authorities to ensure that their populations have access to high quality care. Surgeons practising minimal access techniques should be properly trained in those techniques and junior trainees should be closely supervised by experienced staff.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will add to the patient's charter the right to have surgery performed by a registered medical practitioner trained in surgery.

Mr. Sackville: No. All procedures should be carried out by an appropriate person. A consultant will normally have overall responsibility for the care of a particular patient.

Long-term Care

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to stop NHS trusts entering into contracts with private contractors to provide very long-term care for elderly patients.

Mr. Bowis: None. The national health service has always contracted with private contractors. It is the responsibility of health authorities to arrange and fund continuing health care. We issued guidance to health authorities on their responsibilities for meeting continuing care needs on 23 February, copies of which are available in the Library.

NHS Pensioners

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will set up an investigation into the recent supply of the names and addresses of NHS pensioners and their Paymaster General's office reference numbers to third parties.

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the National Health Service Pensions Agency under its chief executive, A.F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Mr. Martin Redmond, dated 27 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to respond to your written parliamentary question of 17 February 1995 because it falls within my area of responsibility.

The Agency contracts Paymaster to administer the payment of NHS pensions. They had, without reference to us, issued promotional material to pensioners from a third party but I have been assured by Keith Sullens, who is the Chief Executive of Paymaster, that at no time has any information about NHS pensioners been released to third parties.

NHS Efficiency

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the efficiency rating of the NHS in relation to other EU health services.

Mr. Malone: Between 1978–79 and 1992–93, hospital and community health services' efficiency in England increased by over a fifth. Data on health services in other European Union countries are available in "OECD Health Systems", Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development 1993.

We share the judgment of OECD, whose latest "Economic Survey", July 1994, points out that the national health service

"was, and is, a remarkably cost effective institution"

and that it achieves "comparable health outcomes" with other large OECD countries.

Private Finance

Ms Jowell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the value of business plans estimated under the private financial initiative, broken down by region.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) on 3 November 1994 at column *1269*.

Four further projects have been approved, each with a capital value of £1 million or over. These are:

		£ million
Northern and Yorkshire Region		
Royal Victoria Infirmary and Associated Hospitals National Health Service Trust	multi-storey car park	3.2
South Thames Region		
Eastbourne Hospitals National Health Service Trust	clinical waste incinerator	3.0
Merton Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority	residential accommodation	1.0
Mid-Downs Health Authority (Princess Royal Hospital)	magnetic resonance imaging	1.0

Child Protection Register

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of children *(a)* in the Hastings and Rother area, *(b)* nationally and *(c)* in east Sussex are on the child protection register.

Mr. Bowis: Figures in "Children and Young People on Child Protection Registers Year Ending 31 March 1994", copies of which are available in the Library, show that 0.32 and 0.60 per cent. of the population aged under 18 were on the child protection register at 31 March 1994 in England and east Sussex respectively. Information is not available centrally for areas smaller than local authorities.

Depressive Illness

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases of clinical depression have been diagnosed in the NHS for each year since 1990;

(2) how many cases of seasonal affective disorder have been diagnosed in the NHS for each year since 1992.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally for England. The situation in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Insulin Pens

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the total annual projected cost of making the provision of insulin injection pens and needles available on general practitioner prescription.

Mr. Malone: The cost of making injection pens and needles prescribable by general practitioners would depend upon the price the Department is able to negotiate with the manufacturers, and the rate at which general practitioners prescribe them.

Anabolic Steroids

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *158*, if she will list all seizures of anabolic steroids made by the Medicines Control Agency for each of the last five years.

Mr. Sackville: The Medicines Control Agency does not keep separate statistics on the quantities of anabolic steroids seized as a result of its enforcement action.

However, investigations into the illegal trade in anabolic steroids remains a high priority of the MCA. During the last year, as a result of 28 investigations, anabolic steroids with a black market value of several million pounds were seized.

Reactive Hypoglycaemia

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what study she is making of the south Cumbria alternative sentencing options study, and other evidence as to the links between reactive hypoglycaemia and crime; and what plans her Department has to recognise reactive hypoglycaemia as a medical condition requiring further clinical study and research.

Mr. Sackville: We are not aware of the study to which the hon. Member refers. If the hon. Member sends me a copy, I will write to him.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each NHS trust the annual budget for public relations for *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94 and *(c)* 1994–95.

Mr. Sackville: We do not collect this information centrally. It is for each national health service trust to decide how much of its budget it should spend on public relations.

If the hon. Member is concerned at the public relations expenditure of a particular NHS trust, he should write to the chairman.

Disabled Living Centres

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list for each of the last three years the level of funding for disabled living centres by each district health authority.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will ensure that the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 apply to all regulations for which her Department is responsible, past, present and future; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs gave him today.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the statutory instruments which her Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Mr. Sackville: A list be will placed in the Library.

The Royal Hospitals NHS Trust

Mr. Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her oral statement of 20 February, *Official Report*, column 31, on the London health service, what is the capital investment sum needed to provide at the Royal London Whitechapel site the services and facilities to be withdrawn from the London child hospital, the Queen Elizabeth hospital for children and St. Bartholomew's hospital; over what time scale the expansion of the Whitechapel site will take place; and how much of the capital needed will be provided by her Department.

Mr. Malone: The estimated gross capital cost of the proposed single site option, phased over five or six years, as set out in the consultation document "Health Services for the Future" published by East London and the City health authority, is £202 million. This is £106 million more than the £96 million needed to maintain the status quo.

Funding sources will be confirmed when the Royal Hospitals Trust has developed its full business case following the outcome of public consultation.

Paracetamol

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of the link between paracetamol use and the occurrence of migraine.

Mr. Sackville: The Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Medicines Control Agency continually monitor the safety of all licensed medicines in the United Kingdom, including products that contain paracetamol. Since 1964, there has been one report of migraine as a suspected adverse reaction to paracetamol. An estimated 2,000 million paracetamol tablets are sold in the United Kingdom each year. The alleged link between paracetamol and the occurrence of migraine has not been substantiated.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what number and percentage of emergency ambulance calls in London took 14 minute and each subsequent number of minutes up to 90 minutes in January.

Mr. Sackville: Information from the London ambulance service has been placed in the Library.

Primary Care, London

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to her oral statement of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *40*, regarding further investment in primary care initiatives of £85 million in London, if she will list the areas which will receive it, the amounts that they will receive and the initiatives that will be funded.

Mr. Malone: The areas are those covered by the London initiative zone—LIZ:

Brent (excluding Harrow)

Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster
Barking (excluding Havering)
Camden and Islington
City and East London
Eastern Enfield and Edmonton area of Haringey
Waltham Forest (excluding Redbridge)
Greenwich (excluding Bexley but including Thamesmead)
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham
Wandsworth (excluding Sutton and Merton)
North Croydon

The amount of funding each area receives will be determined by North and South Thames regional health authorities and will be based on plans submitted by local health authorities.

The investment will fund a wide range of primary and community care schemes, details of which can be obtained from local health authorities. A total of £10 million of the investment will be specifically allocated to develop a new educational programme for London general practitioners as I announced on 16 February 1995. Details of the schemes which will form part of this programme can be obtained from the Thames regional health authorities.

Residential Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information she has of the extent to which local authorities have used their discretion to increase the personal expenses allowance of a married person in long-term residential care to enable them to support their spouse remaining at home; on how many occasions this rule has been operated by a local authority because the whole of a resident's occupational pension has been used to pay for the costs of care; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally. The Government have reminded local authorities that they have discretion to vary the resident's personal expenses allowance to assist the spouse remaining at home.

Child Care

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest estimate of the number of mothers who do not live with or directly care for their natural dependent children.

Mr. Sackville: No suitable estimate is available.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Equal Opportunities

Mr.Booth: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the current position in the civil service regarding equality of opportunity for women, people of ethnic minority origin and disabled people.

Mr. David Hunt: I am pleased to announce the publication today of the first in a series of annual data summaries of equal opportunities in the civil service. The Government are committed to equality of opportunity for all people and is determined that the civil service should set the best possible example. Figures show that, taking the service as a whole, steady progress has been made over the last five years by women, individuals with disabilities and members of ethnic minorities. They make up a higher proportion of the service overall and are increasingly to be found at senior grade levels.

Hon. Members may also like to see an Office of Public Service and Science paper describing in more detail the current situation regarding ethnic minorities in the civil service. "Equal Opportunities in the civil service for People of Ethnic Minority Origin" was presented to the Home Secretary's advisory council on race relations by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, OPSS, on 26 January 1995. Copies of both publications have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Science Budget

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, if he will make a statement on the allocation of the science budget.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes : My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy announced the allocation of the science budget of £1,281.675 million for 1995–96, subject to parliamentary approval of the Supply estimates, *Official Report*, 2 February, column *754*.

The figures for the two subsequent financial years have now been provided to assist the bodies funded from the science budget with their forward planning. As the table shows, part of the provision has not been attributed to individual bodies at this stage, in order to provide flexibility to target funding to emerging high priority initiatives, including those resulting from the technology foresight exercise. The total provision will also be reviewed in the normal way in the forthcoming public expenditure survey. Actual allocations for 1996–97 will be announced early next year following advice from the Director-General of Research Councils.

Science budget: Planning figures for financial years 1996–97 and 1997–99

	1996–97 £ million	*1997–98 £ million*
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council	160.03	161.63
Economic and Social Research Council	60.63	61.23
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council	354.96	358.51
Medical Research Council	275.06	277.81
Natural Environment Research Council	153.94	155.48
Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council[1]	196.37	196.37
Royal Society	20.79	20.79
Royal Academy of Engineering	2.62	2.62
Pensions	34.77	37.06
OST initiatives	2.25	2.25
High performance computing[2]	12.21	12.21
Additional funding for LINK	6.00	12.00
Technology Foresight/strategic initiatives	20.76	31.43
Total	1,300.39	1,329.39

Notes:

1. includes £8 million provision for international subscriptions reserve (to be adjusted as necessary to provide the agreed level of cover).

2. high-performance computing was previously included within the EPSRC allocation.

Hydrates Research

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the British contribution to the research ship Joides Resolution experimental drilling programme for hydrates in the Atlantic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: One scientist, a microbiologist from the geomicrobiology group of Bristol university, will join the programme for part of December 1995 to investigate the contribution of bacteria to the formation and breakdown of the gas hydrate.

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Mrs. Maddox: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993 and *(d)* 1994 were women.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: For the departments and agencies for which my right hon. Friend is responsible, and other areas which fall within the Cabinet Office vote, the information is as follows:

	1993	1994
Total	42	41
Women	16	17
Women (percentage)	38	41

The figures include European fast streamers who are subsequently assigned to Departments.

Information for the years 1991 and 1992 is contained in the Civil Service Commissioners' report for the relevant year. Copies of the reports are available in the Library.

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how much the Medical Research Council spent on research into multiple sclerosis in *(a)* 1993–94 and *(b)* the current year.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The Medical Research Council is the main agency through which the Government support medical and related biological research. It receives its grant in aid from my Department. The MRC is an independent body deciding what research to support in the light of its own judgment of priorities and the quality of research application it receives. The council is always willing to consider soundly based scientific proposals in competition with other applications for research funding.

The MRC supports a wide range of neurological research relevant to multiple sclerosis—in particular, studies of the neuromuscular system. The 1993–94 funding in this area was a total of £19 million.

The council's specific expenditure on multiple sclerosis in the financial year 1993–94, the latest year for which figures are available, was £137,000. It is not yet possible to provide figures for the current financial year. In addition, the MRC's initiative on the neuroscience approach to human health will help to promote several approaches which may be relevant to the disease.

Besides MRC-funded work, there is also research being undertaken in various universities and NHS hospitals with public funding. However, information is not collected centrally on other Government-funded research on multiple sclerosis.

Sick Leave

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *124–28*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figure given for sickness absence at the Department of National Heritage in 1993 and the figure given in the answer from the Secretary of State for National heritage to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *195*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* The figure given in the answer of 25 January by the Secretary of State for National Heritage was for the number of spells of absence and not the number of days lost. The number of days lost is as given in my answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 7 February.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member of Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *756*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figure given for sickness absence at the Chessington computer centre in 1993 and the figure given in his answer to the hon. Member of Eastleigh of 26 January, *Official Report*, column *756*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* The sickness absence figure given in my answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 7 February is based on workings days lost—excluding weekends and public holidays. The figure given in the answer of 26 January was calculated including weekends and public holidays, as explained in the letter from the chief executive.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *124-28*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figure given for sickness absence at the Lord Advocate's Department in 1993 and the figure given in the answer from the Secretary of State for Scotland to the hon. Member for Eastleigh of 31 January, *Official Report*, column *651*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* The sickness absence figure given in my answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 7 February is based upon workings days lost—excluding weekends and public holidays. The figure given in the answer of 31 January by the Secretary of State for Scotland was calculated including weekends and public holidays.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *124-28*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figure given for sickness absence at the Intervention Board in 1993 and the figure given in the answer from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the hon. Member for Eastleigh on 3 February.

Official Report, columns *923-24;* and if he will make a statement.

Mr Robert G. Hughes *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* The sickness absence figure given in my answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 7 February was for 1993. The figure given in the answer of 3 February by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was for 1994 as requested.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *124-28* what factors underlie the disparity between the figures given for sickness absence at the Government property lawyers in 1993 and the figure given in the answer from the Attorney-General to the hon. Member for Eastleigh of 27 January, *Official Report*, columns *409;* and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* The sickness absence figure given in my answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 7 February is based upon working days lost—excluding weekends and public holidays. The figure given in the answer of 27 January by the Attorney-General was calculated including weekends and public holidays.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *124-28*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figures given for sickness absence at the Serious Fraud Office in 1993 and the figure given in the answer from the Attorney-General to the hon. Member for Eastleigh of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *409*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* The sickness absence figure given in my answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 7 February is based upon full-time equivalent staff years, excluding casual workers. The figure given in the answer of 27 January by the Attorney-General is based upon total staff, including casual workers. The remaining difference is accounted for by differing is accounted for by differing techniques for counting sickness absence, which extends over more than one year.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *124-28*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figure given for sickness absence at the Public Record Office in 1993 and the figure given in the answer from the Lord Chancellor to the hon. Member for Eastleigh of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *389*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* The sickness absence figure given in my answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 7 February was expressed as days lost per staff year. The figure given in the answer of 25 January by the Lord Chancellor used a lost time rate calculation which, when recalculated using the previous method, produces an analogous figure.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) of 7 February, *Official Report*, columns *124-28*, what factors underlie the disparity between the figure given for sickness absence at the Central Office of Information in 1993 and the figure given in his answer to the hon. Member for Eastleigh on 2 February, *Official Report*, column *754*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* The sickness absence figure given in answer to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) on 7 February is based upon working days lost—excluding weekends and public holidays. The figure given in the answer of 2 February was calculated including weekends and public holidays, as I explained in that answer.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member of Eastleigh of 16 February, *Official Report*, column *782*, what factors underlie his statement that the figure given for sickness absence at the Treasury Solicitor's Department in 1993, given in the answer from the Attorney-General of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *409*, also includes factors not attributable to sickness.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* The factors not attributed to sickness absence given in my answer of 16 February to the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) include maternity leave, special leave and secondment outside the Department.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* This information is not held centrally and for the period prior to 1992–93 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The costs of all external consultants, including management consultants, met by Cabinet Office, including the Office of Public Service and Science and its agencies, since 1992–93 are as follows:

Cabinet Office including OPSS and its agencies[1]

	£ *1994 prices*
1992–93	6,450,700
1993–94	6,898,300

[1] Includes operational business expenditure undertaken by CCTA on behalf of other Departments.

The major portion of this expenditure is incurred by CCTA on information technology projects to enable Government Departments to enhance the effectiveness of their IT systems.

The costs of all external consultants, including management consultants, met by COI and HMSO since 1992–93 are as follows:

	£ (1994 Prices)
COI	
1992–93	143,400
1993–94	58,200

	£ (1994 Prices)
HMSO	
1992	431,100
1993	1,082,200
1994	1,750,750

Consultants are used in a variety of activities designed to produce different types of benefits. Much of the work undertaken by consultants is linked to the requirement of Government programmes such as training and designing IT systems, rather than cost saving exercises. In the financial year 1993–94 the OPSS spent £70,838 on consultancy support for its central market testing programme, which produced quantifiable savings of £393,924.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Postal Services

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he expects that a European Union policy for postal services will be in place; and what progress has been made towards this, so far.

Mr. Eggar: The European Council of Ministers' resolution of December 1993 mandated the Commission to bring forward proposals by July 1994 that defined the universal postal service and an appropriate area of reserved services, and established quality and technical standards. This flowed from the recommendations of the EC Green Paper on the development of the single market for postal services, published in June 1992. The Commission has not as yet come forward with these proposals: the delay, we understand, is due to problems with drafting the directives and debate about the appropriate legal basis. The Government will continue to press for draft directives, but it is too early to predict the likely time scale for their introduction, adoption and implementation.

Exports (Indonesia)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, columns *314-15*, with regard to the £17.1 million claims paid in respect of export credits for capital goods and projects to Indonesia in 1985–86 what percentage of those moneys related to exports unrelated to defence equipment.

Mr. Needham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 6 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *125*.

Bank Receptions

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade on how many occasions since April 1992 banks and other commercial interests have hosted receptions for his Department; and if he will publish the names of the hosts involved in each event.

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Member is no doubt referring to the reception hosted by Standard Chartered bank on 22 February. This was arranged entirely on the initiative of the member concerned and Standard Chartered bank. As far as I am aware, this is the only event of its kind in recent history.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mrs. Lait: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many grants under assisted area status have been offered to companies in the Hastings area; how many have been accepted; how many jobs will be created over the next three years; and what is the total of public money offered in grants, and the total sum of money that has been or will be invested by those receiving the grants.

Mr. Eggar: The number of regional selective assistance grants offered to companies in the Hastings area totalled seven by the end of January 1995. Six of these offers have been accepted with the result that some 58 new jobs will be created at a grant cost of £229,000. Total project costs are £6,690,000.

Electricity Pool Prices

Dr. Marek: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will take steps to prohibit the power generators from artificially withdrawing capacity from the grid in order to be able to charge higher pool prices for electricity.

Mr. Eggar: This is a matter for the independent regulator—the Director General of Electricity Supply—who made a statement on 27 January about electricity pool prices.

Dr. Marek: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what evidence he has to show that PowerGen and National Power have artificially taken capacity out of the grid in order to raise the pool price for electricity.

Mr. Eggar: I have no evidence to that effect.

National Strategic Technical Acquisition Plan

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action his Department has taken to implement the national strategic technical acquisition plan.

Mr. Eggar: My Department has endorsed the technology priorities identified in the national strategic technology acquisition plan and reviewed its programme of aeronautics technology support, CARAD II, to ensure its alignment with the plan. My Department has also implemented the recommendation of the NSTAP industry/official joint working group, agreed with the Aviation Committee and the Society of British Aerospace Companies, to fund jointly with industry the appointment of NSTAP technology co-ordinators to promote the implementation of the plan. They are now being appointed.

Aerospace Industries

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on Government support for research and technology in the aerospace industry.

Mr. Eggar: My Department's policy is to work closely with the aerospace industry, helping it to improve its international competitiveness in aircraft technology. We recognise the importance of supporting research in the industry, including collaboration within the European Union, while working towards a progressive reduction in the international level of state aids. Since 1979, my Department has made £387 million available in support

for civil aircraft and aero-engine research and technology demonstration carried out in industry, universities and research establishments, as well as contributing £37 million towards the construction of the European transonic wind tunnel.

China

Mr. Spellar: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what has been the value of exports from and imports to the United Kingdom from the People's Republic of China in each of the last three years.

Mr. Needham: The information is regularly published by the Central Statistical Office in "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", available in the Library of the House.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will ensure that the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 apply to all regulations for which his Department is responsible, past, present and future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in a speech to the British Retail Consortium on 24 January 1995 that the Government intend to make good use of the new enforcement provisions of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to ensure that laws are enforced fairly, transparently and consistently.

Departments are currently reviewing their existing laws against this commitment to identify where the new powers should be used to improve existing procedures.

Consideration is also being given to how to incorporate the provisions into new legislation and to the terms of the model appeals mechanism referred to in section 6 of the Act.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list the statutory instruments which his Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Mr. Heseltine: Because of the number of statutory instruments, I have arranged for the list to be placed in the Library.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in how many cases payments made under the arable area payments scheme have been refused; in how many cases repayment has been demanded in each of the last three years and in the current year; and in how many of those cases these refusals or demands for repayment have followed contact with farmers which led to the belief that a favourable view had been taken.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is not held centrally for the United Kingdom and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Suckler Cow and Sheep Premiums

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many applicants for suckler cow premium and sheep annual premium have been refused because of insufficient documentation for the latest year for which figures are available;

(2) what formal documentation is required to be produced by applicants for suckler cow premium and annual sheep premium under category 3(c) of the 1993 national reserve.

Mr. Jack: The conditions which had to be satisfied by applicants to category 3(c) of the 1993 national reserves for sheep and suckler cows are set down in schedule 2, part V of the Sheep Annual Premium and Suckler Cow Premium Quotas (Amendment) Regulations 1993.

A total of 2,225 of the 2,560 applications for sheep quota and 1,210 of the 1,614 applications for suckler cow quota from category 3(c) of the 1993 national reserves were assessed as ineligible. Data are not available on the number of applications rejected because insufficient documentary evidence was submitted.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill apply to all regulations for which his Department is responsible, past, present and future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given today by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the statutory instruments which his Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Mr. Jack: This Department has been responsible for 130 statutory instruments during the period 1 February 1994 to 31 January 1995. These are as listed:

The Dairy Produce Quotas (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/160)

The National Rivers Authority (Severn-Trent and Anglian Regional Flood Defence Committees Areas) (Boundaries) Order 1994 (SI 1994/245)

The Milk Marketing Scheme (Substitution of Date of Revocation) Order 1994 (SI 1994/282)

The Agriculture Act 1986 (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/249)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (West Penwith) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/250)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Somerset Levels and Moors) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/251)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (South Downs) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/252)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Pennine Dales) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/253)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (The Broads) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/254)

The Marek's Disease (Restriction on Vaccination) (Revocation) Order 1994 (SI 1994/472)

The Quick Frozen Foodstuffs (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/298)

The Medicines (Veterinary Drugs) (Pharmacy and Merchants' List) (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/599

The Plant Breeders' Rights (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/675)

The Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) (Fees) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/676)

The Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy Compensation Order 1994 (SI 1994/673)

The Common Agricultural Policy (Wine) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/674)

The Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/672)

The Drinking Water in Containers Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/743)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Blackdown Hills) Designation Order 1994 (SI 194/707)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Cotswold Hills) Designation Order 1994 (SI 1994/708)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Shropshire Hills) Designation Order 1994 (SI 1994/709

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Dartmoor) Designation Order 1994 (SI 1994/710)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Essex Coast) Designation Order 1994 (SI 1994/711)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Upper Thames Tributaries) Designation Order 1994 (SI 1994/712)

The Racing Pigeons (Vaccination) Order 1994 (SI 1994/944)

The Milk Marketing Board Scheme of Reorganisation (Further Extension of Period for Application) Order 1994 (SI 1994/951)

The Arable Area Payments Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/947)

The Food Labelling (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/804)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (West Penwith) Designation (Amendment) (No.2) Order 1994 (SI 1994/933)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Somerset Levels and Moors) Designation (Amendment) (No.2) Order 1994 (SI 1994/932)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (South Downs) Designation (Amendment) (No.2) Order 1994 (SI 1994/931)

The Environmentally Sensitive (Pennine Dales) Designation (Amendment) (No.2) Order 1994 (SI 1994/930)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (The Broads) Designation (Amendment) (No.2) Order 1994 (SI 1994/929)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Exmoor) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/928)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Avon Valley) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/927)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Lake District) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/926)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (South Wessex Downs) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/925)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (South West Peak) Designation Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/924)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Breckland) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/923)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Clun) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/921)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (North Peak) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/922)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (South River Valleys) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/920)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Test Valley) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/919)

The Environmentally Sensitive Areas (North Kent Marshes) Designation (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/918)

The Materials and Articles in Contact with Food (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/979)

The Poultry Meat, Farmed Game Bird Meat and Rabbit Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1029)

The Integrated Administration and Control System (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1134)

The Farm and Conservation Grant (Variation) Scheme 1994 (SI 1994/1302)

The Habitat (Salt-Marsh) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1293)

The Habitat (Former Set-aside Land) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1292)

The Habitat (Water Fringe) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1291)

The Wells Harbour Revision Order 1994 (SI 1994/1440)

The Pesticides (Maximum Residue Levels in Crops, Food and Feeding Stuffs) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1985)

The Marketing Development Scheme (Specification of Activities) Order 1994 (SI 1994/1404)

The Marketing Development Scheme 1994 (SI 1994/1403)

The Milk and Dairies and Milk (Special Designation) (Charges) (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1446)

The Channel Tunnel (Amendment of the Fisheries Act 1981) Order 1994 (SI 1994/1390)

The Flavourings in Food (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1486)

The Medicines (Medicated Animal Feeding Stuffs) (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1531)

The Suckler Cow Premium (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1528)

The Fish Health (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1448)

The Diseases of Fish (Control) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1447)

The Home-Grown Cereals Authority (Rate of Levy) Order 1994 (SI 1994/1424)

The Oil and Fibre Plant Seeds (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1423)

The Medicines (Fees Relating to Medicinal Products for Animal Use) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1554)

The Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2126)

The Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning) Scheme 1994 (SI 1994/1568)

The Feeding Stuffs (Sampling and Analysis) (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1610)

The Sea Fishing (Enforcement of Community Conservation Measures) (Amendment) (No. 6) Order 1994 (SI 1994/1680)

The Third Country Fishing (Enforcement) Order 1994 (SI 1994/1681)

The Sea Fishing (Enforcement of Community Quota Measures) Order 1994 (SI 1994/1679)

The Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Other Mammals) (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/1716)

The Organic Farming (Aid) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1721)

The Nitrate Sensitive Areas Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/1729)

The Preserved Tuna and Bonito (Marketing Standards) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2127)

The Medicines (Veterinary Medicinal Products) (Applications for Product Licenses) (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2157)

The Plaice and Sole (Specified Sea Areas) (Prohibition of Fishing) Order 1994 (SI 1994/2169)

The Agricultural Holdings (Units of Production) Order 1994 (SI 1994/2183)

The Pig Carcase (Grading) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2155)

The Brancaster Staithe Fishery (Variation) Order 1994 (SI 1994/2230)

The Organic Products (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2286)

The Animals, Meat and Meat Products (Examination for Residues and Maximum Residue Limits) (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2465)

The Feedings Stuffs (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2510)

The Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 1994 (SI 1994/2329)

The Arable Area Payments (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2287)

The Countryside Access Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2349)

The Potato Marketing Scheme (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/2404)

The Dairy Produce Quotas (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2448)

The Milk Marketing Board Scheme of Reorganisation (Third Party Rights) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2460)

The Bovine Offal (Prohibition) (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2628)

The Spongiform Encephalopathy (Miscellaneous Amendments) Order 1994 (SI 1994/2627)

The Apple Orchard Grubbing Up (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2731)

The Sheep Annual Premium Scheme (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2741)

The Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2740)

The Bucellosis (England and Wales) (Amendment) (No.2) Order 1994 (SI 1994/2762)

The Milk Marketing Board (Residuary Functions) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2759)

The Beef Carcase (Classification)(Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2853)

The Medicines (Standard Provisions for Manufacturer's Licences for Veterinary Medicinal Products) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2852)

The Sheep Annual Premium and Suckler Cow Premium Quotas (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2894)

The Importation of Animal Products and Poultry Products (Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/2920)

The Agricultural Marketing Act 1958 Part I (Certification of Cessation of Effect in Relation to Milk) Order 1994 (SI 1994/2922)

The Milk Marketing Scheme (Certification of Revocation) Order 1994 (SI 1994/2921)

The Diseases of Animals (Approved Disinfectants)(Amendment) Order 1994 (SI 1994/2965)

The Dairy Produce Quotas (Amendment)(No.2) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2919)

The Farm and Conservation Grant (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/3003)

The Farm and Conservation Grant (Variation)(No.2) Scheme 1994 (SI 1994/3002

The Draft Milk Development Council Order 1994

The Medicines (Veterinary Medicinal Products) Veterinary Surgeons from other EEA States) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2986)

The Medicines (Restrictions on the Administration of Veterinary Medicinal Products) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/2987)

The Diseases of Poultry Order 1994 (SI 1994/3141)

The Meat Products (Hygiene) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/3082)

The Agricultural Processing and Marketing Grant Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/3137)

The Marketing Authorisations for Veterinary Medicinal Products Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/3142)

The Medicines (Veterinary Drugs) (Renewal Applications for Licences and Animal Test Certificates) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/3143)

The Beef Special Premium (Amendment) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994/3131)

The Medicines (Veterinary Drugs) (Pharmacy and Merchants' List) (Amendment No. 2) Order 1994 (SI 1994/3169)

The Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1994 (SI 1994/3249)

The Sole and Nephrops (Prohibition of Fishing) Order 1994 (SI 1994/3273)

The Enzootic Bovine Leukosis (Amendment) Order 1995 (SI 1995/13)

The Fertilisers (Amendment) Regulations 1995 (SI 1995/16)

The Beef Special Premium (Amendment) Regulations 1995 (SI 1995/14)

The Suckler Cow Premium (Amendment) Regulations 1995 (SI 1995/15)

The Bovine Animals (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1995 (SI 1995/12)

The Pigs (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1995 (SI 1995/11)

The Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula Regulations 1995 (SI 1995/77)

The Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Radioactivity in Sheep) (England) (Partial Revocation) Order 1995 (SI 1995/39)

The Apple Orchard Grubbing Up (Amendment) Regulations 1995 (SI 1995/40)

The Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances) Regulations 1995 (SI 1995/100)

The Surplus Food Regulations 1995 (SI 1995/184)

The Welfare of Animals During Transport (Amendment) Order 1995 (SI 1995/131)

Animal Welfare

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further measures he is taking to promote animal welfare: and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* We shall continue to review and develop our animal welfare provisions in accordance with objective advice and will in particular:

continue to press in Brussels for effective journey limits to be included in the proposed Community measures on the welfare of animals during transport;

maintain our pressure to improve existing Community measures on farm animal welfare, pressing home in particular the case for phasing out the veal crate now that we have got the review of the relevant Community measure brought forward from 1997 to 1995;

continue to work with interested parties to encourage the establishment of welfare-friendly outlets for surplus dairy calves;

maintain our extensive programme of research and development and our provision of advice to farmers on welfare matters.

DEFENCE

Chemical Weapons Convention

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of whether the chemical weapons convention will enhance international security; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The chemical weapons convention provides for a comprehensive, global and verifiable ban of a complete class of weapons of mass destruction and also for the destruction of very large quantities of existing chemical warfare agents. Once fully implemented, it will make a significant contribution to international security.

Wages

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the total wage and salary bill of *(a)* defence personnel and *(b)* civilian personnel at his Department's establishments, in each district council area in Hampshire, in 1989 and in the most recent year, expressed in constant prices.

Mr. Soames: The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Defence Personnel

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, for each district council area in Hampshire, the number and percentage of the population represented by *(a)* defence personnel and *(b)* civilian personnel at his Department's establishments, in (i) 1989 and (ii) the most recent year.

Mr. Soames: Service and civilian personnel numbers are available at local authority area level and the available figures are as set out. Comparable population estimates are not yet available for 1994.

	1 July 1989				1 July 1994	
	Service personnel [1]		Civilian personnel [2]		Service personnel [1]	Civilian personnel [2]
	Number	Percentage of population	Number	Percentage of population	Number	Number
Hampshire	36,715	2.34	20,397.5	1.30	29,092	18,473.0
Basingstoke and Deane	0	0.00	69.5	0.05	0	39.5
East Hampshire	2,398	2.32	799.5	0.77	1,316	666.5
Eastleigh	0	0.00	20.0	0.02	0	7.0
Fareham	1,785	1.80	279.5	0.28	1,511	328.0
Gosport	6,520	8.40	3,978.5	5.13	4,141	3,790.0
Hart	2,491	3.09	785.0	0.98	2,019	840.5
Havant	0	0.00	17.0	0.01	0	14.0
New Forest	570	0.35	142.0	0.09	699	164.5
Portsmouth	9,080	4.84	5,851.0	3.12	9,016	4,710.5
Rushmoor	7,142	8.32	5,072.5	5.91	4,621	4,236.0
Southampton	53	0.03	237.5	0.12	13	161.0
Test Valley	4,291	4.21	1,234.0	1.21	3,798	1,578.5
Winchester	2,385	2.46	1,911.5	1.97	2,095	1,937.0

[1] UK regular service personnel. The figures for 1 July 1994 provisional.
[2] UK based permanent civilian staff counted as full-time equivalents.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Bill apply to all regulations for which his Department is responsible, past, present and future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the statutory instruments which his Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Mr. Soames: In the last 12 months my Department has sponsored the following six statutory instruments:

The Injuries in War (Shore Employments) Compensation (Amendment) Scheme 1994.

The International Headquarters and Defence Organisation (Designation and Privileges) (Amendment) Order 1994

The Visiting Forces and International Headquarters (Application of Law) (Amendment) Order 1994.

The Army, Air Force and Naval Discipline Acts Continuation Order.

Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Application to the Armed Forces etc.) Regulations 1994.

The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency Trading Fund Order 1995.

Surplus Equipment Sales

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the procedures adopted for the sale of surplus small arms prior to the establishment of the Disposal Sales Agency and list British companies involved over the previous five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The rules for the sale of small arms, prior to the establishment of the Disposal Sales Agency and continued since, are to restrict surplus sales to the export market. United Kingdom companies seeking to purchase surplus small arms are required to hold a section 5 firearms licence; to provide proof of a secured contract to an acceptable customer with end user certification and to obtain an export licence. Contracts have been let which ensure that other surplus weapons are reduced to scrap.

It is not MOD policy to reveal details of purchasers without their written consent. A list of British companies involved over the previous five years would require disproportionate efforts to produce should all consents be forthcoming.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the position adopted for the sale of surplus armoured vehicles and tanks prior to the establishment of the Disposal Sales Agency, and the companies purchasing surplus armoured vehicles and tanks over the last five years; and what items were involved.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Pembroke on 1 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *899-900*. The positions adopted prior to and subsequent to the establishment of the Disposal Sales Agency are unchanged.

Royal Marines

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what review is being conducted into the strength of the Royal Marines; what is the target level for the future strength of the Royal Marines; and how many redundancies will be required from current levels.

Mr. Soames: A redundancy programme for the Royal Navy, of which the Royal Marines are an integral part, was announced following the "Front Line First" study and other efficiency measures already in train. Included in this are about 100 regular Royal Marines personnel. The strength of the Royal Marines regulars is not otherwise under review, and—apart from those already mentioned—no RM redundancies are planned. There is no target or ceiling for future strength and manpower will continue to be maintained to meet commitments.

My Department is at present reviewing the future requirement for the Royal Marines Reserve, but no decision on its future size and shape have yet been taken. Any proposals which are accepted in principal by Ministers would then be subject to a period of consultation, during which all interested parties would be offered the opportunity to comment.

Anti-personnel Mines

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 10 February, *Official Report*, column *465*, how much it would cost to fit self-destructing and self-neutralising mechanisms retroactively on those anti-personnel mines held by the United Kingdom armed forces for their use in any future conflict.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* Some theoretical work undertaken by the Defence Research Agency has indicated that it may be feasible to fit self-destructing mechanisms to existing Ranger anti-personnel mine stocks, but no detailed engineering study or cost analysis has been undertaken. This will be one of the options which will be assessed when Ranger comes to be replaced.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, who is responsible for the purchasing by his Department of self-destructing and self-neutralising anti-personnel mines.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* Any acquisition of anti-personnel landmines, which would have a self-destructing or self-neutralising mechanism, would be purchased by my Department's procurement executive.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

14. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he is taking to ensure comparable investment per capita in the promotion of tourism in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Dorrell: Allocations to the national tourist boards reflect the differing circumstances and priorities in each country and are not made on a per capita basis. Direct comparisons are therefore misleading.

21. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for National heritage what plans he has to promote tourism in the midlands.

Mr. Dorrell: Government support for tourism is channelled through the statutory British Tourist Authority and English tourist board. Through the English tourist board, support is made available to the 11 non-statutory regional tourist boards, including the heart of England tourist board and east midlands tourist board.

22. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the current work of the British Tourist Authority.

Mr. Dorrell: The British Tourist Authority promotes Britain as a tourist destination in overseas markets. The Department of National Heritage will be providing £34.5 million in grant in aid to the BTA in the coming financial year.

I shall be making public my agenda for action by Government and the tourist boards to help the tourist industry improve its competitive performance on 1 March.

26. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is his most recent estimate of the value of tourism to the English economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The United Kingdom's earnings from domestic and inbound tourism are estimated to have been £33 billion in 1993. This represents 5.2 per cent. of gross domestic product. Figures for England alone are not available.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the estimated contribution from *(a)* the single regeneration budget, *(b)* the total public sector and *(c)* the private sector to London's tourism over each of the next five years.

Mr. Dorrell: London will benefit from the single regeneration budget by £316 million over the next seven years and an investment of this size will have a substantial effect in attracting visitors to the capital. In November, I announced £4 million of public funds that would be made available for BTA to run a marketing campaign in conjunction with the London tourist board; this will be matched from the private sector. The LTB will also receive £439,000 of public funds from the English tourist board this year. Forecasts of SRB, public and private funding for the next five years are not available.

Playing Fields

19. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many local authority playing fields have been sold off since 1979.

Mr. Sproat: This information is not available centrally.

Wakefield Sculpture Park

23. **Mr. Enright:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he last visited Wakefield sculpture park; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: I have not yet had the pleasure of visiting the Yorkshire sculpture park. I hope to have the opportunity to do so. The Yorkshire sculpture park is, I know, one of our national assets and is of international significance, and I look forward to experiencing its delights.

National Lottery

27. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the effect of the national lottery on the sums available for good causes from football pools operators.

Mr. Sproat: It is for the Football Trust and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, in the first instance, to assess the impact of the national lottery on their incomes.

28. **Mr. Jamieson:** To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage which organisations in the south-west have benefited from funds from the national lottery.

Mr. Dorrell: No funds from the national lottery have yet been distributed to good causes. The distributing bodies expect to begin making announcements about successful applications shortly with grants being made shortly thereafter.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received regarding the decision to fund only capital projects from national lottery receipts.

Mr. Dorrell: The national lottery distributors are able to provide limited revenue support for a lottery funded capital project where that funding cannot be found from any other source. It is necessary to limit the use of revenue funding from lottery proceeds to maintain the principle of additionality and to prevent the silting up of available funds with on-going commitments. The National Lottery Charities Board will not be subject to the presumption in favour of capital expenditure.

Drama and Music Students

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what action his Department is taking to support young people who would need financial support to go to drama or music school.

Mr. Dorrell: Responsibility for this issue rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education. I know that she is aware of particular concerns currently about discretionary grants from local authorities for dance and drama students.

Channel 4

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what representations he has received from Channel 4 regarding payments to the Independent Television Commission.

Mr. Dorrell: I have received a number of letters from the chairman and chief executive of Channel 4, and met them on 17 October 1994 to listen to their views.

Press

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he has discussed with the Press Complaints Commission media coverage of crime and the press code of conduct.

Mr. Dorrell: I have met members of the Press Complaints Commission and the newspaper industry to discuss the effectiveness of press self-regulation. Amendments to the code of practice are matters for the industry's code committee.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *158*, when he expects to announce any decision on changes to the law as it relates to privacy following the reports on privacy and media intrusion by the National Heritage Committee HC 294 1992–93, and HC 38, 1993–94, and of the report of Sir David Calcutt's review of press self-regulation.

Mr. Dorrell: The White Paper on privacy and media intrusion will set out what, if any, changes may be needed to the law as it relates to privacy. It will be published when we have completed our consideration of the legal issues relating to the proposed criminal and civil remedies.

Teletext

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to review the allocation of television broadcasting line capacity in order to encourage further improvements in teletext services on ITV and Channel 4.

Mr. Dorrell: None. The present allocation aims to make the best use of spare capacity within the television signals on Channel 3 and 4 while enabling the provision of a public teletext service meeting the detailed content requirements specified in the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many letters were sent to hon. Members last month by each Minister in the Department.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* The following number of letters were sent to hon. Members last month:

Member	*Number*
The right hon. Stephen Dorrell, MP	33
Iain Sproat, MP	101
Viscount Astor	122

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many letters were received in the Department from hon. Members last month.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 22 February 1995]:* Some 297 letter were received in my Department from hon. Members last month.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the statutory instruments which his Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department has sponsored 21 statutory instruments in the last 12 months as follows:

Title of SI	*Number*
The National Lottery Regulations 1994.	SI 1994/189
The Broadcasting (Prescribed Countries) Order 1994.	SI 1994/454
The Broadcasting (Foreign Satellite Programmes) (Specified Countries) Order 1994.	SI 1994/453
The Hyde Park and Regents Park (Vehicle Parking) Regulations 1994.	SI 1994/432
The Return of Cultural Objects Regulations 1994.	SI 1994/501
The Wireless Telegraphy (Television Licence Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 1994.	SI 1994/595
The Grants to the Redundant Churches Fund Order 1994.	SI 1994/962
The European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production Order 1994.	SI 1994/1065
The National Lottery (Licence Fees) Order 1994.	SI 1994/1200
Ancient Monuments (Class Consents) Order 1994.	SI 1994/1381

Title of SI	Number
The National Lottery etc Act 1993 (Amendment of Section 23) Order 1994.	SI 1994/1342
The National Lottery (Revocation of Licences) Procedure Regulations 1994.	SI 1994/1170
Sports Grounds and Sporting Events: the Football Spectators (Seating) Orders 1994.	SI 1994/1666
The Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Order 1994.	SI 1994/1771
The European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production (Amendment) Order 1994.	SI 1994/1904
The Safety of Sports Grounds (Designation) Order 1994.	SI 1994/2239
The Protection of Wrecks (Designation, No. 1) Order 1994.	SI 1994/1842
The Broadcasting (Restrictive Trade Practice Act 1976) (Exemption for Networking Arrangements) Order 1994.	SI 1994/2540
The European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 1994.	SI 1994/3218
The Films Co-Production (Amendment) Order 1994.	SI 1994/3222
The Broadcasting (Unlicensed Television Services) Exemption Order 1994.	SI 1994/3172

EMPLOYMENT

Youth Training

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many places are currently provided for youth training by further education institutions in each training and enterprise council area; and what this figure is expressed as a proportion of the total number of youth training places provided through each TEC.

Mr. Paice: The information requested is not available.

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many young people in *(a)* the county of Cumbria and *(b)* the borough of Copeland he expects to be in receipt of youth training guarantees on 1 April.

(2) How many youth training guarantees were made in 1994 to young people in the area covered by Cumbria TEC; how many youth training guarantees had been met by Cumbria TEC as at 21 December 1994; and how many youth training guarantees are projected to have been met by 31 March 1995 in the area covered by Cumbria TEC.

Mr. Paice: In 1994, 2,714 school leavers registered as eligible for youth training in Cumbria. As at 21 December 1994, all eligible young people bar one had received an offer of a place on YT within the guarantee period. At April 1995, it is expected that there will be 3,285 young people eligible for the YT guarantee in Cumbria, of which 632 will be from Copeland. The training and enterprise council expects fully to meet its obligations to offer a YT place to every eligible young person up to and beyond 31 March 1995.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many places were provided by further education institutions for youth training in each of the last five years for each region; what these numbers are as a proportion of the total places provided in each region in each year; what has been the cost in each region in each year of these training places; and what percentage of the youth training budget in each region in each year this represents.

Mr. Paice: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many further education institutions are contracted as training providers for youth training by each training and enterprise council; and what this figure is expressed as a proportion of the total number of youth training providers contracted to each TEC.

Mr. Paice: Training and enterprise councils are private companies and are responsible for determining their own contracts with training providers. The Department does not have this information.

Employment Training and Training for Work

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the number of starts in employment training and in training for work in each of the last five years; and what is the number in each year for those completing such training.

Mr. Paice: The information is given in the table. As figures on those completing training come from surveys, it is possible to give only an estimate of the percentage and not the actual number.

Great Britain

Year	Total number of starts employment training 1989–90 to 1992–93, training for work 1993–94	Percentage of leavers in each year completing their agreed training—ET 1989–90 to 1992–93, TfW 1993–94
1989–90	431,000	47[1]
1990–91	389,000	48
1991–92	293,000	55
1992–93	291,000	59
1993–94	338,000	60[2]

Source:
Management information provided by training and enterprise councils, the Welsh office and the Scottish Office, training for work national follow-up survey.

Notes:
[1] July 1989 to March 1990.
[2] England and Wales only.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what plans he has to provide training in Government organisational and financial procedures for non-executive directors of TEC boards.

Mr. Paice: None. Training and enterprise councils are private companies and the induction and training of their directors is a matter for the board.

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many out-of-school child care places were delivered by Dudley TEC in 1993–94 and are planned to be delivered in 1994–95 and in future years; and at what cost.

Mr. Paice: Dudley training and enterprise council was not one of the pilot TECs for child care and therefore did not deliver any out-of-school child care places in 1993–94.

In 1994–95 the TEC is planning to deliver 95 child care places and has a budget of £60,615 which covers development work and setting up costs.

In 1995–96, 139 full-time places are allocated to the TEC, with a budget of £100,895.

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many contracts were issued by Cumbria TEC in the financial year 1994–95 to provide training for people with special needs.

Mr. Paice: One hundred and twenty four of the contracts issued by Cumbria training and enterprise council to date have capacity for training people with special needs.

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what estimate he has made as to the ability of Cumbria TEC to provide sufficient contracts to meet the needs of the unemployed; and what contingency plans he has made.

Mr. Paice: The Government office for the north west is currently in negotiation with Cumbria training and enterprise council for the 1995–96 financial year and is confident that Cumbria TEC will continue to deliver effective programmes to support the unemployed in the area for which it is responsible.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidance his Department *(a)* has issued, *(b)* plans to issue and *(c)* plans to revise in respect of the requirement for evidencing outputs and starts for output-related funding of training providers by TECs; and if he will place in the Library copies of the guidance documents on evidencing outputs and starts that his Department produces.

Mr. Paice: The evidence the Department requires to support claims is set out in the training and enterprise council contractual documents, copies of which are placed in the Library each year. Copies of the documents for 1995–96 have been sent to TECs and will be placed in the Library.

Further guidance, explaining the requirements in more detail and describing the checks to be made, will be available to TECs at the beginning of 1995–96 and will be revised as necessary.

Technical and Vocational Education Initiative

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what evaluation he has made of the technical and vocational education initiative; and what plans he has for it achievements to be continued.

Mr. Paice *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* The Department is responsible for the technical and vocational education initiative. We have undertaken three major evaluation studies of the programme: one covering students' experiences, one assessing TVEI's impact on the labour market, and one covering how well TVEI practices have become embedded in schools and colleges. There has also been research into the impact of specific TVEI themes. In addition, each local project is required to undertake its own evaluation. These studies suggest that TVEI has made a significant contribution to improving the preparation of young people for working life.

Staff in Government offices continue to work with local education authorities, training and enterprise councils, schools and colleges to take forward the lessons of TVEI. In the White Paper, "Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win", CM 2563, additional funds were announced to support action to spread best practice identified through TVEI and to ensure that all pupils in their last year of compulsory education can have at least one week's work experience.

Funding for Training

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the amount and type of funding or other support received from his Department by *(a)* the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, *(b)* the Business and Technology Education Council and *(c)* City and Guilds in (i) the current year and (ii) each of the previous three years.

Mr. Paice: The Department has provided funding or other support to the National Council for Vocational Qualifications comprising grant in aid towards its operating costs and specific contract funding to enable it to undertake activities in support of the development of national vocational qualifications and general national vocational qualifications and to help support other Government initiatives. Details of the funding provided in the current year to date and in the previous three years is shown in the following table.

Year		*Funding £*
1994–95	Grant in aid funding	1,928,000
	Support for specific activities	3,271,648
1993–94	Grant in aid funding	3,826,000
	Support for specific activities	3,244,703
1992–93	Grant in aid funding	3,900,000
	Support for specific activities	3,202,932
1991–92	Grant in aid funding	3,700,000
	Support for specific activities	1,878,721

No funding or other support has been provided by the Employment Department to the Business and Technology Education Council or to City and Guilds in the current year or any of the previous three years. The Department does not normally fund awarding bodies.

SCOTLAND

NHS Trusts

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the financial status of each NHS trust in Scotland as at 1 February.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As at 31 January, the majority of NHS trusts in Scotland were forecasting that they would meet their financial targets. Of those that were not, only two will not break even on their income and expenditure account. The other trusts are within 1 per cent. of their target rate of return.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the remuneration of the chairman and the board members of Scottish Homes; what are the termination dates for their appointments; what compensation would be required for early termination; and what notice would be required.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information regarding the remuneration of the chairman and members appointed to the board of Scottish Homes and the termination date for their appointment is set out in the table. The terms of appointment of members indicate that, normally, no compensation is payable where a person

ceases to be a member before the expiry date of the term of office but schedule 1, paragraph 7(3) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1988 provides for circumstances where my right hon. Friend may consider it right for compensation to be paid. Such compensation would be of an amount which my right hon. Friend, with the approval of Treasury, may determine. No notice of termination is required.

Name	*Annual remuneration £*	*Termination date*
Sir James Mellon (Chairman)	38,330	31 March 1996
Mrs. Frances McCall, MBE	6,660	31 March 1998
Professor Duncan McLennan, MA, M Phil, FRSA	6,660	31 March 1997
Dr. Tom N. A. Begg, OBE, JP, BA, PhD	6,660	31 March 1995
Mrs. Heather Sheerin, OBE	6,660	31 March 1997
Councillor Daphne M. W. Sleigh	6,660	31 March 1999
Mr. Cameron H. Parker, OBE	6,660	31 March 1996
Professor John Rankin Small, CBE	6,660	31 March 1997
Mr. Alastair C. Dempster, FCIBS	6,660	31 March 1998

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if potential landlords who propose to acquire Scottish Homes or new town development corporation stock under large-scale voluntary transfers are excluded if they have no former experience or track record of managing and maintaining housing stock.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. However, when Scottish Homes and new town development corporations consider selling their houses to an alternative landlord it is essential that the organisation is able to demonstrate a long term guaranteed future for tenants and the ability to provide the required level of service. The appraisal and evaluation of any proposal will take these issues fully into account.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which registered housing associations, housing trusts, private landlords or private companies, community businesses or individuals have *(a)* expressed an interest in bidding for Scottish Homes stock or new town development corporation stock and *(b)* formally proposed to acquire such stock; and which of them are at (i) the initial screening stage to establish the validity of the proposal and (ii) the detailed evaluation stage involving consultation with tenants.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested relating to Scottish Homes stock is a matter for Scottish Homes and I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member.

Details of organisation which have expressed an interest in new town development corporation stock are not held centrally. Glenrothes and East Kilbride have received formal bids for their stock from the following organisations:

Glenrothes
Kirkcaldy District Council
The Munro Trust
Kingdom Housing Association
Glenrothes Community Housing Association
Collydean Housing Association
Hillcrest Housing Association
Bield Housing Association
Kirk Care Housing Association

East Kilbride
East Kilbride District Council
The Munro Trust

All the offers received to date by the corporations have completed the evaluation stage including consultation with tenants, or have been withdrawn.

Public Bodies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Lang: Such information will not be available for some time. Of the 49 existing executive NDPBs sponsored by my Department, around one third have pay arrangements involving a close link to national civil service settlements. It will be for the management in each NPDB concerned to develop and bring forward proposals over the coming year for new pay arrangements to operate following delegation of civil service pay to Departments and agencies and in the absence of national settlements from April 1996.

Sheriff Court House, Haddington

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of whether the sheriff court house at Haddington satisfies the objectives set out in the justice charter for Scotland in respect of *(a)* accessibility for disabled people, *(b)* adequate and comfortable accommodation, *(c)* refreshment facilities, *(d)* services for defence witnesses and lawyers and *(e)* in all other respects; and if he will make a statement on plans to improve Haddington's sheriff court premises.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The accommodation for the sheriff court in County buildings at Haddington has a number of deficiencies, particularly in terms of facilities for court users. County buildings is partly owned by the Secretary of State for Scotland and partly by East Lothian district council. Substantial improvements to the sheriff court facilities within the building would therefore require participation by the council and my noble and learned Friend the Minister of State wrote to the hon. Member on 20 December 1994 indicating his willingness to consider proposals from the council.

Breast Care Nurses

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of breast care nurses employed in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland; of these nurses how many are employed by way of funding from outwith the national health service; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Statistics on the number of nurses engaged on breast care duties are not maintained centrally.

Prison Management Costs

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the cost to public funds of managing each prison since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service. I have asked its chief executive, Mr. E. W. Frizzell to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from E. W. Frizzell to Dr. Godman, dated 27 February 1995:

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton has asked me to reply to your Question about the cost to public funds of managing each prison since 1979.

The attached Annex sets out yearly expenditure per establishment, from financial year 1981/82 onwards. The Agency records do not provide for information detailed by establishment, prior to this.

Annex

Scottish Prison Service—expenditure by individual establishment[1]

£ thousands

	1981–82	*1982–83*	*1983–84*	*1984–85*	*1985–86*	*1986–87*	*1987–88*	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*
Aberdeen	1,165	1,553	1,777	1,726	1,713	1,776	1,934	2,469	2,969	2,967	3,364	4,277	4,494
Barlinnie	5,569	6,058	6,991	7,983	8,539	9,096	10,089	11,573	13,015	13,029	13,975	15,367	17,383
Barlinnie Unit	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	42	361	391	440
Castle Huntly	993	973	1,067	1,055	1,143	1,119	1,355	1,697	1,891	1,882	2,021	2,406	3,402
Corton Vale	2,127	2,345	2,457	2,978	2,953	3,060	3,195	3,629	4,600	5,010	4,760	5,196	6,017
Dumfries	1,206	1,473	1,503	1,932	1,761	1,778	3,221	3,202	2,740	3,323	3,475	3,958	4,390
Dungavel	1,109	1,145	1,256	1,352	1,185	1,134	1,462	2,101	2,100	1,957	2,273	2,863	2,945
Edinburgh	4,249	5,310	5,353	5,944	7,306	7,222	7,592	8,505	9,382	9,992	10,774	12,743	13,133
Friarton	558	681	653	818	972	966	1,074	1,205	1,163	1,165	1,302	1,502	1,731
Glenochil	4,199	4,918	5,082	5,657	6,348	6,476	7,245	8,219	9,320	10,228	11,569	12,868	14,346
Greenock	399	1,076	781	1,435	2,624	2,601	2,997	3,426	3,405	3,246	3,925	4,101	4,918
Inverness	921	1,050	1,258	1,315	1,308	1,375	1,966	2,316	2,441	2,367	2,506	2,910	3,000
Longriggend	1,481	1,699	2,006	2,325	2,426	2,471	3,345	4,066	3,384	3,764	4,021	4,264	4,788
Low Moss	1,218	1,690	2,280	2,835	2,280	2,177	2,623	3,035	2,901	3,981	4,344	4,438	5,195
Noranside	702	836	936	1,182	1,223	1,085	1,349	2,200	1,632	1,614	2,375	2,228	2,483
Penninghame	566	643	664	690	682	677	859	1,060	958	1,178	1,258	1,342	1,611
Perth	3,485	3,674	4,352	6,119	5,272	5,428	7,016	7,845	8,275	9,555	10,212	10,854	11,661
Peterhead	3,328	3,631	4,162	4,538	4,788	4,940	5,604	5,818	6,700	6,320	6,124	6,364	7,765
Polmont	2,911	3,644	3,769	4,883	4,550	4,184	4,699	5,770	7,619	6,649	8,230	8,546	10,960
Shotts	958	1,112	1,127	1,513	1,413	2,983	5,879	8,069	10,612	10,929	10,090	10,753	12,670
Shotts Unit	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	83	447	505	607
Total by establishment	37,143	43,511	47,474	56,279	58,487	60,549	73,503	86,203	95,105	99,281	107,431	117,874	133,939
Other expenditure	13,887	13,104	15,363	16,164	22,162	24,563	22,801	24,870	26,394	26,627	29,332	34,340	20,404
Total expenditure	51,030	56,615	62,837	72,443	80,649	85,112	96,304	111,073	121,499	125,908	136,763	152,214	154,343

[1] 1979–80 and 1980–81 not available.

Note:

"Other Expenditure" represents the cost of Central Administration and expenditure met from the Votes of other Departments on behalf of the Scottish Prison Service. These costs cannot be allocated due to the data capture system being designed for Vote, rather than Management information purposes.

NHS Consultants

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he intends to adopt to enable him to monitor and record the allocation of time that NHS consultants devote to *(a)* NHS responsibilities and tasks and *(b)* their private practice work.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* NHS consultants are contracted to work to the duties and responsibilities agreed with their employers. It is for the employing bodies to satisfy themselves that they are fulfilling their NHS commitments. NHS consultants are able to undertake private practice provided that it is not to the disadvantage of the NHS or NHS work. Whole-time consultants are expected to devote substantially the whole of their professional time to their NHS duties. They may not earn from private practice more than 10 per cent. of their gross NHS earnings; if they do so they transfer to a maximum part-time contract. The provisions of the maximum part-time contract allow the consultant to carry out private practice without a specific limit, but maintain the consultant's commitment to NHS responsibilities and tasks.

M77

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received from Scottish Militant Labour with regard to the extension to the M77; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* No representations on the M77 have been received from Scottish Militant Labour.

Waste Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about Scottish Nuclear's proposal for a dry store for waste nuclear fuel at Torness power station.

Mr. Kynoch: My right hon. Friend expects to make a decision shortly.

ENVIRONMENT

Sulphur Quotas

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking to allocate unused

sulphur quotas from England and Wales to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Atkins: As my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Energy and Industry said in his reply to the question from the hon. Member for Antrim East (Mr. Beggs) on 8 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *315-16*, this is a matter which is kept under regular review.

Exchange Sale Scheme

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses he has received to his proposed exchange sale scheme for council leaseholders; and what proportion supported the scheme.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We received 38 responses to the proposal for the exchange sale scheme. More than three quarters supported the introduction of a scheme in principle and commented on the details.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the exchange sale scheme for council leaseholders.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: We are reviewing the scheme in the light of the comments received to our consultation exercise. We hope to announce details shortly.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will ensure that the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 apply to all regulations for which his Department is responsible, past, present and future; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs earlier today.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the statutory instruments which his Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Sir Paul Beresford: A list of the statutory instruments will be placed in the Library sponsored by my Department in the last 12 months—1 February 1994 to 31 January 1995—will be placed in the Library. In addition to those orders, a further 254 local orders were also processed.

Pollution

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action the United Kingdom is taking to phase out the production of substances damaging the ozone layer.

Mr. Atkins *[pursuant to his reply, 15 February 1995 c. 674]*: The production of chlorofluorocarbons has been phased out in the European Union except for some limited production for a small number of essential uses, such as gas medical inhalers, and to meet the domestic needs of certain developing countries as provided for under the Montreal protocol and European Union regulations.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all samples of the presence of polychlorinated biphenyls, polychlorinated dibenzo-para-dioxins and polychlorinated dibenzofurans in *(a)* soil and *(b)* air which have been taken by his Department and agencies responsible to his Department in Hampshire in the past 10 years and, in each case, the location of the sample site.

Mr. Atkins: In addition to the samples reported in Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollutions technical report, 1989, entitled "Determination of PCBs, PCDDs and PCDFs in UK Soils", the following soil and air samples have been taken on behalf of HMIP. The results of items 1 and 2 will be published by HMIP this spring. The results of items 3 to 6 are already available on HMIP's public registers.

Item	*Type*	*Date*	*Number*	*Location*
1	Soil	1988–89	8	Around Winchester municipal waste incinerator
2	Soil	1988–89	12	Around Fawley chemical waste incinerator
3	Air	1991–94	5	Stack emissions from Havant incinerator
4	Air	1992–94	6	Stack emissions from Basingstoke incinerator
5	Air	1991–94	6	Stack emissions from Marchwood incinerator
6	Air	1992–94	4	Stack emissions from Winchester incinerator

Irish Sea (Science)

Mr. Faber: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made by the Irish sea science co-ordinator in reviewing Irish sea science since his appointment was announced on 11 March 1992.

Mr. Atkins: The co-ordinator has prepared "A Review of Current Activities and Future Needs" with the assistance of organisations on both sides of the Irish sea. The review which has been submitted to the UK and Irish Governments as the "Second Report of the Irish Sea Science Co-ordinator", concludes that the Irish sea is already receiving much scientific attention. The review assesses the contribution of current scientific work to understanding environmental change and human impact in the Irish sea and identifies broad priorities for further work. I am placing copies in the Library of the House today.

The co-ordinator is now preparing a report on specific, immediate priorities for future research and monitoring. This further report will be made available to the House once it has been completed.

New Forest

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column *808*, if the terms of reference of the New Forest committee and the New Forest consultative panel which it administers apply to the Crown lands of the New Forest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The terms of reference of both the committee and the panel apply equally to the Crown lands of the New Forest.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *89*, which waste consignments for the Drigg disposal facility contained quantities of free liquid.

Mr. Atkins: The following waste consignments have been seized by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution since 1990 and found to contain quantities of free liquids.

Date of seizure	*Consignor*
18 May 1994	Wylfa—Nuclear Electric
7 October 1993	AEA—WNL
1 October 1992	BNF—Sellafield
24 January 1992	BNF—Sellafield
24 January 1992	Hunterston—Scottish Nuclear
20 March 1991	Dungeness—Nuclear Electric
31 August 1990	BNF—Sellafield
20 July 1990	Amersham International—Amersham
18 July 1990	AEA—Harwell
26 June 1990	AEA—Harwell
15 March 1990	Wylfa—Nuclear Electric
March 1990	Hinkley Point—Nuclear Electric

Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to announce the appointment of the new chair for the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee; what consultation he has carried out regarding the appointment; and what criteria were used in selecting the new chair.

Mr. Atkins: An announcement will be made in due course. The chairman of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee is appointed by the Secretaries of State for the Environment, for Scotland and for Wales, in consultation with other ministerial colleagues as appropriate, and is chosen on the basis of his or her abilities to fill what is an important and demanding position.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what plans he has to change the status of *(a)* the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee and *(b)* the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Nuclear Installations;

(2) what plans he has to merge the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Nuclear Installations.

Mr. Atkins: There are no current plans to change the status of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee, although the effectiveness of all such committees is kept under review. Questions concerning the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Nuclear Installations are a matter for the Health and Safety Commission in consultation with the Department of Trade and Industry and the Scottish Office.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee.

Mr. Gummer: Sir John Knill, the current chairman of Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee is due to step down as chairman of RWMAC at the end of May of this year. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales and I had intended to invite Dr. David Harrison, chairman of the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Nuclear Installations to be Sir John Knill's successor. However, in recent weeks differences have emerged between the RWMAC and ACSNI members of a joint study group examining the approach to site selection for disposal facilities.

I have recently received their report including the minority views of the two ACSNI members, which I shall be publishing shortly. In the light of these differences, Dr. Harrison has indicated that he feels it would be in the best interests of both committees that they should not at the present time have the same chairman and he has therefore withdrawn his name from consideration for the chairmanship of RWMAC. I have reluctantly acquiesced.

A further announcement will be made in due course about Sir John Knill's successor.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations have been made by the European Commission to Her Majesty's Government in respect of local labour clauses within contracts for objective 1 projects; what the Commission's position is on such contracts; what his response has been; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: No representations have been made by the Commission on this subject on Merseyside, though on the initiative of local partners it will be considered at a future meeting of the monitoring committee.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the European Commission calling for greater representation of local authorities and for the representation of social partners on the committees monitoring the use of objective 1 funds on Merseyside; what his response has been; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The Commission has made no representations to me on these issues, following the agreement of the single programming document with the Commission last year.

Ethnic Minority Funding

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *149*, regarding additional section 11 funding, if she will give the amounts of ring-fenced section 11 funding within the single regeneration budget of November 1994.

Mr. Curry: Expenditure on the section 11 schemes which are now part of the single regeneration budget is expected to be £60.5 million in the current financial year, 1994–95. These schemes will continue to receive funding through the single regeneration budget for their planned lifetimes.

WALES

Child Care

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will establish a special "under-fives initiative"

along the lines of proposals submitted to him by Chwarae Teg.

Mr. Richards: I expect to make an announcement on this shortly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will extend beyond the next financial year the funding of the training and enterprise council out-of-school initiative.

Mr. Richards: The out-of-school child care grant initiative was introduced in 1993 as a three-year pump-priming initiative to stimulate the market for child care for children of school age. There are no plans to extend the pump-priming period.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will establish a child care task force to draw up a child care action plan for Wales as proposed by the Equal Opportunities Commission in its report "Equal Opportunities Commission Evidence to the Welsh Office on EC Childcare Recommendations."

Mr. Richards: Chwarae Teg already has a central role in stimulating and guiding actions to promote child care, working with relevant agencies in Wales. I am not convinced that a child care task force will make effective action more likely.

Mr Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to raise awareness among employers of the EC child care recommendation adopted by the Council of Ministers in March 1992.

Mr. Richards: I look to Chwarae Teg to lead action to raise awareness among employers. The Welsh Office's core funding for Chwarae Teg recognises this.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he will take on EC child care recommendations evidence from the Equal Opportunities Commission in Wales.

Mr. Richards: The Equal Opportunities Commission's evidence will be taken into account in the Welsh Office contribution to the Government's report on the EC child care recommendation 1992.

I refer the hon. Member the the replies given to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) today.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the development of the NHS trusts in Wales.

Mr. Richards: There are currently 24 operational NHS trusts in Wales and I announced on 16 January that we were establishing a further three trusts with an operational date of 1 April 1995.

Additionally, public consultation on applications received from the University hospital of Wales and Cardiff Royal Group and the West Glamorgan east unit—Neath and Port Talbot—and district service unit has now ended. In the light of representation received, and taking account of the individual merits of both applications, my right hon. Friend and I have decided to establish these units as NHS trusts to become operational from April 1995 and April 1996 respectively.

The orders giving the effect on these decisions have been signed today.

My right hon. Friend and I are satisfied that the new University hospital of Wales healthcare NHS trust can become fully operational on 1 April 1995. However, we have always made it clear that we will only appose full trust status when management at a trust can concentrate on improving patient care, our key criterion for agreeing trust status. My right hon. Friend and I have therefore decided to approve trust status for the new Glan-y-Mor NHS trust to become fully operational on 1 April 1996.

During the intervening period, when the trust will run in shadow form and undertake a limited number of functions of a fully operational trust, the new trust will be able to complete the integration of the West Glamorgan east unit and district services unit and make further progress on the development of the new Baglan hospital.

We will announce shortly details on chairmen and non-executive directors for the new NHS trusts.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many accident and emergency departments there are in Wales; what was the corresponding figure in each year since 1986; and how many accident and emergency departments have been relocated in each year since 1986.

Mr. Richards: The number of accident and emergency departments in each year since 1985–86 is given in the following table. Information concerning relocation of these departments is not available centrally.

Year	*Number of accidents and emergency departments'*
1985–86	72
1986–87	71
1987–88	71
1988–89	71
1989–90	70
1890–91	70
1991–92	68
1992–93	69
1993–94	67

'Includes all hospitals which reported treating patients in the speciality of accident and emergency during the year, including hospitals which treated only a small number of patients in this specialty.

School Budgets

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the schools which have contributed to the total balance held by local education authority schools and the balances held by each school together with the date it was recorded.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the reply my hon. Friend gave to the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on 23 February 1995, *Official Report,* column *301,*

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 14 February *Official Report,* column *610,* if he will list the date that the balances were recorded in the audited account of each grant-maintained school; and if he will list by local education authority the balance held by locally maintained schools on the same date.

Mr. Redwood: The financial balances detailed in my answer of 14 February were taken from the annual accounts of grant-maintained schools in Wales for the year ending 31 March 1994. According to financial

outturn statements for 1993–94 prepared by local education authorities under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988, locally maintained schools held the following balances.

	£
Clwyd	5,245,788
Dyfed	3,921,715
Gwent	7,730,178
Gwynedd	3,592,432
Mid Glamorgan	12,833,594
Powys	1,567,732
South Glamorgan	1,848,000
West Glamorgan	10,856,158
Wales	47,595,597

Hedgerows

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has, and what guidance he has issued, to prevent further loss of hedgerows in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: The 1990 survey conducted by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology indicated that, although removal was a cause the loss of hedgerows was mainly due to poor management. The Countryside Council for Wales, at the request of Welsh Office Ministers, introduced the hedgerow renovation scheme in 1992 to improve management. The hedgerow clauses in the Environment Bill will enable the introduction of a notification scheme allowing local authorities to prevent the removal of important hedgerows.

Tir Cymen

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to extend the Tir Cymen scheme to the whole of Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Tir Cymen is being run as an experimental scheme for five years. Decisions as to its future will be taken following a review to be undertaken before the end of the period.

Designated Areas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those designated areas in Wales that have been damaged in each of the last five years with the cause of the damage in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The protection and monitoring of designated habitats is the responsibility of the Countryside Council for Wales and the information is not held centrally. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member with the data requested; a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to increase the number of designated areas in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I will continue to consider each proposal for designation as it arrives.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he is taking to protect designated areas in Wales from being damaged; and what advice he has issued to local authorities in respect of this.

Mr. Redwood: The protection of designated habitats is the responsibility of the Countryside Council for Wales. National parks are the responsibility of their committees and areas of outstanding natural beauty are managed by the appropriate local authority or authorities.

Guidance on the protection of such areas is contained in various planning policy guidance notes, regulations, letters and circulars.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what discussions he has had with the Council of Welsh Districts and the Assembly of Welsh Counties with respect to the shift in monitoring of small sites of special scientific interest from the Countryside Council for Wales to local authorities;

(2) what assessment he has made of the scientific competence of local authorities with respect of their monitoring of small sites of scientific interest;

(3) what additional funding will be made available to Welsh local authorities to enable them to carry out effective monitoring of small sites of scientific interest.

Mr. Redwood: No decisions have yet been taken on the extent to which local authorities in Wales will be involved in the oversight and monitoring of small sites of special scientific interest. No new duties will be imposed on local authorities in Wales. Although no discussions have yet taken place, I fully intend involving local authority associations in discussions on how their members might become more involved in local nature conservation and countryside matters. I would expect these discussions to cover the questions of resources and scientific competence.

Country Parks

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what additional funding will be made available to local authorities to fund country parks following the reduction in the budget of the Countryside Council for Wales.

Mr. Redwood: The designation and maintenance of country parks is entirely a local authority matter. It is for the Countryside Council for Wales to decide upon its level of funding of education and interpretation interests in country parks.

Forestry

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what hectarage of new forest has been planted in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Redwood: The information is as follows:

Year ended 31 March	*New planting (hectares)*
1979	1,163
1980	1,353
1981	1,244
1982	1,330
1983	1,347
1984	1,339
1985	1,079
1986	792
1987	846
1988	1,102
1989	984

Year ended 31 March	New planting (hectares)
1990	648
1991	525
1992	411
1993	429
1994	626

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amount of woodland grant scheme has been paid to landowners in Wales in each year since its interception.

Mr. Redwood: The information is as follows:

Year ended 31 March	£ thousands
1989[1]	25
1990	405
1991	463
1992	622
1993	756
1994	1,222

[1] Part year.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has issued to landowners for increasing forest cover in Wales; and what plans he has to make extra funds available for this under the woodland grant scheme.

Mr. Redwood: The Forestry Commission has published a wide range of information and advice on the creation of new woodlands. In his statement of 19 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *177–91*, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced that significant extra funds would be provided for forestry throughout Great Britain.

Waste to Energy Project

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report*, column *152*, which four projects in Wales have been awarded contracts for waste-to-energy schemes under the third round of the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Mr. Redwood: The following waste-to-energy projects were awarded contracts under the third round of the NFFO:

Technology band	Prosper	Site name	MW DNC	Parliamentary constituency
Landfill Gas	AD Waste Ltd.	Standard	0.875	Alyn and Deeside
Landfill Gas	Renewable Power Generation Ltd.	Tythegston	1.175	Bridgend
Municipal and Industrial Waste	Associated Energy Projects plc	Lamby Way	1.446	Cardiff South and Penarth
Municipal and Industrial Waste	Pyrogen (Merthyr) Ltd.	Taff Merthyr Colliery	9.000	Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney

Out of Town Retailing

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many planning applications for our out-of-town developments have been referred to him in the last two years, what was the result of those applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Between 1 February 1993 and 31 January 1995, 26 out of town centre retail applications were referred to me under the Town and Country Planning (Shopping Development) (England and Wales) (No. 2) Direction 1993, or as departures from the development plan or as a result of call-in requests. It was decided not to intervene in 23 cases; three are still under consideration. In addition, 25 such proposals came forward on appeal of which three have been dismissed, 12 were withdrawn by the applicants, four were allowed and six have yet to be determined.

Recycling Plans

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh local authorities have now produced recycling plans: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: All 37 district authorities have produced recycling plans.

Organic Farming

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has issued to farmers in respect of encouraging organic farming.

Mr. Redwood: An organic aid scheme was introduced by WOAD on 1 September 1994 in order to aid farmers wishing to convert land to organic production. An information pack containing details of the scheme and listing addresses where further advice might be obtained is available from divisional office.

Showering Facilities

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changing and showering facilities are available to Welsh Office staff who work at *(a)* Gwydyr house and *(b)* Cathays Park.

Mr. Redwood: At Gwydyr house there are showers in toilet/washroom areas. At Cathays Park there are separate changing rooms with showers.

Rights of Way

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made on the introduction of a public rights of way network in Wales as promised in "This Common Inheritance—The Third Year Report".

Mr. Redwood: The latest available information is that 66 per cent. of the 1995 target strategic network will be open by the end of the financial year 1994–95. The 1995 target is a milestone towards the end of the century deadline, by which time the entire system of public rights of way is intended to be open and properly signposted in Wales.

Local Development Plans

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh local authorities have produced local development plans under the terms of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The relevant planning provision of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 came into effect on 10 February 1992. Since that date, five districts have adopted local plans which cover the whole of their area. A further two districts have deposited plans and 11 districts and two national parks have published consultation drafts. Local plans, taking into account government guidance and local needs and priorities, have an important role in promoting and guiding development and in protecting and conserving our natural and build heritage. I want to see full local planning coverage in Wales at the earliest possible date and up to date and succinct plans giving clear guidance on acceptable land uses.

Reclaimed Land (Building)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what guidance he has issued to local authorities in Wales to ensure that new building takes place on reclaimed land wherever practicable.

Mr. Redwood: Welsh Office circular 21/87—development of contaminated land—indicated that the Government wished to encourage full and effective use of land in urban areas and the re-use of sites which have been previously developed. Planning policy guidance note 12, Wales, published in February 1992 requires local authorities to include in development plans, land use policies for the improvement of the physical environment, for example, by reclaiming contaminated and derelict land so that it can be brought back into use more quickly and reduce pressure on green-field sites. In addition, the need for reclamation is referred to in other planning guidance. The value of using reclaimed land for new building is repeated in "The Environmental Agenda for Wales", published recently. I have stressed the priority of this work to the WDA and local authorities in the meetings I have held with it about developments.

TRANSPORT

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 apply to all regulations for which his Department is responsible, past, present and future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the statutory instruments which his Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Mr. Norris: My Department was responsible for 116 statutory instruments during this period. I have placed a list in the Library.

Bray's Detective Agency

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 20 February *Official Report*, column *3*, on what date Bray's Detective Agency ceased to be contracted to his Department; and what was the total expenditure by his Department in relation to the contract or contracts with Bray's.

Mr. Watts: Bray's Detective Agency ceased to be contracted to the Department of Transport on 31 July 1994. The total sum paid to Bray's by the Department on 31 July 1994. The total sum paid to Bray's by the Department amounted to £267,377.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on which road schemes promoted by his Department private detective agencies are being retained to identify protestors, serve writs, or for other purposes; in each case, what is the name of the agency and to whom the agency is contracted; and what financial liability rests with his Department for his contract.

Mr. Watts: Bray's Detective Agency is currently being employed through the Treasury Solicitor in connection with the A12 Hackney Wick–M11 link and M65 Blackburn southern bypass schemes. The question of financial liability will depend on the degree and amount of any work that Bray's might be instructed to undertake.

Royal Train

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what mileages were covered by the royal train in each of the past seven years; and what were the total costs measured per mile travelled.

Mr. Watts: The information is as follows:

Year	*Mileage covered by the royal train*	*Total costs charged to Department of Transport, averaged per mile travelled* £
1987–88	21,936	44.40
1988–89	22,611	45.64
1989–90	19,979	58.55
1990–91	25,207	78.66
1991–92	28,568	78.20
1992–93	24,629	87.23
1993–94	30,494	80.33

Notes:
1. Information has been provided by British Railways Board.
2. 1989–90 was the first year in which police costs were charged as a separate item to the Department of Transport. Full police costs were charged from 1990–91. In that year, police costs amounted to £600,000.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what have been the total amounts paid for the royal train in each of the past seven years; what additions or reductions were listed in estimates; and what is his estimated total for the next two years.

Mr. Watts: Expenditure met by the Department of Transport and estimated expenditure for 1994–95,

1995–96 and 1996–97 in respect of the royal train, including refurbishment, and travel by scheduled train on official business by members of the royal family and their households has been as follows:

Year	Total paid £000s	Supplementary estimates included £000s
1987–88	3,081	—
1988–89	3,301	—
1989–90	2,288	—
1990–91	2,868	+700
1991–92	2,628	+1,075
1992–93	2,556	+1,000
1993–94	2,827	+730
1994–95	2,360	+351
1995–96	2,041	—
1996–97	2,041	—

Notes:
1. The figures for 1987–88 to 1993–94 are outturns, for 1994–95 a forecast outturn and for 1995–96 to 1996–97 planned expenditure.
2. Costs are met by the Department of Transport following receipt of agreed claims for journeys undertaken.

Fish Factory Ships

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *633*, when the consultation document on the regulation of fish factory ships will be published; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Norris: A consultation paper on possible further measures to ensure that fish factory ships meet agreed safety standards and carry adequate liability insurance will be issued shortly. Copies will be made available in the Library.

Nuclear Waste Shipments

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *482*, if he has now received representations from the Channel Islands on nuclear waste shipments.

Mr. Norris: No.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what change there has been since 19 December 1994 to the timetable for the announcement of his decision on the Newbury bypass.

Dr. Mawhinney: I will announce my decision after I have had an opportunity to consider carefully the Highways Agency's answer to the questions I have posed.

Donaldson Inquiry (MV Braer)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, when he hopes to publish the Government's response to Lord Donaldson's inquiry recommendations set up after the Braer disaster.

Dr. Mawhinney: Shortly.

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. Norris: Intake to the Department's administrative and specialist fast stream for 1991 and 1992 are contained in the Civil Service Commissioners' report for both years. For 1993 the split was six men and three women; and for 1994, seven men and five women.

Blackwall Tunnel

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the need to undertake remedial works on the Blackwall tunnel; and what estimate he has made of the likely length of time for such works if deemed necessary.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Bob Dunn, dated 27 February 1995:

I refer to your request in the House for information on the need for remedial works at Blackwall Tunnel. This is a trunk road operational matter and your request has therefore been referred to the Highways Agency.

I imagine that your enquiry is a result of recent press reports about subsidence caused during the excavation of a pilot heading for the Jubilee Line Extension (JLE) at Blackwall Tunnel in Greenwich. These gave the impression that the problem was far worse than was the case. There has been no damage to the tunnels and no remedial works are required beyond placing grout and concrete in and around the pilot heading. The incident in question was in any case under the southbound tunnel exit ramp, not under the tunnels.

You may be interested to know that the normal maintenance regime provides for routine work such as cleaning, removal of debris, changing of light bulbs etc. to be carried out in the northbound tunnel during regular Tuesday night closures. Such work in the southbound tunnel takes place under lane closures that are implemented on two nights every week. Further, there are full closures of the southbound tunnel on six Saturdays nights per year—three in March and three in November for more extensive cleaning works.

As you know major refurbishment of the northbound Blackwall Tunnel was completed as recently as 1992 at a cost in excess of £20 million.

A recent study of the southbound tunnel has shown that after being in operation for 27 years the cladding and the ventilation system are in need of refurbishment/replacement. These works will take about eighteen months to complete, and are planned to start in 1996/97. Suitable advance publicity will be arranged closer to the start of works.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Wheelclamping

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who will be allowed to wheelclamp unlicensed vehicles on his behalf; whether private contractors or local authorities will be allowed to wheelclamp vehicles; whether the authority to wheelclamp unlicensed vehicles will remain following the introduction of continuous liability; and what level of remuneration will be set for

the wheelclamping companies for each vehicle that is wheelclamped.

Mr. Norris: The scheme for wheelclamping unlicensed vehicles is being developed in consultation with the police and local authorities. A pilot will take place in London later this year. The London boroughs now have responsibility for much of the parking enforcement in the capital, which includes responsibility for vehicle clamping and removal. Details of the scheme, including levels of remuneration for contractors, have yet to be agreed upon. Decisions on the use of wheelclamping under continuous licensing will be based on its effectiveness in tackling evasion under the current system.

Kidsgrove Station

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek assurances from Railtrack to keep open the booking office at Kidsgrove station beyond October 1995.

Mr. Watts: I understand that Regional Railways Central has no plans to close this booking office.

Track Access Grants

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many track access grants to reduce Railtrack charges have been made since the announcement of this facility.

Mr. Watts: Ten.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 28 February 1995

TREASURY

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Nelson: None.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 22 February, *Official Report*, column *195*, how many "Dear Accounting officer" letters he has sent to non-departmental bodies giving guidance on the schedule E classification and tax status of non-executive board members; on what date they were sent; and what their principal elements were.

Sir George Young: None. Where necessary, guidance on these matters is provided on an individual case by case by the Inland Revenue.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the law on VAT group registration is to be changed, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have asked Customs and Excise to review the current provisions on VAT group registration and report to me by the early summer with a view to including any necessary changes in next year's Finance Bill. However, following a recent VAT tribunal decision, I have decided to propose some changes in the law immediately to prevent continuing tax losses by manipulation of the current provisions for tax avoidance purposes. The new clause will be tabled in the course of this year's Finance Bill. The clause, if approved, will have effect as from midnight tonight.

Customs and Excise will be issuing a press notice, together with a draft of the clause, today. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will ensure the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 apply to all regulations for which his Department is responsible, past, present and future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* I refer to the reply given on 27 February by the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Ashford Great Park

Mr. Cousins: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what losses were sustained by the Commissioners over the Ashford Great Park programme; and what charge exists, or legal action has been taken by them against the European Land group of companies, or family trusts or interests of Mr. James Cookson and his successors.

Mr. Alison: Companies within the European land group and controlled by the late Mr. James Cookson were one of the commissioners' partners in the Ashford Great Park project, but they went into receivership in 1992. Shortly afterwards the Commissioners exercised their legal charge over the land purchased for the project in order to offset the loans owed to the Commissioners by their partners. No further action is being taken against European Land or its subsidiaries or the family interests of Mr. Cookson following his death. All of the land purchased for the project now belongs to the Commissioners and, for the present, this land has been written down to its value at an agricultural estate but with the benefit of the local plan allocation for redevelopment at some stage in the future. The cost of the Commissioners' investment in the partnership amounted to £80 million.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Disabled Employees

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the percentage of disabled people directly employed by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, (Mr. McNamara) on 5 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *251*.

Parliamentary Pension Fund

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has at any time met the chairman and/or members of the senior salaries review body to discuss its current review of the parliamentary contributory pension fund.

Mr. Newton: I have had no such meetings.

TRANSPORT

Office of Passenger Rail Franchising

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what will be the continuing sum available for the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising over the next three financial years for the support of passenger services both franchise and those operated by British Rail.

Mr. Watts: An estimated £1,800 million of grant to support passenger services will be provided in 1995–96

of which £1,610 million will be paid by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising to British Rail and franchisees, and £190 million will be paid by the Department of Transport to passenger transport authorities.

Estimates of the level of grant support for later years are not yet available.

Furness Bridge (Rudder Assembly)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received in relation to the rudder assembly of the Furness Bridge; what recent assessment he has made of rudder assemblies in other ships in the Derbyshire class; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Marine Safety Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mrs. Joan Walley, dated 28 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the rudder assembly of the Furness Bridge and other ships in the Derbyshire class.

Two representations have been received in relation to the rudder assembly of the Furness Bridge. I am not aware of any recent assessments of rudder assemblies of other ships in the Derbyshire class.

Heavy Lorries (Track Costs)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if delays to motorists arising from structural maintenance of the road network are included in the assessment of the track costs of heavy lorries.

Mr. Watts: Track costs are restricted to the provision and maintenance of the track, and do not include delay costs.

Buses (Pollution)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will issue guidelines to London bus operators to direct their drivers to switch off their engines when a bus is parked; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: This is a matter for London Transport Buses.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Dr. Mawhinney: No items of correspondence were received by Ministers in the Department of Transport from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Suriname

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will include in the United Kingdom overseas aid programme provision for financial assistance to the Government of Suriname for the purpose of strengthening the Surinamese forest management service.

Mr. Baldry: We provide substantial assistance in promoting sustainable forest management to a number of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, Honduras and Guyana, but we have no plans to introduce a bilateral aid programme to Suriname.

Aid Distribution

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the Overseas Development Administration's aid to developing countries goes to the poorest countries.

Mr. Baldry: In 1993–94, 69 per cent. of ODA's aid to developing countries which can be attributed to individual country programmes went to the poorest countries.

The change-over the figure of 80 per cent. previously given for the proportion of aid going to the poorest countries in 1992–93 is explained by the following factors:

(i) technical changes in the definition used for aid to the poorest including:

a reclassification of some emergency aid provided through multilateral agencies from multilateral to bilateral aid, reflecting the fact that the aid is made available for countries that ODA specifies and is thus bilateral is character. Since many of the recipients for instance, in the former Yugoslavia—are not among the poorest countries, this has the effect of reducing bilateral aid to the poorest. This accounts for a change of over two percentage points;

a change in the OECD definition of income groups, lowering the threshold for low income countries from an annual income per head of $765 to $675. This accounts for a change of two percentage points;

(ii) some shift of aid expenditure from low income countries to lower middle income countries accounting for the remaining change of over six percentage points. This includes emergency aid in Bosnia and Angola, neither of which are classified by the OECD as low income countries.

Brazil

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that timber imports from Brazil to the United Kingdom do not come from indigenous and biological reserves.

Mr. Baldry: It is the Brazilian Government's responsibility to ensure that timber extraction in Brazil is undertaken legally. The Brazilian Government are aware of our concern that logging in the Amazon should be legal and sustainable.

Our embassy in Brasilia has helped arrange discussions between representatives of United Kingdom timber importers and interested bodies in Brazil aimed at ensuring that all mahogany imported from Brazil comes from legal sources.

Through our aid programme we aim to help strengthen forest policies and management in Brazil.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring he is carrying out in respect of the World Bank funded Carajas project in Brazil; and what are his conclusions in relation to evidence of illegal logging and mining activities in indigenous people's territories.

Mr. Baldry: The World Bank loan for the Carajas iron ore project and associated railway was approved in 1982 and closed in 1987. We have no recent information about logging and mining activities in the region.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Attorney General what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

The Attorney-General: None.

ENVIRONMENT

Climate Change

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which elements of the carbon dioxide emission reduction programme outlined in "Climate Change: the UK Programme" are *(a)* delivering and *(b)* now expected to deliver greater savings than were initially expected.

Mr. Atkins: We are currently reviewing the contributions expected from the measures in our climate change programme in the light of recent developments, taking account of the revised energy projections that the Department of Trade and Industry is working on. I shall make an announcement to the House shortly.

Departmental Property

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many dwellings owned by each Government Department lay vacant in each year since 1979; and what proportion of each Department's total housing stock this represented in each case.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Comprehensive data on Government Department vacant dwellings are not available. The table sets out the readily available estimates of vacants, including those in need of refurbishment or awaiting sale or demolition, for the Departments with the largest numbers of dwellings. In response to the report of the task force on Government Departments' empty homes, the Government have undertaken to monitor empty residential properties owned by Departments and to set annual targets for reducing vacants; the targets for 1994–95 were announced on 30 November last year.

	1989	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Number of vacants						
Ministry of Defence	16,286	13,991	11,975	11,180	10,973	11,313
Department of Health[1]	15,911	n/a	14,729	n/a	1,800	n/a
Home Office[2]	3,241	2,382	1,641	1,406	1,672	n/a
Scottish Office	502	319	310	246	239	158
Department of Transport	n/a	n/a	584	483	788	887
Welsh Office[3]	85	n/a	n/a	n/a	40	43
Percentage of housing stock vacant						
Ministry of Defence	21	18	16	15	15	16
Department of Health[1]	18	n/a	15	n/a	12	n/a
Home Office[2]	16	14	10	9	12	n/a
Scottish Office	23	16	16	15	14	10
Department of Transport	n/a	n/a	22	16	22	23
Welsh Office[3]	19	n/a	n/a	n/a	17	18

[1] Includes NHS. The 1989 and 1991 figures include empty bed-spaces in hostels.
[2] Includes the Prison Service and Metropolitan and provincial police authorities.
[3] Excludes dwellings awaiting demolition or conversion to non-residential use.
n/a = Not available.

Housing, Westminster

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many houses were built in each of the wards of the borough of Westminster in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is not held centrally by the Department.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money was spent on the provision of disabled facilities in each of the wards within the borough of Westminster in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information is not available centrally.

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money was spent in each of the wards within the borough of Westminster for council house refurbishment for *(a)* facade improvements, *(b)* stone cleaning, *(c)* tree planting and *(d)* improving pavements in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The information requested is not held centrally in this detail.

Westminster City Council

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the leader of Westminster city council to discuss the district auditor's interim report.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: No such meeting has taken place. This is not a matter for the Government, but for the local authority and its appointed auditor.

Councillors and Officers (Penalties)

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the

adequacy of the level of penalties that can be imposed on councillors and officers who do not comply with district auditors' demands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Any person who, without reasonable excuse, fails to comply with any requirement of an auditor under sections 16(1) and 16(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 is liable on summary conviction to a fine of up to £200 and to an additional fine of £20 for each day on which the offence continues after conviction. I am not aware of any evidence that this is an inadequate penalty.

Tree Preservation Orders

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, how many prosecutions were carried out in respect of breaches of tree preservation orders in each of the last five years; and what assessment he had made as to the extent to which this mechanism is effective.

Sir Paul Beresford: Information on the numbers of prosecutions in respect of breaches of tree preservation orders is not collected centrally. The effectiveness of this mechanism was considered as part of a wide-ranging review of tree preservation policies and legislation. The outcome, following public consultation, was announced by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside in July last year. A number of changes are proposed to ensure that local authorities have adequate powers to bring effective action against abusers of the system. A paper setting out the Government's conclusions in more detail was placed in the Library of the House.

House Building Requirements

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the house building requirements imposed by his Department in each county authority for the period 1991 to 2006 and *(b)* the environmental constraints which have affected the requirement downwards; what considerations determine the house building requirement (i) nationally and (ii) regionally; and what assessments he makes of the infrastructure required to support such a building requirement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The proposed provision of additional housing for each county in England is set out in "Regional and Strategic Planning Guidance". The figures for each county are shown in the table.

National population projections are provided by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in consultation with local authorities. The Department of the Environment produces household projections for counties, and the metropolitan boroughs, which are adjusted to be consistent with national totals. The proposed regional dwelling provision is based on the household projections, and take into account factors such as the need for house replacement, vacancy rates, second homes, and tied accommodation.

Regional conferences of local authorities are consulted on the distribution of the regional figures. In considering the figures they are required to take national planning and environmental policies into account, as well as local circumstances and constraints.

The figures in regional planning guidance are then tested through the structure plan process, and subject to scrutiny through an examination in public. This enables the figures to be refined in the light of local circumstances.

Infrastructure requirements should be considered at the regional, county, and local level according to the size and strategic nature of proposed developments.

Proposed regional level dwelling provision for counties in England
(Figures are annual averages for the period stated, and are taken from "Regional or Strategic Planning Guidance" unless otherwise stated.)

	Number
East Midlands region—1991 to 2011	
Derbyshire	3,250
Leicestershire	3,500
Lincolnshire	3,400
Northamptonshire	3,500
Nottinghamshire	3,250
Eastern region—1986 to 2006	
Cambridgeshire	3,700
Norfolk	3,450
Suffolk	3,100
Northern region—1991 to 2006	
Cleveland	933
Durham	1,400
Northumberland[1]	1,033
Tyne and Wear Metropolitan area SPG[1]	2,315
South East region—1991 to 2006	
Bedfordshire	2,467
Berkshire	2,667
Buckinghamshire	3,267
East Sussex	2,333
Essex	5,333
Hampshire	6,133
Hertfordshire	3,333
Isle of Wight	533
Kent	5,800
Oxfordshire	2,467
Surrey	2,400
West Sussex	2,933
London Metropolitan area	1,155
South West region—1991 to 2011	
Avon	2,950
Cornwall	2,250
Devon	4,950
Dorset	3,150
Gloucester	2,650
Somerset	2,500
Wiltshire	3,450
West Midlands region 1991–2011 (consultation draft figures)	
Hereford and Worcester	2,500
Shropshire	2,150
Staffordshire	2,850
Warwickshire	1,750
West Midlands (Metropolitan area)	5,000
Yorkshire and Humberside region 1991–2006 (consultation draft figures)	
Humberside	3,500
North Yorkshire	3,000
South Yorkshire (Metropolitan area)	3,400
West Yorkshire (Metropolitan area)	6,700

	Number
North West region (draft RPG forthcoming—figures are for time scales as detailed)	
Cheshire structure plan (1986–2001)	3,933
Cumbria structure plan (1981–1996)	1,573
Further proposed modifications (1991–2006)	1,833
Lancashire structure plan (1986–1996)	4,120
Deposit replacement plan (1991–2006)	4,403
Merseyside SPG, 1986–2001 (Metropolitan area)	3,303
Greater Manchester SPG, 1986 to 2001 (Metropolitan area)	4,000

[1] 1988 to 2001

(1) Includes NHS. The 1989 and 1991 figures include empty bed-spaces in hostels.

(2) Includes the Prison Service and Metropolitan and provincial police authorities.

(3) Excludes dwellings awaiting demolition or conversion to non-residential use.

NCM Ltd.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations there have been with the trustees of the Marquis of Bute's estate regarding the permission granted for three years from 1 January 1992 to January 1995, for NCM Ltd. to remain co-located with his Department at Crown buildings, Cathays park; on what date and until what date an extension to the permission was granted; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford *[holding answer 23 February 1995]*: The permission given on behalf of the Bute estate for NCM Ltd. to occupy Crown buildings, Cathays park, contrary to a restrictive covenant within the deeds for the premises, has been excited.

The liquidator of Mountjoy Ltd., successors in title to all the Cardiff property formerly owned by the Marques of Bute, consented by letter dated 31 January 1995 to waive the restrictive covenant for a period of six months from the date of that letter.

Negotiations of a commercial nature are continuing between my Department and NCM Ltd. It is therefore not appropriate for any statement to be made.

Objective 1 Funding

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps her Majesty's Government are taking to monitor access and take-up of objective 1 funds by small and medium enterprises and, in particular Department of Trade and Industry co-financed schemes.

Mr. Curry *[holding answer 20 February 1995]*: Monitoring of objective 1 funds on Merseyside will be undertaken by the Government office for Merseyside for European regional development fund including DTI co-financed schemes, the Employment Department for European Structural Fund and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund. The Merseyside single programme document sets clear targets for the assistance of SMEs through the programme and progress towards these targets will form part of the monitoring process.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, how much is being spent in 1994–95 under the single regeneration budget in London in *(a)* Greater London *(b)* metropolitan districts and *(c)* elsewhere; what are the figures for each year since the establishment of the single regeneration budget; and how much is planned to be spent in (i) 1995–96 and (ii) 1996–62.

Mr. Robert B. Jones *[holding answer 21 February 1995]*: The single regeneration budget came into operation in April 1994. Outturn expenditure in 1994–95 on the contributing programmes within the SRB is expected to be:

	£ million
a) Greater London	373.7
b) Metropolitan districts	639.5
c) elsewhere	254.5
Total	1,267.7

These figures exclude expenditure by English Partnerships, whose budget has not been regionally allocated. Total expenditure may also be higher in areas where contributing programmes make use of receipts or contributions from local authorities or the private sector.

Planned SRB expenditure, including English Partnerships, in future years is £1,329.0 million in 1995–96 and £1,324.2 million in 1996–97. As allocations to specific areas are not finalised and new SRB partnerships will, in some cases, operate across local authority areas, a breakdown of this planned expenditure by the areas sought is not available.

Ethnic Minorities

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the answer of 21 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *149*, regarding additional section 11 funding, if he will give the amounts of section 11 funding ring-fenced within the single regeneration budget, in November 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker *[holding answer 27 February 1995]*: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. and learned Friend has given today to a question by the hon. Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn).

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Gummer: None.

EC Directives

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those directives from the European Union/Community since 1990 which have had an effect on local government, stating for each *(a)* the manner in which the directive has been absorbed into United Kingdom law, *(b)* the means of enforcing the directive and *(c)* the extra resources made available to local authorities to meet those consequences, differentiating between provision by way of standard spending assessments, annual capital guidelines and basic credit approvals.

Mr. Gummer: I have today placed in the Library a table containing information about directives from the European Community which have affected local government, and the legislation which makes provision for their enforcement in national law. The European Union recognises that most of the activities of local councils are best regulated by local and national Government. However, many environmental issues can be addressed effectively only in the context of the European Union and the UK plays its proper part at the heart of the Union seeking to ensure that directives are good for Britain and good for Europe. The annual local government finance settlement takes full account of the cost to local authorities of all new burdens, including those arising from the European Community. Basic credit approvals issued to each authority are calculated by reference to annual capital guidelines; these are assessments of the authority's need to spend and are determined by the Government Department with the policy responsibility for each service.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Television Without Frontiers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list the research projects undertaken in his Department to ascertain the impact of quotas for European work in the television without frontiers directive, and its effect on strengthening the European audio-visual industries ability to produce and distribute television programmes.

Mr. Dorrell: My Department has not undertaken any research projects into the effect of the European programme requirements in articles 4 and 5 of the television without frontiers directive. The hon. Gentleman may, however, be interested in a study conducted by London Economics, "The Economic Impact of Television Quotas in the European Union", published in 1994, which concluded that quotas were an ineffective means of encouraging growth in the production sector and might actually have a negative effect.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what was the outcome of his meeting in Bordeaux regarding quotas; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects to *(a)* receive an official text from the Commission and *(b)* the House to receive a document on television without frontiers from the European Union.

Mr. Dorrell: The informal meeting of European Union Culture and Audio-visual Ministers in Bordeaux on 13 to 14 February discussed a number of issues of audio-visual policy, among which was the European Commission's review of the implementation by member states of the television without frontiers directive. There was a spirited debate on the European programme requirements of the directive's articles 4 and 5, which revealed a large measure of agreement against tightening the existing quota regime.

In the light of this discussion, the Commission has undertaken to try to bring forward proposals for a revised directive before the end of March.

Any proposals from the European Commission for revision of the directive will be deposited for parliamentary scrutiny in accordance with the usual procedures.

West Cumbria

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he is taking to promote west Cumbria as a destination for leisure travel.

Mr. Dorrell: Grant in aid to the English tourist board supports a range of development and marketing programmes which benefit tourism in all parts of England. Many of these are delivered by the regional tourist boards, including the Cumbria tourist board, which receive substantial funding from the ETB. The CTB will receive a block grant of £342,000 in the current financial year, and can also bid for support for specific projects from the ETB's £2.25 million tourism development fund.

Tourism in west Cumbria also benefits from the overseas activities of the British Tourist Authority. The CTB is now part of the BTA's marketing consortium "England's North Country" which provides a higher profile for the area in overseas markets.

National Lottery

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if applications for improvements to public libraries are eligible from the national lottery fund.

Mr. Dorrell: The National Heritage memorial fund's guidelines to applicants for lottery funds state that grants can be made to library buildings which are of recognised importance to the heritage. Copies of these guidelines are available in the Library of the House. The Arts Council of England has stated that it can make grants out of lottery funds for the enhancement of library facilities through the provision of space for activities such as readings, literary events, exhibitions, concerts and performances.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what directives he has issued to the Director General of the National Lottery in pursuit of the policy of Her Majesty's Government not to stimulate the demand for gambling.

Mr. Dorrell: Under section 11 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, my predecessor as Secretary of State for National Heritage issued a number of directions to the Director General of the National Lottery. These include a direction which requires the director general to exercise his functions under sections 5 and 6 of the Act in such a way as to ensure that no licence is granted which authorises the promotion of any lottery which in his opinion encourages excessive participation or does not have sufficient controls to prevent the participation of young people under the age of 16. A complete set of the directions issued to the director general are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to require the Camelot Group plc to publish regularly its profitability derived from the operation of the national lottery.

Mr. Dorrell: I have no plans to impose further reporting requirements on Camelot Group plc in addition to those to which it is already subject under the Companies Acts.

Football Matches

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what discussions he has held with football clubs and the Football Association in the aftermath of the recent Dublin riot, about the involvement of extremist political organisations in crowds at football matches.

Mr. Sproat: None. Such discussions would be for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary or the police.

Media II Programme

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when Her Majesty's Government expect to receive notification of the EU's media II programme; and what parliamentary proceedings it will be subject to.

Mr. Dorrell: We have yet to receive the European Commission's formal proposal, although we have seen an informal draft. According to the current timetable, we would expect to receive the final proposal by 22 March. Normal parliamentary scrutiny arrangements would apply.

European Audio-visual Policy

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is the timetable for further public meeting proceedings on EC document 6398/94.

Mr. Dorrell: The European Commission's Green Paper on European Audio-visual policy raised wide-ranging issues about the future of the European programme production industry and the measures which member states and the European Community should take to promote and strengthen it.

In the light of the response to the document, and of the audio-visual conference held in Brussels on 30 June to 1 July, the Commission on 8 February adopted a proposal for a new programme, media II, to replace the existing EC media programme, and this has now been communicated to the Council. Discussions between member states on the proposal, which will be deposited for parliamentary scrutiny in the usual way, have now begun in an ad hoc Council working group. I cannot say when they will be completed. We expect the Commission to bring forward further proposals arising from the Green Paper in due course.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the EU's media II programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We have yet to receive the Commission's formal proposal. Although we broadly support the approach set out in an informal text, for a more focused programme, which concentrates resources on training, development and distribution, we have yet to agree details of how media II would be implemented.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of those accepted for the fast stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the Civil Service Commissioners Report for 1991 and 1992 for the figures requested. The figures for 1993 and 1994 are not published in the form requested. For the years 1993 and 1994, the percentage of women recruited into the Department's fast stream in the administration, legal statistician and economist groups was 50 per cent. and 58 per cent. respectively. The European fast stream, for whom the Cabinet Office is responsible, is excluded.

Standards for Livestock Vehicles

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the draft proposal for the EC directive on standards for livestock vehicles.

Mrs. Browning: The Commission draft proposal was circulated widely, on 8 February, to interested organisations and individuals for their comments. The Commission working group has had one meeting so far and further meetings are expected before it is discussed in the Council.

Quality Beef Promotion Scheme

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he is making to the European Commission to obtain additional funds from the European quality beef promotion scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: The Government are making representations to the European Commission to improve the suitability of the European quality beef promotion scheme to the UK market. However, we are not seeking an increase in the overall funds available for the scheme in the European Union. This is because it is not clear that in the UK at least, the scheme is currently achieving its aim of increasing beef consumption.

Live Animal Transport

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he had with British protesters objecting to the humane transport and export of animals in Brussels on the occasion of the Agriculture Council meeting in Brussels on 20 February, and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: My right hon. Friend the Minister and I met with animal welfare organisations in advance of the Agriculture Council on 16 February to discuss the prospects for discussions on animal welfare issues. My right hon. Friend talked to protesters demonstrating outside the Council building in Brussels on 20 February, and welcomed their presence as a useful contribution to raising public awareness of animal welfare issues in other member states. He also received a petition organised by

the RSPCA, which had been signed by a large number of members of the public from several EU member states.

Genetically Modified Food

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what safeguards are in place to regulate the sale to the public of genetically modified food.

Mrs. Browning: The sale of food containing genetically modified organisms is controlled under the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992, as amended. The safety of foods produced using genetic modification is assessed by the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes whose approach to safety assessment is held in high esteem worldwide. The Food Advisory Committee considers the labelling of genetically modified food on a case-by-case basis.

Ochratoxin A

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the present view of the safe limit for consumption of ochratoxin A; and what plans he has to revise the limit.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* There are at present no legislative limits for ochratoxin A in foods. The European Commission has initiated negotiations to set regulatory limits for ochratoxin A in some foodstuffs. The Department of Health's Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment has recommended that levels of ochratoxin A should be reduced to the lowest technologically achievable. The European Commission's Scientific Committee for Food has recently concluded

"that an acceptable safe level of daily exposure of ochratoxin A would fall in the range of a few nanograms per kilogram body weight per day".

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research work he has undertaken on the alleged connection between ochratoxin A in coffee and cases of kidney cancer.

Mrs. Browning *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* It is accepted that ochratoxin A is a genotoxic carcinogen and causes kidney cancer. The mycotoxin that produces ochratoxin A occurs naturally in the environment and is an opportunistic contaminant of a variety of foodstuffs, not only coffee beans. The levels found in UK food are generally low. MAFF surveillance of ochratoxin A in coffee began in October 1994 and will be completed in late 1995. The results will be published in the "Food Safety Information Bulletin". MAFF-funded research to investigate the effects of decaffeination, roasting and brewing on levels of ochratoxin A in coffee is planned to start in April 1995. It is expected that the results from this study will be published in the scientific literature.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment Scheme

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what documentary evidence there is to show how successful has been the application of (1) policy appraisal and (2) fair treatment to the Industrial Development Board.

Mr. Ancram: Revised Government guidelines on the policy appraisal and fair treatment initiative, which came into effect in January 1994, contain provisions for an annual report. The first report is currently being prepared and will include reports on individual Departments. The Department of Economic Development's report will cover the Industrial Development Board.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to evaluate the implementation of the policy appraisal and fair treatment scheme and the targeting social need scheme; and what documentation on the results of the schemes is available.

Sir John Wheeler: Annual reports will be published on the implementation of the policy appraisal and fair treatment initiative. The first is currently being prepared. During 1994, the Department of Economic Development commissioned management consultants to undertake a review of how the objectives of targeting social need related to those of the Department and its agencies. Their report made a number of recommendations, which are currently being implemented. A summary of these recommendations will shortly be published in a DED strategy review and I will ensure that the hon. Lady receives a copy.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the contribution of *(a)* policy appraisal of fair treatment and *(b)* targeting social need to the creation of employment opportunities for women.

Mr. Ancram: The aim of the policy appraisal and fair Treatment initiative is to ensure that issues of equality and equity condition policy making and action in all spheres and at all levels of Government activity in Northern Ireland. It is not directly concerned with the creation of employment opportunities.

Targeting social need is a public expenditure priority established to ensure that resources are directed towards areas identified as socially and economically disadvantaged and that community differentials are thereby reduced. No assessment has been made of the effect of TSN specifically on employment opportunities for women.

Fair Employment Tribunal

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the average length and cost of a case dealt with by the fair employment tribunal.

Mr. Ancram: The average length of time taken to deal with a fair employment tribunal case is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The average direct cost to the fair employment tribunal of dealing with a complaint is approximately £290. The cost estimate excludes rent/rates, capital works, furniture/equipment and costs of the parties involved.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of complaints taken up by the fair employment tribunal since the implementation of the Fair Employment Act 1989 concluded in a pre-trial settlement.

Mr. Ancram: Since its formation, to 31 December 1994, 4 per cent. of the complaints made to the fair employment tribunal were conciliated by the Labour

Relations Agency or agreed between the parties and a further 43 per cent. of complaints were withdrawn by the complainants. Reasons for withdrawal are not required to be notified.

RUC

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Catholics applied to join the RUC in its recruitment in December 1994.

Sir John Wheeler: The last advertisement period for recruitment to the RUC was from 28 November 1994 to 13 January 1995. The number of applicants perceived to be from the Roman Catholic community was 512.

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to modify the system of internal discipline within the RUC.

Sir John Wheeler: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on 17 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *833*.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Sir John Wheeler: None.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 February.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister, if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 February 1995.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Prime Minister if he will consult the people of Northern Ireland on the acceptability of the draft framework document as a basis for discussion and negotiation through a referendum in the event that Unionist parties in Northern Ireland do not agree to enter into discussion and negotiation.

The Prime Minister: The proposals contained in "Framework for the Future" provide a basis for discussion, consultation and negotiation with the political parties in Northern Ireland. If agreement is reached in the negotiations, the outcome will be put to the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum.

The Government will not put proposals to the people of Northern Ireland in a referendum before there is a widespread agreement between the main political parties.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, none.

Ministerial Payroll

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Prime Minister what has been the cost of the ministerial payroll; and how many ministers it has covered in each year since 1979.

The Prime Minister: The number of salaried Members of the Government, including Whips, was 106 in May 1979 and is 108 now. The total salary bill for all Government Ministers and Whips is currently some £3.6 million per annum. Information about ministerial salary costs in earlier years is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Prime Minister if the duties of accountability set out in paragraph 27 of "Questions of Procedure" for Ministers apply in all respects to departmental agencies.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many special or political advisers to Ministers are currently employed in the civil service; in which Departments they work; and on which grades they are paid;

(2) what is the role of special advisers appointed to serve Ministers and Departments; what guidance is issued relating to the scope of such advisers to become involved in party political activity in the course of their duties; what is the salary range for such posts; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: There are currently 32 special advisers, 28 political and four expert advisers, serving Ministers in the following Departments:

Department	*Numbers* *Political*	*Expert*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	1	—
Chief Whip's Office	1	—
Defence	1	—
Education	1	—
Employment	1	—
Environment	2	2
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	2	—
Health	1	—
Home Office	2	—
Lord Privy Seal	1	—
Northern Ireland Office	1	—
Office of Public Service and Science	1	—
Prime Minister's Office	4	—
Lord President	1	—
Scottish Office	2	—
Social Security	1	—
Trade and Industry	1	2
Transport	1	—
HM Treasury	2	—
Welsh Office	1	—

Political advisers assist Ministers with that part of their work which is partly governmental and partly political, and expert advisers complement advice given to Ministers by their Departments with that of their particular professional fields. In the course of their duties, advisers are subject to the same rules of conduct as other civil servants. Special advisers are bound generally by the rules on political activity applicable to civil servants, but with specific exemptions. They may, with the approval of their Ministers, attend party functions and maintain contact with party members, and take part in policy reviews undertaken by the party. In addition, and also subject to approval by their Minister, special advisers are allowed to undertake all forms of local political activity, apart from local activities in support of national political activities.

Salaries for special advisers are negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, and are confidential. They are, however, normally paid on a special advisers' salary spine of 34 points ranging from £19,503 to £67,609. Appointments are non-pensionable, and the salary spine reflects this.

Public Sector Employees

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Prime Minister what is the total number of people employed *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly by Government-funded sources in the United Kingdom on a (i) full-time and (ii) part-time basis in each year since the introduction of (1) privatisation or denationalisation, (2) next steps agencies and (3) NHS trusts; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Information showing the number of employees in the public sector is published in the January 1995 edition of *Economic Trends*. A copy of this publication is available in the Library.

Russia (Seal Killing)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column 22, what action the Russian officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs agreed to take on the issue of seal pup slaughter.

The Prime Minister: Russian officials have taken note of British opposition to the practice of seal culling but have not agreed to take any action as a result of our representations. Embassy officials are in regular contact with the Russian ministry of foreign affairs on this subject.

Northern Region

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list by Government Department the principal aid given to the Northern region of England in each year since 1979.

The Prime Minister: The principal aid given to the area covered by the Government office for the north east—which covers Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Cleveland—since 1979 is as follows:

£ million

Year	*Department*					
	Department of Transport	*Employment Department*	*Department of Trade and Industry*	*Department of the Environment*	*Department of National Heritage*	*Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food*
Figures relate to year ending CY/FY[1]	FY	FY	CY	FY	FY	FY
1979	—	—	9.909	—	—	—
1980	n/a	n/a	14.035	184.740	1.629	n/a
1981	n/a	n/a	19.902	169.414	1.821	n/a
1982	n/a	n/a	17.597	179.524	2.248	n/a
1983	n/a	n/a	13.177	183.959	2.481	n/a
1984	n/a	n/a	13.542	167.435	2.612	n/a
1985	30.637	n/a	15.182	143.667	2.813	n/a
1986	33.845	n/a	16.243	134.979	3.483	0.013
1987	37.954	n/a	26.302	135.973	5.184	18.333
1988	51.313	n/a	41.912	145.973	5.830	16.980
1989	59.695	n/a	51.064	210.957	7.421	17.825
1990	89,581	124.2	23.694	464.622	8.783	23.501
1991	95,075	119.1	31.649	502.481	16.593	28.947
1992	91,849	129.1	33.488	520.557	16.928	31.005
1993	110,704	126.0	29.735	544.698	18.328	70.084
1994	103,094	164.7	22.781	467.967	10.697	n/a
1995	n/a	132.1	—	—	—	—

[1] FY—Financial year ending 31 March; CY—Calendar year ending 31 December.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Chessington Computer Centre

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when a decision will be made and announced regarding the privatisation of the Chessington computer centre.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: A study is currently under way to advise me on the suitability of Chessington computer centre for privatisation and how best to achieve it. An announcement will be made at the appropriate time.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which parts of the Chessington computer centre are being considered for privatisation.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The suitability of all parts of Chessington computer centre for privatisation is being considered.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster which private sector companies have expressed an interest in buying part of all of the Chessington computer centre.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: This information is commercially confidential.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, what are the criteria on which a decision will be based regarding the privatisation of the Chessington computer centre.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The key criterion will be how best to ensure that the range and quality of services provided by Chessington computer centre continue to be available and are improved.

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster who contributed to his review of the case for privatisation of the Chessington computer centre.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster announced in the House on 17 November 1994, contributions to the review were welcome from those with an interest in Chessington and its work. All contributions that were elicited are covered by an undertaking of confidentiality.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: None.

Science and Research Budget

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what was the amount in cash, in real terms, and the percentage allocated for *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* Wales of (i) the science budget and (ii) the research councils' budget in each of the last three years.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The science budget is allocated on the basis of the United Kingdom as a whole. Research councils' expenditure over the last three years, excluding overseas spend, is analysed as follows:

£ million

	England	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*	*Wales*	*Total*
1991–92					
Cash	689.3	82.6	3.7	35.6	811.2
1994–95 prices	753.3	90.3	3.9	39.0	886.5
Percentage	85.0	10.2	0.4	4.4	—
1992–93					
Cash	805.9	95.3	5.2	34.5	941.0
1994–95 prices	847.2	100.2	5.5	36.3	989.2
Percentage	85.6	10.1	0.6	3.7	—
1993–94					
Cash	887.5	109.4	6.3	33.8	1,037.0
1994–95 prices	905.2	111.6	6.4	34.5	1,057.7
Percentage	85.6	10.5	0.6	3.3	—

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Payment Policies

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how he intends to require public companies to state their payment policies in their directors' reports as announced in the White Paper on Competitiveness (Cm. 2563).

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government wish to bring about a change in business culture to encourage shorter payment times. We announced in the Competitiveness White Paper a package of measures to achieve this.

As part of this, my Department proposes that directors of public companies should state in their annual reports what their policies are towards paying their suppliers. This will provide suppliers with information about how they can expect to be treated by their major customers. At the same time, we intend to ensure that the compliance costs for public companies are not onerous.

Under the proposals, companies which follow the CBI prompt payment code or an equivalent—such as a British standard for prompt payment currently under consideration—would simply state this in their annual report and show where information about the code can be found. The DTI is also seeking views on two options for public companies that do not follow a code.

Comments are sought by 11 May 1995.

Cable Companies

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list those cable companies franchised and licensed by *(a)* Oftel and *(b)* the Independent Television Commission stating, in each case, whether the company has reached its most recent agreed milestone; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Compliance with the obligations contained in Telecommunications Act licences issued by my Department is a matter for the Director General of Telecommunications. I have therefore asked the director to write to the hon. Member with details of the 125 cable franchisees which have been licensed under both broadcasting and telecommunications legislation and whether they have complied with their most recent build obligations. In addition to these franchises, the ITC has

awarded three further franchises which have yet to be licensed under the Telecommunications Act 1984. The franchises for west Kent, Blackpool and Fylde, and southern-east Anglia have been awarded to Eurobell, SBC Cablecomms and Cambridge Cable respectively.

Debt Recovery

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what regulations currently apply to large companies when dealing with small businesses in relation to debt recovery; and what penalties he is considering introducing for large companies if they default on payments to small businesses.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Recovery of debt is a matter on which a number of statutory provisions and rules of common law impinge, both generally and in relation to specific circumstances and sectors. Not all of these are the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry.

In the White Paper on Competitiveness, (Cm 2563), in May 1994 the Government announced that they would re-examine the case for legislation for a statutory right to interest in two years if there has been no significant improvement in payment performance.

Palestine National Authority

Mr. Duncan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what initiatives his Department has undertaken to promote United Kingdom business in the Palestine National Authority.

Mr. Needham: We have sponsored a number of inward visits to the UK of senior Palestinians involved in areas such as water, housing and the medical sector. Sir Derek Hornby, chairman of the British Overseas Trade Board, took a group of business men with him when he visited the occupied territories last October and discussions were held with several groups of Palestinian business men as well as with the Palestinian authorities. We look forward to further enhancing these ties as a result of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's forthcoming visit, where he will be accompanied by me and by a group of leading business people.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much Export Credits Guarantee Department cover is available for projects in the Palestine National Authority.

Mr. Needham: No cover is currently available, although the situation is under review.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many projects financed by the Japanese funds have been won by United Kingdom companies in the Palestine National Authority.

Mr. Needham: We are not aware that any UK firms have secured such contracts.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Palestine National Authority to discuss trade matters of mutual interest.

Mr. Needham: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has no immediate plans to meet Chairman Arafat. However, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I, accompanied by a delegation of senior business men, will be meeting him in Gaza to discuss trade matters on 14 March. I last met Mr. Arafat in Tunis in March 1994.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how much Export Credits Guarantee Department cover has been already allocated to projects in the Palestine National Authority.

Mr. Needham: None.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions he has had with European Union Partners to promote European Union partner countries' business with the Palestine National Authority.

Mr. Needham: None.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his estimate of the value of existing United Kingdom trade activity with the Palestine National Authority.

Mr. Needham: No separate trade statistics exist for the occupied territories so it is not possible to make a realistic estimate of the level of trade activity.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations he has received from United Kingdom companies seeking assistance for business in or with the Palestine National Authority.

Mr. Needham: We have a continuing dialogue with a wide range of companies interested in this market.

Employment of Children

Mrs. Golding: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has for making offences relating to employment of children grounds for disqualification as a company director.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986 contains a provision, in section 2, for the disqualification of a person who has been convicted of an indictable offence in connection with the management of a company, which would include matters relating to employment. It also provides, in section 6, for the disqualification of a person who has been a director of an insolvent company and whose conduct makes him unfit to be concerned in the management of a company.

It would be for the appropriate court to determine whether the circumstances fell within either of the provisions outlined above, and whether a disqualification order should be made. In the case of section 6, the court would have regard to the totality of unfit conduct of which the offence could form part.

There are no plans to extend section 2 of the CDDA to cover summary offences.

Post Office

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Post Office complex buildings in Oldfield lane, Greenford, was sold; to whom and for what purposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Page: Matters relating to the day-to-day running of the Post Office business, such as the sale of Post Office buildings, are the responsibility of Post Office management. However, I understand that the buildings concerned have not yet been sold.

British Steel

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage of the United Kingdom steel crude industry and the engineering steel industry is under the

control of British Steel following the British Steel purchase of GKN's interest in United Engineering Steels.

Mr. Page: Based on tonnage output, British Steel produced approximately 75 per cent. of all UK crude steel produced last year. British Steel and UES together, based on last year's figures, would increase the percentage to approximately 82.5 per cent. with a similar figure for UK engineering steel production. However, the situation is fluid as output this year is increasing at present around 3 to 4 per cent.

Steel Imports

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the tonnage in tonnes of steel imported into the United Kingdom in each year since 1990 from *(a)* Germany, *(b)* Italy, *(c)* France, *(d)* Spain, *(e)* the former USSR, *(f)* Poland, *(g)* the Czech Republic/Slovakia and *(h)* the USA; and what was the percentage of total imports from each country.

Mr. Page: The information is in the table.

UK imports of steel[1]

000 tonnes

	1990	*per cent. of total*	*1991*	*per cent. of total*	*1992*	*per cent. of total*	*1993*	*per cent. of total*
Germany	1,306	24.1	1,719	30.8	1,490	27.3	1,342	27.3
Italy	264	4.9	275	4.9	303	5.5	306	6.2
France	556	10.3	779	14.0	795	14.5	673	13.7
Spain	396	7.3	391	7.0	406	7.4	340	6.9
Former USSR	14	0.3	10	0.2	62	1.1	90	1.8
Poland	75	1.4	67	1.2	67	1.2	52	1.1
Czech Republic and Slovakia	38	0.7	25	0.4	62	1.1	50	1.0
USA	31	0.6	53	1.0	58	1.1	43	0.9
Other	2,731	50.5	2,257	40.5	2,222	40.7	2,022	41.1
World total	5,411	100	5,576	100	5,465	100	4,917	100

Source:
Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.
Note:
[1] Products of the steel industry in the Standard Industrial Classification (1980), Groups 221, 222 and 223.

Manufactures (Import Penetration)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he is now able to publish firm figures for import penetration of the United Kingdom market for manufactures in 1993; and if he will publish *(a)* a table showing for 1988 and 1992 his best estimate of the sales value and volume of United Kingdom output of manufactures less food, drink and tobacco together with the value and volume of imports and exports of such manufactures and *(b)* a table showing the corresponding figures for manufactures including food, drink and tobacco.

Mr. Needham: Information for 1993 is expected to be published by the Central Statistical Office at the end of April 1995. The available information for 1988 is published in Central Statistical Office Business Monitor MQ12, available in the Library of the House. Figures for 1992 are not available.

Deregulation Orders

Mr. Steen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what deregulation orders the Government propose to bring forward in the next three months.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: The Government intend to bring forward a number of proposals under the deregulation order-making power.

The Government agreed to a recommendation of the Procedure Committee that the new Deregulation Committee should be allowed 28 days before any orders were proposed.

The first orders are likely to include some of those measures identified as candidates for the order-making power in "Cutting Red Tape", published in January 1994. Copies of that publication have been placed in the Library of the House.

British Coal

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how British Coal's commitments under the Moynihan agreement will be carried out after British Coal is wound up; and what finance has been made available to meet these commitments.

Mr. Page: It is too soon to say when British Coal will be dissolved or what arrangements might be appropriate for the discharge of any obligations then outstanding. The financing of British Coal's specific obligations is a matter for the corporation, within the overall funding made available.

Hydrates

Mr. David Porter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what assessment he makes of the quantities of hydrates contained in ocean sediments around the waters of the United Kingdom which could be commercially exploited to produce fuel; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what technological advice and financial support his Department is preparing to give to companies active in the North sea to assist them to explore for hydrates which can be turned into fuel; and if he will make a statement;

Mr. Page *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The Department of Trade and Industry, and its predecessor the Department of Energy, has funded research into the systematic mapping of the UK continental shelf over the last three decades ending in the early 1990s. No evidence was found to indicate the presence of hydrates. Further research is under way but not funded by the DTI.

Mr. Edmund Sykes

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when Ministers or officials of his Department last met Mr. Edmund Sykes.

Mr. Ian Taylor *[holding answer 24 February 1995]:* It is not possible to answer this question on the information provided.

HEALTH

Patients Charter

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will introduce into the patients charter a standard for the maximum delay for *(a)* the assessment and *(b)* the treatment of children with speech defects.

Mr. Malone: The patients charter already sets standards for maximum waiting times for in-patient treatment and out-patient treatment offered by hospital consultants. The national health service executive encourages the setting of challenging targets for other non-consultant out-patient clinics.

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which her Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. Sackville: The information requested for 1991 and 1992 is published in the Civil Service Commissioner's report for the relevant year, copies of which are available in the Library.

Seven out of 14 of those accepted for entry into the fast stream in 1993 were women, compared to one out of six in 1994.

Hospital and Community Health Services

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what considerations underlay the allocation of 75 per cent. rather than 100 per cent. of funds to health and community health service under the new York formula; and how the 25 per cent. of funds not allocated by the new York formula will be allocated to health and community health services;

(2) if she will list for a typical health authority the effect of funding by head of population (i) under the present formula, (ii) under the 75 per cent. York formula and (iii) under a 100 per cent. York formula.

Mr. Sackville: There is no "York formula". The consultants from York university were contracted to undertake an analysis of hospital utilisation but it was not part of their remit to produce an allocations formula.

The modified weighted capitation formula—announced in October 1994—is applied to 100 per cent. of hospital and community health services expenditure.

It is not therefore possible to calculate hypothetical targets on the basis sought.

Patients

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are currently treated in the NHS; and what was the figure in 1979.

Mr. Sackville: Information is not available centrally in the precise form requested. The available information is shown in the table:

General and acute specialties

thousands

	Out-Patients first attendances	*Hospital admissions*
1979	6,771	[1]4,993 discharges and deaths
1993–94	8,832	8,205 finished consultant episodes

Note:
[1] Recording of in-patient activity changed in 1988–89 following a review of Health Services Information. As a result in-patient figures prior to 1988–89 are not directly comparable with later years.
Sources:
1979, SH3 returns; 1993–94, KH09 and KP70 returns.

Kawasaki's Disease

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what advice is issued to general practitioners about the diagnosis and treatment of Kawasaki's disease; and if she will ensure that all general practitioners in the country receive information at least as comprehensive as that being issued to Birmingham general practitioners by local consultants in communicable disease control;

(2) what are the most recent figures on the incidence of Kawasaki's disease in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* the west midlands region.

Mr. Sackville: Information on the diagnosis and treatment of Kawasaki's disease is available to general practitioners in medical journals. The advice from the Birmingham consultants is helpful and we shall consider whether similar information on this uncommon disease should be issued centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 13 July 1994 at column *602* for the most recent figures available on the incidence of Kawasaki's disease.

Residential Homes (Devon)

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment she has made of whether sufficient weight is given to medical opinion as distinct from advice

from social services advisers, when placements are made in residential homes under the care in the community policy in Devon.

Mr. Bowis: Local social services departments are responsible for assessing and deciding with users and carers how the needs of local people should be met, but I have made it clear that there should be an input from doctors or nurses, when appropriate, in continuing care assessment procedures.

Dental Services

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the current shortfall in funding for NHS dental treatment in Whitehaven, Cumbria; and what is her policy for remedying it.

Mr. Malone: Expenditure on the hospital and community dental services in any area is a matter for local purchasers to decide. Expenditure on the general dental services in an area depends upon the number of treatments provided under the national health service by local general dental practitioners, all of whom are independent contractors. Cumbria family health services authority is able to help patients find a national health service dentist.

Birth Registration

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will bring forward regulations to allow a mother, when registering birth, the option of requiring her address to be confidential.

Mr. Sackville: The information to be entered in a register of births is prescribed by regulations. This includes the mother's address. A birth certificate is a certified true copy of the entry in the register and it is not therefore possible to omit from the certificate information contained in the register. We have no plans to change statutory requirements.

Population Estimates

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the number of the population who will in the years 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014, be in the age cohorts 60 to 64, 65 to 69, 70 to 74, 75 to 79, 80 to 84, 85 to 89, and 90 years and over.

Mr. Sackville: The information, using the most recent—1992-based—national population projections, is shown in the table:

Projected resident population of England

Thousands

	Year			
Age (years)	*1999*	*2004*	*2009*	*2014*
60–64	2,368	2,509	3,145	2,938
65–69	2,140	2,197	2,343	2,954
70–74	1,937	1,898	1,968	2,117
75–79	1,724	1,590	1,582	1,660
80–84	984	1,252	1,180	1,194
85–89	661	602	783	756
90 and over	354	424	428	527

Residential Care

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average cost per person to public funds of those receiving continual residential care, at full or part cost to the public purse in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1984, *(c)* 1989 and *(d)* 1994.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the percentage of the elderly who will require residential care in the years 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014 and who will, in that year be in the age cohorts 60 to 64, 65 to 69, 70 to 74, 75 to 79, 80 to 84, 85 to 89 and 90 years and over.

Mr. Bowis: Estimates for the total number of people who require residential care are not made.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a table showing, for 1979, 1984, 1989 and 1994 the number of elderly people requiring continual residential care in each of the age cohorts 60 to 64, 65 to 69, 70 to 74, 75 to 79, 80 to 84, 85 to 89, and 90 years and over; and what these figures represent of the total population in that age cohort.

Mr. Bowis: The available information is shown in the table.

Long term residents in residential care homes for elderly and physically and/or sensorily disabled people, England

	Long term residents aged			*Percentage of population aged*		
As at 31 March	*65–74*	*75–84*	*85 and over*	*65–74*	*75–84*	*85 and over*
1979	33,900	62,500	57,300	0.78	3.01	11.98
1984	24,100	74,200	75,000	0.58	3.12	13.86
1989	24,600	92,100	107,700	0.58	3.56	16.05
1994	22,300	80,100	122,000	0.52	3.15	14.53

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in her Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Sackville: Ministers receive numerous representations about a wide variety of matters.

Juice Plus

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what correspondence has been exchanged or received by or between Ministers in her Department in the last three years on the use, distribution or approval of Juice Plus;

(2) what meetings have taken place between Ministers in her Department and others in the last three years on the use, distribution or approval of Juice Plus.

Mr. Sackville: Two letters promoting Juice Plus have been addressed to Ministers in the Department and there has been correspondence with officials in the Medicines Control Agency. There have been no meetings about these products.

NHS Pensions

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what types of information are supplied by NHS Pensions-Paymaster to *(a)* commercial and *(b)* other outside organisations.

Mr. Sackville: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the National Health Service Pensions Agency under its chief executive, A. F. Cowan. I have asked him to reply to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. F. Cowan to Ms Dawn Primarolo, dated 28 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Health has asked me to respond to your written Parliamentary Question of 23 February 1995.

The NHS Pensions Agency is responsible for the administration of the NHS Pension Scheme. It contracts Paymaster for the administration of pensions payments to retired NHS employees. As a matter of policy the NHS Pensions Agency does not disclose any material about NHS Scheme members to third parties. This policy extends to those whom we contract.

National Blood Service

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the crown forming part of the blood transfusion service logo has been removed permanently from the new design; what are the reasons for changing the design; what consultation was undertaken over the design of the logo; and whether formal authorisation has been obtained for the removal of the crown.

Mr. Sackville: The National Blood Service logo was introduced in April 1994 as one part of the National Blood Authority's identity and communications review. The review, which included consultation with blood donors and blood service staff, indicated that the design of the current logo best reflects the service provided by the NBA. There are no plans to change the design.

Official advice was that it was not necessary to seek formal permission to remove the crown from the logo.

NHS Sight Tests

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many national health service eyesight tests were conducted in each year since 1978.

Mr. Malone: The number of national health service sight tests paid for by family health services authorities in England is shown in the table:

Year	*Millions Sight tests*
1978–79	7,894
1979–80	8,331
1980–81	8,332
1981–82	8,469
1982–83	8,678
1983–84	9,266
1984–85	9,882
1985–86	10,246
1986–87	10,615
1987–88	11,695
1988–89	12,493
1989–90[1]	5,280
1990–91[1]	4,154
1991–92	4,979
1992–93	5,528
1993–94	5,935

[1] From 1 April 1989, NHS sight tests were restricted to certain groups in the population.

The figures for 1989–90 include sight tests paid for in 1989–90 but conducted in 1988–89 under the previous scheme. The remaining tests were conducted and paid for in 1989–90 which does not constitute a full 12 months of the new scheme. The figures for 1990–91 which do represent 12 months under the new scheme, are not, therefore, directly comparable with those for 1989–90.

Two surveys carried out jointly by the Department of Health and the optical profession estimated that 13.184 million sight tests were performed in Great Britain in the year to 31 March 1994; the estimate for the year to 31 March 1995 is 12,673 million.

Good Hope Hospital, Sutton Coldfield

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were provided in the last 12 months at the Good Hope hospital, Sutton Coldfield; and what was the comparable figure for 1978.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally, although I understand from the Good Hope hospital that the total number of operations undertaken at the hospital in the current year is expected to show a 47 per cent. increase on 1989–90. I refer my right hon. Friend to Mr. Doug Ellis, chairman of the Good Hope hospital, for further details.

World Health Organisation

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what contributions the United Kingdom Government made to the World Health Organisation in *(a)* 1981, *(b)* 1991 and *(c)* 1994; if these funds were directed to (i) the World Health Organisation headquarters or (ii) the regional office in Copenhagen; who determined the level of contributions; at what time of the year the contributions were requested; if such funding is linked to inflation; and when the next review of financial allocations will take place.

Mr. Malone: The United Kingdom contribution to the World Health Organisation regular budget was as follows:

1981: £4,286,214.93
1991: £8,357,571.23
1994: £13,432,053.21

These funds were directed to the WHO's headquarters in Geneva. The level of the United Kingdom contribution is in accordance with the United Nations's scale of assessment adjusted to the specific requirements of the WHO. The WHO biennial budget is set at the world health assembly. Contributions are payable in two instalments to be submitted by 1 January. Inflation, in line with the standard assessment for all United Nations organisations, is one of the factors taken into account in determining the budget with the next biennial budget for 1996–97 is due to be set at the world health assembly in May.

WALES

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales will the Secretary of State provide details of what performance targets for 1995–96 he has proposed for the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for

Rural Wales, the Wales tourist board and the Cardiff Bay development corporation.

Mr. Redwood: The targets I am proposing to the chairman of the bodies concerned are:

	1995–96 target
WELSH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY	
Job creation	
Number safeguarded or created	13,000
Minimum percentage outside M4 and A55 catchment areas	20
Inward Investment	
New jobs	10,000
Investment (£ million)	500
Industrial and commercial floor space (direct build and joint ventures)	
Square metres	100,000
Property	
Disposal (£ million)	90
Vacant space (000 Sq metres)	116
Investment	
In conjunction with capital programme (£ million)	650
Derelict land	
Reclamation hectares	850
Efficiency	
Management running costs (£ million)	13.2
Reduction in consultancy (costs £000)	700
DEVELOPMENT BOARD FOR RURAL WALES	
Job creation	
Number safeguarded or created	1,500
Property	
Disposal (£ million)	6.0
Void rate (percentage)	10.0
Investment in conjunction with capital programme	
£ million	30
Management	
Running costs £ million	3.689
Reduction in consultancy costs (£000)	170
CARDIFF BAY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION CBDC'S PROGRAMME BARRAGE	
Expenditure in year (£ million)	42.0
Percentage completed	54
Land reclamation	
Hectares	24
Land disposal	
Hectares	30
Receipts (£ million)	10.3
Roads	
Constructed (kilometres)	3.5
Running costs (£ million)	4.1
PRIVATE SECTOR ACTIVITY DEVELOPMENT	
Private Sector Investment (£ million)	120
Industrial/Commercial floor space (sq metres)	69,500
Residential (units)	560
Jobs	3,000
WALES TOURIST BOARD	
Capital development	
Private sector investment (£ million)	18.0
Leverage Private: Public	6.1
Direct marketing: cost per response	75p
Wales share of GB market, (percentage)	9.5
Average occupancy rates, (per cent.):	
Hotel and Guest Houses	40
Caravan Sector	62
Self Catering	72
Running costs (£ million)	4.15

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the answer of the Chancellor of the Exchequer of 22 February, *Official Report*, column *195*, what information he has on the numbers of non-executive members of the boards of non-departmental public bodies sponsored by him who are paid other than on a schedule E basis, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally. However, non-departmental public bodies sponsored by my Department were instructed in May 1994 that board members' remuneration should be subject to national insurance and tax in the usual way.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the loss of revenue to farmers in Wales so far this year resulting from their inability to get their products to market as a result of public disorder incidents; and what is his estimate of the full-year effect on current trends.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: There has been little effect so far on prices on beef animals and sheep as a result of the present action on live exports. The main effect has been on dairy producers, who are receiving less for their surplus male calves. If these animals are fattened for beef in this country, this may impact on producer prices in the medium term, but this could be mitigated by increases in exports of carcases and boned meat.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take immediate steps to ensure that no Welsh farmers are prevented from transporting their animals to market within the framework of legislation that safeguards animal welfare and in accordance with the trading laws of the European Community; and how many representations he has received from *(a)* farmers and *(b)* farming unions on this matter.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Numerous representations have been received on this subject and I have met the farming unions on a number of occasions to discuss the matter. The export of live animals is a legal trade. The Government fully appreciate the strong feelings and concern expressed by those calling for higher animal welfare standards; but pursuing these aims by violent means is completely unacceptable. We do share their views about standards elsewhere and we have been doing our best to reach an acceptable agreement throughout the European Community on the transport of live animals which would allow the trade to operate on a basis acceptable to all.

Minerals Planning Guidance

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to issue a Welsh equivalent of the new version of minerals policy guidance note 6 on guidance for aggregates provision in England.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend is considering what guidance is needed in Wales to supersede that contained in minerals planning guidance note 6, 1989.

Planning Policy Guidance

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to issue Welsh equivalents of planning policy guidance notes *(a)* No. 15, on planning and the historic environment, *(b)* No. 23, on planning and pollution control, *(c)* No. 24 on planning and noise and *(d)* No. 2 on green-belts.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: My right hon. Friend is preparing draft planning policy guidance for Wales, covering those policy planning guidances recently issued in England.

Minewater Pollution

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will draw up a list of watercourses and their surrounding areas which are vulnerable to minewater pollution and develop a programme of remedial and preventative work along with estimates of the funding required.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A survey report on ferruginous minewater impacts in the Welsh coalfields was published in March 1994 and copies have been placed in the Library of the House. A follow-up report studying remedial options for the most significant minewater discharges is due to be published shortly.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Redwood: The Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards), received a request on 3 February 1995 from Ian Greer Associates Ltd. for a meeting with representatives of Boeing, which was declined.

Biodiversity

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research his Department has carried out upon the impact of recreation on biodiversity.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has not recently carried out an research on the impact of recreation on biodiversity.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what prime biodiversity areas within the meaning of the report, "Biodiversity—The UK Action Plan", he has identified in Wales; and if he will make a statement about his strategy to protect and enhance such sites.

Mr. Redwood: The biodiversity steering group is considering this issue. Its report is due to be published by the end of this year.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the suitability of existing financial incentives to encourage environmentally sensitive forms of agriculture to ensure that they are contributing to biodiversity objectives.

Mr. Redwood: The environmentally sensitive area scheme is an obvious example of the application of biodiversity objectives to agricultural policy. A detailed monitoring programme to examine the environmental and economic effects of the scheme has been established and will continue.

Policy reviews are undertaken every five years to assess the suitability of the scheme and reports of the findings in the Cambrian mountains "Original", and Cambrian mountains "Extension" and Lleyn peninsula ESAs were published in 1991 and 1992 respectively. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House. Payment reviews are undertaken biennially.

The new agri-environmental schemes will be similarly monitored to ensure they also contribute to biodiversity objectives.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has issued to encourage the tourism industry in Wales to include information about the need for environmental conservation, and information about local biodiversity, in promotional literature.

Mr. Redwood: Planning policy guidance note 21: "Tourism", issued November 1992, outlines the economic significance of tourism, its environmental impact and how it should be dealt with in local authority development plans. Local authorities, working with the Wales tourist board are best placed to decide how to promote such policies.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial assistance from public services was provided to the Welsh Health Common Services Authority and to Grosvenor Waterside with respect to the development of Crickhowell house as the authority's new headquarters.

Mr. Redwood: A contribution of £478,000 was paid by the Cardiff Bay development corporation to Grosvenor Waterside towards infrastructure costs associated with the construction of Crickhowell house.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning the number of inquiries made with regard to the market testing of the prescription-pricing service; how many inquiries have been made to date; and what is the proposed modus operandi for organising the market-testing bidding procedure.

Mr. Redwood: None. By 23 February, 38 organisations, including the prescription pricing services' in-house team, had asked for a copy of the authority's market testing information pack. The closing date of the submission of outline proposals is 24 March 1995. The bidding procedure will be organised according to the established public sector procurement rules.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority concerning damage to the authority's premises arising from leaks;

what compensatory measures he has discussed to remedy the problem; and who will pay for it.

Mr. Redwood: None. The defects liability period for the external envelope of Crickhowell house has been extended to 31 March 1995. The rectification of any building defects is a contractual matter for Grosvenor Waterside and the parties responsible for the design and construction of the building.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the oral statement of the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Mr. Richards) of 21 February, *Official Report*, columns 223–24, if he will list those sections of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority which will be market tested under the conventional procedure and those sections where other procedures will be followed.

Mr. Redwood: Prescription pricing services is being market tested conventionally. As my hon. Friend indicated on 21 February, *Official Report*, column 223, options for other non-clinical services still have to be considered.

Bryn Alyn Hall School

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer to 23 February, *Official Report*, column *300*, on what date the latest inspection of Bryn Alyn Hall school took place; what representations he has received and from whom under section 87 of the Children Act 1989 following the Department's inspection of welfare of children at the school, and what was his Department's response to their representation.

Mr. Redwood: At the request of my Department, the office of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools inspected the school in November 1994. Its advice was received in January 1995 and is currently being considered.

The responsibility to inspect the welfare of children at the school under the Children Act 1989 rests with the Clwyd social services department. I understand that that Department visited the school in November/December 1994 and its final report is expected to issue shortly. My Department has received for information a copy of a previous report on the school by the SSD, but has received no formal notification of a concern about welfare under section 87(4) of the Children Act.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress is being made in the preparation of summary management plans for biological sites of special scientific interest in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The designation and management of SSSIs is the responsibility of the Countryside Council for Wales. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member with the information requested. I will arrange for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

Coastal Defence

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research his Department has undertaken to assess the scope for habitat creation through managed retreat of the coast.

Mr. Redwood: Strategic research in this area is funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. A full-scale managed set-back trial is being carried out at Tollesbury creek, Essex. Nevertheless, my Department ensures that, where appropriate, a managed set-back option is among those considered for coastal defence schemes approved for grant aid.

Red Kites

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made to maintain the annual red kite population increase in Wales at more than 5 per cent. per annum since the publication of the report "Biodiversity—The UK Action Plan": and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Sixty-nine breeding pairs of red kite were observed in Wales in 1994, as opposed to 61 pairs in 1993—an increase of 13.1 per cent.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the aggregate outturn level of savings by general practitioner fundholders for the current financial year.

Mr. Redwood: The latest estimate is £6 million.

Special Areas of Conservation

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those areas he intends to designate special areas of conservation in Wales over the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: A list of candidate sites of community importance will be published as soon as possible.

Special Protection Areas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what plans he has to designate any marine special protection areas in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: No such sites have yet been submitted to me for designation.

Nature Conservation

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what guidance he has issued to local authorities to encourage them to make reasonable provision for local nature reserves and natural green space in local plans.

Mr. Redwood: Advice and guidance to local authorities on the needs of nature conservation are set out in Welsh Office circular 52/87. In addition, the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994 which implement the habitats directive encourages the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance of wild flora and fauna, which would include sites which are important to local communities.

DEFENCE

Yorks and Lancaster Regimental Museum

13. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will guarantee the future of the Yorks and Lancaster regimental museum in Rotherham.

Mr. Soames: With the exception of one member of staff, my Department does not fund this museum and I cannot therefore comment on its future.

Official Service Residences

16. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's procedures for controlling expenditure on the official service residences of senior officers.

Mr. Soames: The control of expenditure on accommodation, including official service residences, is delegated to budget holders. Work is in hand to prepare comprehensive guidance on expenditure on such residences.

Killing of Civilians

17. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on members of the armed services who are accused of killing civilians while on duty.

Mr. Soames: Members of the armed forces are subject to the criminal law. Where a member of the armed forces is alleged to have committed murder or manslaughter in the United Kingdom, jurisdiction lies with the civil authorities.

Submarines and Fishing Vessels

18. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the measures taken to avoid hazardous encounters between submarines and fishing vessels in and around the Firth of Clyde and on traditional fishing grounds.

Mr. Soames: A comprehensive package of dynamic measures provides for the safe co-existence of submarines and fishing vessels in UK waters. These have been implemented only after extensive consultation with the fishing industry, with whom my officials and those of the Department of Transport regularly consider such matters.

Armed Services Ranks

19. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the armed services were estimated to be in post on 1 January; how many of them held *(a)* one of the six highest commissioned ranks, *(b)* the three highest non-commissioned rank and *(c)* no rank at all; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: At 1 January 1995, the total strength of the regular armed forces was 236,667. On the same date, 1,752 personnel on the active list held one of the six highest commissioned ranks. 28,144 personnel held one of the three highest non-commissioned ranks. No service personnel had no rank at all.

European Defence Co-operation

20. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to discuss European defence co-operation with the Council of Ministers of the Western European Union at their next meeting.

Mr. Soames: We look forward to participating fully in discussions on a range of issues affecting European defence and security at the next meeting of WEU Ministers in May. The development of the WEU as a means of European co-operation in this area will undoubtedly be on the agenda.

"Front Line First"

21. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to undertake a review along the lines of "Front Line First"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The defence costs study was highly successful and achieved all of its aims and we do not plan, nor do we need, to conduct another similar exercise. The Ministry of Defence will, however, continue to subject all of its activities to close and continuous scrutiny as part of its normal arrangements for maximising efficiency and effectiveness.

Atomic Weapons Establishment, Llanishen

22. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received in relation to the percentage allowance for overheads on bids for non-Trident warhead diversification work by the atomic weapons establishment, Llanishen, Cardiff.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has received no such representations.

Defence Industry Scientists

23. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he is taking to help find gainful employment for defence industry scientists following reduced demand for defence equipment.

Mr. Freeman: The Government described in "Realising our Potential", Cm 2250, the considerable efforts being made to exploit the wealth-creating potential of the defence research and development programme. Further details were given in the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1994, Cm 2550.

European Defence Co-operation

24. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to develop increased European defence co-operation through existing NATO structures.

Mr. Soames: European allies co-operate closely within the alliance. As agreed at last year's NATO summit, the alliance is prepared to make its collective assets available for WEU operations undertaken by the European allies in pursuit of their common foreign and security policy. NATO's combined joint task force concept, which was also endorsed at the summit, will make NATO command and control facilities available for European-led operations. These developments have paved the way for the generation of separable but not separate European capabilities.

Bosnia

25. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to visit Bosnia; and if he will make a statement on the level of humanitarian supplies so far delivered and the number of lives saved.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made two visits to Bosnia

last year, most recently in December 1994. It is too early to say how many he will make this year, or when.

UNHCR records show that a total of 315,000 tonnes of food aid was delivered to over 2,700,000 people in Bosnia in 1994, including almost 71,000 tonnes to Sarajevo. As part of this, British UNPROFOR troops have assisted with the delivery of over 234,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid since operations began in Bosnia in Autumn 1992; the RAF airlift into Sarajevo has flown in a further 22,800 tonnes of aid since July 1992.

Land Contamination (Woolwich Arsenal)

26. **Mr. Austin-Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of land contamination on the Woolwich arsenal site; and if his Department will bear the costs of decontamination.

Mr. Soames: I refer the hon. Member to my written answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 15 February 1995, *Official Report*, column 723 about my Department's assessment of land contamination at the royal arsenal, Woolwich. The extent of decontamination required and the associated costs have yet to be defined and will be determined by the future use of the site.

Chemical Weapons Agents (Russia)

27. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has made to the Government of Russia about the safe storage and ultimate destruction of its stock of chemical weapons agents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Officials are in regular dialogue with their Russian counterparts on all aspects of the chemical weapons convention through the preparatory commission of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in The Hague. Her Majesty's Government remain keen to see the Government of Russia, as the declared holder of one of the largest stockpiles of chemical weapons, deposit early its article of ratification of the chemical weapons convention so that monitoring of the stockpiles's destruction can begin as soon as possible.

Nuclear Weapons

28. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action his Department has taken to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the last 12 months.

Mr. Soames: The prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons is one of the main aims of the United Kingdom's security policy. My Department supports a wide range of measures to this end, including:

Actively working to have the nuclear non-proliferation treaty extended idefinitely and unconditionally at the review and extension conference of states parties in April/May.

Playing a positive and constructive part in negotiations for a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Making a full contribution to the work of the Zangger Committee and Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Scrutiny of export licence applications for nuclear-related goods to sensitive destinations.

Trying to establish a mandate for an ad hoc committee at the conference on disarmament in Geneva to negotiate a Convention banning production of fissile material for military explosive purposes.

Defence Contractors

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance his Department is providing to defence contractors, as a result of redundancies, in the procurement budget.

Mr. Freeman: My Department expects to remain the largest single customer of the United Kingdoms defence industry. To help defence contractors adjust to reductions in the defence budget, we provide them with as much information as possible on our future procurement plans.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to ensure that United States firms competing for United Kingdom defence contracts are treated in the same way as United Kingdom firms seeking to tender for United States defence contracts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: It is our policy to promote fair and open international competition for defence equipment contracts and we encourage other countries to do the same. To this end we reviewed the US-UK defence co-operation memorandum of understanding in December last year, which helps to maintain a two-way street in bilateral defence trade between the UK and the US.

Defence Costs Study

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decisions he has taken on the proposals contained in the consultative document, "The Way Ahead for Test and Evaluation", issued on 14 July 1994 as part of the defence costs study.

Mr. Freeman: Proposals recommending the closure of four establishments in the Directorate General of Test and Evaluation—Pendine, Kirkcudbright, Lavington and Hurn—were announced as apart of the defence costs study last year. During the period of consultation, which closed on 14 October, representations were made by trade unions, local authorities, several environmental bodies which we had consulted and by a number of hon. Members. All the points raised have been carefully considered, against the background of the need to match demand and capacity within the directorate. The decisions we have now reached are as follows:

a. We received a number of very constructive responses to our proposal to close Pendine, notably from the Pendine steering group. In the light of these, and of our own further analysis of the costs of reproviding certain facilities, we have decided that Pendine should stay open and that the dynamic test tracks and associated static warhead trials together with the small arms and cannon work should remain there. Administrative, stores and engineering support will in future be provided from Aberporth and mortar trials will be transferred from Pendine to Shoeburyness in the course of 1995. The net result will be that about 110 jobs will remain at Pendine.

b. Kirkcudbright, too, will stay open but numbers will fall slightly from their current level of about 120 to about 90. We expect numbers to remain broadly at this level for two to three years to support the current tank armament development and integration work. On completion of this work and subject to there being no significant change in the anticipated workload, the intention would be to reduce test and evaluation activities to a small permanent level of about six staff with trials conducted on a "campaign" basis and trails teams brought in as required from other T&E facilities. However, in this eventuality, the army has declared a significant interest in using Kirkcudbright for training purposes. This idea, which would bring with it the possibility of additional recruitment of civilian support staff and significant capital spend on the range, is currently under study.

c. Lavington will close four months from now and its work, but not its personnel, will be transferred in the main to Shoeburyness.

d. Hurn will close as a manned site four months from now. Thereafter it too will be operated on a "campaign" basis but large plant will be transferred to Chertsey.

Compared with the current costs of running the establishments, these measures are estimated to save about £83 million over the next 10 years and a little over £8 million per year thereafter.

Strategic Defence Initiative

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) of 3 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *888*, if he will list all the projects carried out in the United Kingdom in the 1985 US-UK strategic defence initiative memorandum.

Mr. Soames: US-funded work performed in the UK under the 1985 US-UK "SDI" memorandum of understanding is effected by the agreement of Government-to-Government arrangements called letters of offer and acceptance. Since the signing of the memorandum of understanding, 26 letters of offer and acceptance have been awarded amounting to a total value of $129.4 million. The majority of work and funding effort has been sub-contracted to UK industry.

The purpose of two of these arrangements is classified; the remainder are as follows:

UK SDI architecture study
European BMC3 architecture
Electromagnetic railgun
Countermeasures to SDI components
Laser impulse coupling, interaction
European test bed requirements study
Catalysts for CO2 laser system
Advanced sensor hardening
Higher operating temperature IR detectors
Delay lines for use at 10 micrometers
UK extended air defence test bed
Artificial intelligence discrimination
Data fusion demonstrator
MESAR radar trials
Tretraform
UKAS follow-on study
Lethality database
Sensor hardening (follow-on studies)
Phase conjugation programme
Target oriented tracking system
Evolution and test of IR window materials
Lethality technology
Threat generation study
Interceptor avionics

Armoured Vehicles, Bosnia

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether, pursuant to his answer of 3 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *857*, sniper protection armour has been fitted to any vehicles at a time when such vehicles have been detained by any local military or paramilitary forces operating in Bosnia.

Mr. Soames: No vehicles so fitted have been detained by the warring factions.

Personal and Family Services

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on personal and family services for *(a)* the RAF, *(b)* the Army and *(c)* the Royal Navy in each year since 1979.

Mr. Soames: Work in these areas is carried out by a number of different people and organisations; these are funded from different budgets, and may work wholly or partly providing such services. The overall cost of personal and family services is not, however, separately identifiable.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the budget for naval personal and family services based at *(a)* HMS Nelson, Portsmouth, *(b)* HMS Drake, Plymouth and *(c)* HMS Cochrane, Rosyth, in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: According to available records, which are held only for the last three years, the budget for the naval personal and family services organisation at these establishments is as follows:

£ million

Financial Year	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
HMS Nelson	0.762	0.866	0.924
HMS Drake	0.838	0.973	1.034
HMS Cochrane	n/a	0.514	0.522

Note:
1994–95 figures show the end of year forecast.

The overall cost of providing personal and family services is not separately identifiable, however, and could not therefore be provided.

Uranium

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will set out his Department's procedures for disposal of uranium swarf; and if he will identify the burial sites around Britain.

Mr. Freeman: Depleted and natural uranium swarf is sent to British Nuclear Fuels plc for recycling or storage pending the identification of a disposal route. Enriched uranium swarf is always recycled for possible future use. There are at present no UK sites approved for the bulk burial of either natural or depleted uranium swarf.

Service Housing

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the amount of rent arrears currently outstanding on service housing;

(2) how many ex-service families were evicted as result of non-payment of rent for service housing in each of the last two years.

Mr. Soames: All serving personnel who occupy service families accommodation have their accommodation charges deducted from their pay. Personnel who have left the services lose their entitlement to this accommodation. If they continue to occupy it they become irregular occupants and must pay damages for trespass, which are charged at a level considered to be a fair market rent. At present, there are DFT arrears of some £2.9 million for the Army and Navy. The RAF does not hold these figures centrally.

Although proceedings to evict irregular occupants for non-payment of rent have been initiated in a number of cases in the last two years, no evictions have been necessary.

RAF Machrihanish

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current building work being carried out at RAF Machrihanish; if he will list the companies involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Apart from regular maintenance, no major building work is currently being carried out at RAF Machrihanish at present.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will list the companies involved in the upgrading of RAF Machrihanish since 1990; what was the value of each contract awarded by *(a)* his Ministry and *(b)* NATO; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The following companies have been employed in building projects at RAF Machrihanish since 1990:

Amey Construction Ltd.
Amey/Res
B and D Builders
Colas
C. R. Smith
Devon
Hattrick Bruce
Hendry Boot
James Scott
Kelsey
Lilley Construction
Maurice Hill Ltd.
McFarlane
Molem Ltd.
NEI Cochrane
N. W. Holst
Parkinson Twaddle Ltd.
Pirie
Pottins Ltd.
PSA BM Edinburgh
R. G. McLeod
Strathclyde regional council
Topek Roofing
Trafalgar House Group
Watson Norrie Ltd.
Weir Ferguson and Martin

The value of individual contracts awarded is commercially confidential; however, the total funding by my Department and NATO for building projects at the station since 1990 is £16.0 million and £39.9 million respectively.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will list the current functions of RAF Machrihanish; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: RAF Machrihanish is a NATO forward operating base which is assigned to SACLANT.

Redundant Churches and Chapels

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will list the redundant churches and chapels sold by his Department in the last five years; and what were *(a)* the original valuation, *(b)* the eventual selling price and *(c)* the buyer in each case.

Mr. Soames: No redundant churches or chapels have been sold as individual buildings by my Department in the last five years, although St. George's chapel in Chatham is in the process of disposal and is to be sold to Gillingham borough council. In addition, a building at Netheravon, Wiltshire which had been used as a Roman Catholic church some years ago was sold on the open market to Mr. P. Hilliyard who has subsequently converted the property to a house for his own occupation. It is not my Department's practice to disclose the sale price of buildings or sites, which is commercial in confidence to the purchaser.

Eurofighter 2000

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make a statement on the progress towards memorandum 4 for Eurofighter 2000 with particular reference to the development assurance phase and integrated logistic support.

Mr. Freeman: We and our Eurofighter 2000 partners hope to sign the memorandum of understanding governing the reorientation of the development phase of the programme within the next few months. This will permit the start of the development assurance phase and preparatory integrated logistic support activities.

Honorary Officers to the Queen

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will name the current *(a)* personal aides-de-camp to the Queen, *(b)* the first and principal naval aide-de-camp to the Queen, *(c)* the flag aide-de-camp to the Queen, *(d)* naval aides-de-camp to the Queen, *(e)* the royal marine aide-de-camp to the Queen, *(f)* extra naval equerries to the Queen, *(g)* royal naval reserve aides-de-camp to the Queen, *(h)* the royal marine reserve aide-de-camp to the Queen, *(i)* honorary chaplains to the Queen, *(j)* the honorary surgeons to the Queen, *(l)* honorary dental surgeons to the Queen, *(m)* the Royal Navy reserve honorary surgeon to the Queen and *(n)* the honorary nursing officer to the Queen; what are the duties of each postholder; and if he will list the salaries or other benefits to which each postholder is entitled.

Mr. Soames: The information requested is given in the table. The duties of each post are not set out formally, but are mainly of a representational nature. No remuneration or other benefit is received by any of the postholders.

Personal ADC to the Queen
HRH the Prince of Wales
HRH the Duke of York

First and Principal Naval ADC to the Queen
Admiral Sir Benjamin Bathurst

Flag ADC to the Queen
Admiral Sir Michael Layard

Naval ADCs to the Queen
Commodore B. B. Perowne
Captain J. A. Benyon
Captain A. S. Ritchie
Captain J. G. F. Cooke
Captain J. B. Simpson

Captain R. T. R. Phillips
Captain J. K. Covell
Captain A. E. Slater

Royal Marine ADC to the Queen
Colonel R. E. Dillon

Extra Naval Equerries to the Queen
Vice Admiral Sir Peter Ashmore
Rear Admiral Sir Richard Trowbridge
Rear Admiral Sir Paul Greening
Rear Admiral Sir John Garnier
Rear Admiral Robert Woodard
Lieutenant General Sir John Richards

Royal Naval Reserve ADC to the Queen
Captain D. A. Carr

Royal Marine Reserve ADC to the Queen
Colonel T. H. Lang

Royal Navy Honorary Chaplains to the Queen
The Ven. M. W. Bucks
Rev. W. E. Weldon
Rev. B. F. Neill
Rev. R. G. Devonshire

Army Honorary Chaplains to the Queen
The Ven. A. Deen
Rev. Dr. V. Dobbin
Rev. J. Holliman
Rev. R. McAllen

RAF Honorary Chaplains to the Queen
Rev. J. Shedden
Rev. G. B. McVoy
The Ven. B. H. Lucas
Rev. P. R. Turner

Royal Navy Honorary Physicians to the Queen
Surgeon Rear Admiral A. Craig
Surgeon Captain D. L. Swain
Surgeon Commodore R. Harland
Army Honorary Physicians to the Queen
Major General G. O. Cowan
Brigadier W. R. Short
Brigadier M. D. Conroy
Brigadier T. B. N. Oldrey
Brigadier G. C. Callow

RAF Honorary Physicians to the Queen
Air Commodore J. R. Creig
Air Vice Marshal J. A. Baird
Air Commodore A. F. Johnson
Air Commodore J. D. C. Baxandall

Royal Navy Honorary Surgeons to the Queen
Surgeon Commodore I. L. Jenkins
Surgeon Vice Admiral A. L. Revell
Surgeon Commodore M. P. W. H. Paine

Army Honorary Surgeons to the Queen
Major General F. B. Mayes
Brigadier D. G. Stork
Brigadier M. H. Daly
Colonel D. W. Herring
Brigadier B. Rowe

RAF Honorary Surgeons to the Queen
Air Commodore D. H. Hull
Air Commodore F. K. Amroliwalla
Air Commodore A. Nicholson
Air Commodore H. Wober

Royal Navy Honorary Dental Surgeon to the Queen
Surgeon Commodore E. J. Grants

Army Honorary Dental Surgeons to the Queen
Brigadier C. D. Parkinson
Brigadier R. A. Smart

RAF Honorary Dental Surgeons to the Queen
Air Commodore D. W. Marchant
Air Vice Marshall J. Mackey

Royal Naval Reserve Honorary Surgeon to the Queen
Surgeon Captain T. A. Waterworth

Royal Navy Honorary Nursing Officer to the Queen
Principal Nursing Officer C. M. Taylor

Army Honorary Nursing Officers to the Queen
Brigadier H. S. Dixon-Nuttall
Lieutenant Colonel A. Clouston

RAF Honorary Nursing Officer to the Queen
Group Captain V. M. Hand

Fraud

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money was spent by his Department in each of the last 10 years to combat fraud.

Mr. Soames: Figures are available only from 1991–92 and relate to the cost of the Ministry of Defence police fraud squad and the defence fraud unit. They are as follows:

Year	*Cost*
1991–92	783,000
1992–93	932,000
1993–94	1,079,000
1994–95	1,087,000

A good deal of effort is expended elsewhere in my Department to combat fraud, but the cost of this could not be separately identified.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many investigations into fraud have been made within his Department in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames: Complete figures are available only from 1986 and include cases where the alleged fraud was not against my Department.

Year	*Investigations*
1986	3,983
1987	3,275
1988	3,205
1989	2,251
1990	3,837

Year	Investigations
1991	4,413
1992	3,260
1993	[1]2,277

[1] Includes MOD police investigations for January to March 1994.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money his Department has lost through fraud in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames: The values of reported fraud for the financial years 1984–85 to 1993–94 inclusive are as follows:

	£
1984–85	41,000
1985–86	199,000
1986–87	244,000
1987–88	1,039,000
1988–89	334,000
1989–90	233,000
1990–91	984,000
1991–92	63,000
1992–93	205,000
1993–94	571,000

These figures exclude "procurement fraud"—fraud perpetrated by contractors, including corruption of officials by contractors and collusion between officials and contractors—which is often difficult to quantify precisely.

No abatement is made for subsequent recoveries.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by name the five fraud cases which have cost his Department the most money in the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames: The largest fraud cases characteristically relate to procurement fraud, where the extent of the cash loss to the Department is often difficult to quantify with any precision. The five highest value cases were as follows:

Case	Year
Director of Ammunition Procurement (Foxley)	1994
VMS Ltd.	1991
Chellingworth and Singer Ltd.	1990
Gateway Motor Auctions	1987
CAS Aviation and Marine International	1986

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what actions he has taken to combat fraud within his Department.

Mr. Soames: My Department has taken a range of measures to deter and detect fraud and to make staff aware of the need for vigilance. All suspected cases are vigorously pursued and an internal statement on fraud policy and law makes it clear that we will not tolerate dishonest behaviour among our employees. Investigations into suspected fraud are undertaken by the Ministry of Defence police fraud squad. The service police similarly investigate fraud in the service environment. The deterrence of fraud forms part of high level management plans with requirements placed upon senior line management to impose sound controls, follow up suspicions, and report suspected fraud. There is a consultative panel on fraud and irregularity which is being reconstituted to involve line management representation, supported by a defence fraud unit which is tasked with collating information, assessing policy options and raising fraud awareness. Private sector expertise has been drawn on in the development of a methodology for fraud risk assessment. In the procurement field there has been extension of competitive procurement, a greater rotation of duties in significant procurement posts, and stress on fraud awareness.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the cases when employees of his Department have *(a)* been tried and *(b)* been successfully convicted of fraud in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Soames: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Army Base Repair Organisation, Old Dalby

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the prospects of allocating new sources of his Department's work to ABRO, Old Dalby.

Mr. Freeman: Prior to my announcement on 27 October 1994 of the intention to withdraw work from ABRO Old Dalby, ABRO had undertaken a number of studies to determine the practicality of moving work from its other facilities into Old Dalby. The studies clearly demonstrated that such a course of action was not cost-effective. ABRO also assessed the potential for transferring work undertaken by private contractors into Old Dalby, but concluded that this was neither practical nor cost-effective. The other services are also looking at the need to make effective use of the repair facilities at their disposal and some further rationalisation and consolidation of repair work may result from the defence costs study recommendation for tri-service rationalisation. This will not, however, alter the decision to withdraw all MOD work from ABRO, Old Dalby.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on possible private sector interest in purchasing all or part of ABRO, Old Dalby.

Mr. Freeman: Following my announcement of 31 January 1995 that MOD operations were to cease at the ABRO, Old Dalby workshop, a number of companies have expressed tentative interest in some of the facilities. As yet, however, none of these amount to substantive proposals.

Any costed proposals received before the end of July 1995 will be carefully considered to see if they offer improved value for money compared with transferring work to ABROs Donnington or Bovington workshops or elsewhere within MOD. It is important to bear in mind however that the primary objective of the Old Dalby closure is to rationalise excess capacity within ABRO by moving work to other workshops where spare capacity exists.

Industry has been invited to come forward with non-MOD uses for the Old Dalby workshop.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many personnel have joined his Department from defence or defence-related companies in the last 10 years;

(2) if he will list the personnel who have joined his Department from defence or defence-related companies in the last two years; and what were the companies involved and the numbers joining each company.

Mr. Freeman: Information concerning previous employment is collected during the recruitment process and is retained on an individual's personal file. This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Freeman: My ministerial colleagues and I keep no comprehensive records of all unsolicited mail or other items that we receive.

SCOTLAND

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many accident and emergency departments there are in Scotland; what were the corresponding figures in each year since 1986; and how many accident and emergency departments have been relocated in each year since 1986.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the numbers of accident and emergency units is shown in the table. The relocation of accident and emergency departments is a matter for health boards and the information held centrally does not allow this to be accurately identified.

Numbers of hospitals with accident and emergency units[1]; years ending 31 March

Year	*Number of hospitals*
1986	104
1987	106
1988	103
1989	101
1990	100
1991	100
1992	101
1993	101
1994	101

Note:
[1] Hospitals with 100 or more accident and emergency attendances in each year.
Source:
Information and statistics division.

Medical Register

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if inclusion in the medical register with a T(S) indication is the equivalent of accreditation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The T(S) indication in the medical register has been used to record that a doctor has been accredited in a specialty—S indicates surgery—or been appointed to a consultant post in the NHS.

Accreditation represents the decision of the relevant royal college body responsible for training in the specialty that the doctor has completed specialist training. The UK's system of specialist medical training is being reformed in the light of the Calman report "Hospital Doctors: Training for the Future".

Peterhead Sheriff Court

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the cases dealt with by *(a)* summary complaint and *(b)* indictment in Peterhead sheriff court in each year from 1974 to 1994 involved accused with two or more previous convictions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of theft by housebreaking were dealt with on summary complaint at Peterhead sheriff court in each year from 1974 to 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The available information is set out in table:

Persons called to Peterhead sheriff court on summary complaint where the main crime was theft by housebreaking[1], 1976–93

Year	*Persons proceeded against*
1976	18
1977	25
1978	27
1979	38
1980	26
1981	44
1982	56
1983	31
1984	52
1985	76
1986	65
1987	80
1988	98
1989	55
1990	58
1991	51
1992	53
1993	28

Notes:
[1] Includes charges of attempted theft by housebreaking and housebreaking with intent to steal.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of theft by housebreaking were dealt with on indictment at Peterhead sheriff court in each year from 1974 to 1994; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The available information is set out in the table:

Persons called to Peterhead sheriff court on indictment where the main crime was theft by housebreaking[1], 1976–1993

Year	*Persons proceeded against*
1976	0
1977	0
1978	7

Persons called to Peterhead sheriff court on indictment where the main crime was theft by housebreaking[1], 1976–1993

Year	Persons proceeded against
1979	9
1980	20
1981	2
1982	5
1983	9
1984	4
1985	5
1986	1
1987	4
1988	3
1989	2
1990	1
1991	0
1992	0
1993	0

[1] Includes charges of attempted theft by housebreaking and housebreaking with intent to steal.

Breast Cancer Screening

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent guidelines he has issued to national health service trusts and clinics regarding the subject of breast cancer screening programmes; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* A number of guidelines have been produced in recent years by the Scottish breast screening programme on breast cancer screening. Recent publications are set out in the table:

Title	Date Published
Quality Assurance Guidelines for Mammography (Pritchard)	March 1989
Guidelines for Pathologists	February 1990
Pathology Reporting in Breast Cancer Screening	February 1990
Breast Cancer Screening—A Practical Guide for Primary Care Teams	1990
Quality Assurance Guidelines for Radiologists	June 1990
Radiographic Quality Control Manual for Mammography	February 1992
Quality Assurance Guidelines for Surgeons and Beast Cancer Screening	May 1992
Guidelines for Cytology Procedures and Reporting in Breast Cancer Screening	September 1992

Breast Clinics

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many breast clinics there are in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole; of these how many are located in out-patient departments; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* There are five specialist breast clinics for out-patients in Scotland located in Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen and two in Glasgow.

Breast Care Nurses

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of breast care nurses employed in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland; of these nurses how many are employed by way of funding from outwith the national health service; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* Statistics on the number of nurses engaged on breast care duties are not maintained centrally.

Disabled People

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what recent discussions he has held with the Art Council concerning barrier-free access to theatres, galleries, museums and other buildings and freedom of movement within such for people with disabilities; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what recent discussions he has held with the owners of cinemas regarding barrier-free access to their establishments and the freedom of movement within such for people suffering from disabilities; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* None. The provisions in the Disability Discrimination Bill will require service providers, including those who operate cultural and entertainment facilities, to remove physical barriers, where reasonable, in order to improve access for disabled people to their service. The Government's White Paper "Ending Discrimination against Disabled People" makes it clear that there will be a continuing process of consultation on the detailed implementation of their proposals.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has held with representatives of amateur and professional football clubs, cricket clubs and rugby clubs and others regarding *(a)* barrier-free access to sporting grounds and *(b)* the freedom of movement within such for people with disabilities; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The provisions in the Disability Discrimination Bill, currently before the House, will require service providers, including those who operate sports stadiums, to remove physical barriers, where reasonable, in order to improve access for disabled people to their service. The Government's White Paper "Ending Discrimination against Disabled People" makes it clear that there will be a continuing process of consultation on the detailed implementation of its proposals. The Scottish Sports Council, as the Government's advisory body on sport in Scotland, has a strong track record in providing quality information on the design of facilities where people with a disability are concerned. The council has paid particular attention to such needs in preparing the guidelines for application for national lottery funding.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the conduct of the Sports Council in relation to the provision of sporting facilities and activities for people with disabilities; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The Government regard the promotion of sport for people with disabilities as particularly important. The Scottish Sports Council is committed to a programme of initiatives, in partnership with the Scottish Sports Association for People with a Disability and others, to develop opportunities for people with disabilities to

participate at all levels of sport and generally to raise the profile of athletes with a disability in Scotland. Recent examples of the Scottish Sports Council's commitment in this area include their support for the ready, willing and able initiative, and the inclusion of sport for people with a disability within the teamsport programme.

National Lottery

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money will be made available from the national lottery in the current financial year to distribute to voluntary organisations and charities; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The control and management of the national lottery distribution fund which channels lottery proceeds to the various distributing bodies is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage.

Farmers and Crofters

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farm or croft holdings are estimated to occur within the environmentally sensitive areas of *(a)* the Shetland Islands, *(b)* the Cairngorm Straths, *(c)* the Argyll Islands and *(d)* the revised Machair of the Uists.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The number of potentially eligible farm or croft holdings is estimated to be as follows:

	Number
The Shetland Islands	1,300
The Cairngorms Straths	400
The Argyll Islands	950
The Revised Machair of the Uists and Benbecula, Barra and Vatersay	1,050

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many farmers or crofters have to date completed agreements with the Scottish Office under the environmentally sensitive area schemes in *(a)* the Shetland Islands, *(b)* the Cairngorm Straths, *(c)* the Argyll Islands and *(d)* the revised Machair of the Uists.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The number of farmers, crofters and crofters grazings committees who currently have environmentally sensitive area scheme agreements with the Secretary of State is as follows:

	Number
The Shetland Islands Environmentally Sensitive Area	9
The Cairngorms Straths Environmentally Sensitive Area	10
The Argyll Islands Environmentally Sensitive Area	13
Machair of the Uists, Benbecula, Barra and Vatersay Environmentally Sensitive Area (revised boundaries)	612

Ground Nesting Birds

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many approved farm conservation plans in the Argyll Islands environmentally sensitive area scheme include measures to be undertaken under the voluntary 2 prescriptions for ground nesting birds.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* Five.

Agri-environment Programme

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *308*, if he will give a breakdown of the funds allocated to each of the schemes introduced under the Scottish agri-environment programme in *(a)* the current financial year, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97.

Sir Hector Monro *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The table sets out the 1994–95 supply estimates provision and the Government's present plans for spending on these schemes for 1995–96 and 1996–97.

	Financial Year		
Scheme	*1994–95 £ million*	*1995–96 £ million*	*1996–97 £ million*
Environmentally Sensitive Areas[1]	4.5	5.7	7.8
Heather Moorland	Nil	0.6	2.9
Habitats	Nil	0.6	0.6
Organic Aid	0.1	0.1	0.2
Access to Set-aside	Nil	0.5	0.5
Total	4.6	7.5	12.0

[1]Including new scheme for informal recreation in ESAs.

Community Care

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what national care standards are being prescribed for care in the community.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* Standards can only realistically be set at local level. The general policy is that care should be such as to allow vulnerable people to live as independent lives as practical in homely settings in the community. Following reorganisation, we will ask local authorities to develop community care charters in which they will set our standards by which their performance can be judged locally.

NHS Consultants

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospital consultants have been dismissed from their employment with national health service hospitals in each of the past 15 years; of those how many were reinstated following a successful appeal to him; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* Information on dismissals is not held centrally. The NHS management executive is informed of dismissals only when a consultant appeals to the Secretary of State against termination of the contract of employment. Since 1983, the earliest date of available records, there have been six such appeals by NHS consultants, two of which resulted in reinstatement.

EDUCATION

Class Sizes

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what were the average class sizes in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in 1979–80, and what were the average class sizes for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Robin Squire: The average sizes of single-teacher classes in maintained primary and secondary schools in England in 1980 and 1994 are shown in the table.

Position in January each year

	Primary	*Secondary*[1]
1980	25.4	21.0
1994	26.9	21.4

[1] Excludes sixth form colleges which ceased to be classified as schools from 1 April 1993.

School Places

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the average cost of a school place in a local education authority school in Hampshire; and how many surplus school places there are in local education authority schools in Hampshire.

Mr. Robin Squire: The national average premises-related cost of maintaining a school place is estimated to be £182 a year for a primary school and £303 a year for a secondary school at 1995–96 prices. It is not possible to give separate estimates at LEA level. The actual cost and the scope for realising savings from removal of surplus school places in practice will depend on local circumstances.

In January 1994, there were 18,287—13 per cent.—primary surplus school places and 8,834—13 per cent.—secondary places in local education authority schools in Hampshire. The authority has recently completed a reorganisation which, together with pupil population growth, will have reduced the amount of surplus from these levels.

National Youth Agency

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she plans to announce her decision on the future of the National Youth Agency.

Mr. Boswell: As my noble Friend the Lord Lucas said on Monday 23 January 1995, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns 860–61, my right hon. Friend will not be making a decision on the policy review of the National Youth Agency until the final report is submitted. Meanwhile, some responses to the second phase consultations of the review team are still outstanding.

Youth Service Unit

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many people work in the youth service unit.

Mr. Boswell: The youth service unit of the Department for Education at present comprises 13 members of staff.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what was the work programme of the youth service unit for 1994–95;

(2) what is the proposed work programme of the youth service unit for 1995–96.

Mr. Boswell: In addition to normal official duties, including policy advice to Ministers, the activities of officials in the Department's youth service unit include the following:

- administration of relevant DFE grants, including grants to the National Youth Agency, the youth exchange centre, and 60 national voluntary youth organisations;
- co-ordination within Whitehall of the Government's interest in youth issues in the European Union and the Council of Europe, including the proposed youth for Europe III programme, and representation of United Kingdom interests at meetings;
- commissioning or sponsoring national programmes and studies including the GEST youth action scheme and its national evaluation, the GEST activity on the training and youth and community workers, and a survey of youth service participation carried out as part of the OPCS omnibus survey;
- co-ordination of the Department for Education's policy on volunteering;
- liaison with other Government Departments on issues relevant to the youth service, including crime prevention and health education;
- co-ordination with the Department of Employment of national consultations on the scope for developing NVQ standards for youth and community work;
- policy review of the National Youth Agency and review of the administration of grants to national voluntary youth organisations.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many grant-maintained schools were formerly *(a)* country, *(b)* voluntary aided, *(c)* voluntary controlled and *(d)* special agreement schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: The numbers of grant-maintained primary and secondary schools in each category is as follows:

Former status	*Number*
County	698
Voluntary aided	226
Voluntary controlled	95
Special agreement	13

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list, by local authority, the capital bids from grant-maintained schools for 1995–96.

Mr. Robin Squire: These matters are now the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the funding agency to write to the hon. Member with this information.

Student Loan Fund

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to amend the rules of the Student Loan Fund to meet the specific and special needs of medical students in the fourth and fifth year of their undergraduate training.

Mr. Boswell: The Government keep the operation of the loans scheme under review, but have no current plans to introduce any major changes.

Schools

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the total number of *(a)* voluntary controlled, *(b)* voluntary aided, *(c)* county and *(d)* special agreement schools in each year from 1992 to 1995.

Mr. Robin Squire: The number of voluntary schools and county schools in England in the years 1992 to 1994, the latest date for which information is available, are shown in the table.

Voluntary and County Schools[1] in England 1992–1994
Position in January each year

	1992	1992	1994
Voluntary schools			
Controlled	2,998	2,968	2,909
Aided	4,221	4,174	4,032
Special agreement	67	64	54
County Schools	15,230	14,942	14,503

[1] Excluding sixth form colleges which ceased to be classified as schools in April 1993.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in her Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Boswell: As stated in my previous answer, on Wednesday 8 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *310*, during the month of February three Ministers in the Department received invitations to a social event, which have been declined.

School Attendance

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education whether she will publish the results of the survey of arrangements for enforcing school attendance undertaken by her Department last year.

Mr. Forth: The survey showed that 2,689 education welfare officers were employed by English local education authorities as at September 1994. LEAs were also asked to provide information on the number of school attendance orders, education supervision orders and prosecutions mounted against parents over the three school years up to and including 1993–94. The survey revealed that, over the period in question, the total number of SAOs had risen from 40 to 56 a year, ESOs from 81 to 314 a year, and the number of prosecutions had risen from 2,803 to 3,688 a year. The position for individual LEAs is set out in the following table.

Enforcement of School Attendance

LEA	Education Welfare Officers[1]		School Attendance Orders[2]			Education Supervision Orders[2]			Prosecutions[2]		
	Total	FTE	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Avon	61	56.0	0	0	0	2	12	8	27	19	14
Barking and Dagenham	11	11.0	0	0	0	1	3	2	50	62	35
Barnet	12	12.0	2	2	1	0	0	0	3	4	6
Barnsley	17	17.0	3	0	0	0	6	0	13	16	26
Bedfordshire	32	32.0	0	0	0	1	3	2	36	39	74
Berkshire	31	31.0	0	0	2	2	6	1	68	22	56
Bexley	7	7.0	0	0	0	0	4	2	24	19	21
Birmingham	89	86.0	0	0	1	0	0	1	48	67	54
Bolton	22	19.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	12	15
Bradford	37	31.5	1	0	0	2	4	0	91	32	78
Brent	19	19.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	14	6	16
Bromley	11	11.0	0	0	1	1	1	0	33	33	27
Buckinghamshire	29	28.5	1	3	1	1	2	2	10	52	65
Bury	8	8.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	20	33
Calderdale	14	14.0	0	0	0	0	2	4	6	4	6
Cambridgeshire	28	26.6	2	1	3	2	3	6	28	24	18
Camden	17	16.7	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	6
Cheshire	32	32.0	0	0	0	0	4	6	12	24	58
Cleveland	47	45.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2	3
Cornwall	15	15.0	0	0	0	1	1	1	14	19	22
Coventry	19	19.0	0	1	0	0	0	1	38	16	21
Croydon	16	16.0	0	0	1	2	1	4	21	29	47
Cumbria	39	36.0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	4	11
Derbyshire	46	41.5	0	0	0	1	4	3	43	45	40
Devon	32	31.0	0	0	1	0	0	1	22	28	38
Doncaster	27	24.0	0	0	0	1	1	1	12	12	5
Dorset	30	28.0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Dudley	10	10.0	1	0	0	1	0	4	5	5	14
Durham	38	38.0	0	0	0	0	6	5	9	21	33
Ealing	20	18.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	117	83	81
East Sussex	21	12.0	0	0	0	0	2	2	37	12	22
Enfield	19	16.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	7	3
Essex	79	75.5	0	0	0	0	4	11	51	64	105

Enforcement of School Attendance

LEA	Education Welfare Officers[1] Total	FTE	School Attendance Orders[2] 1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	Education Supervision Orders[2] 1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	Prosecutions[2] 1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Gateshead	20	20.0	1	0	0	8	5	4	22	45	46
Gloucestershire	16	16.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	11	19
Greenwich	17	15.3	1	0	0	0	0	0	109	138	151
Hackney	15	14.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	14	4
Hammersmith and Fulham	15	12.5	1	4	6	6	4	9	10	12	14
Hampshire	83	80.6	1	0	0	1	1	17	48	32	65
Haringey	12	11.5	0	0	0	0	0	2	5	7	8
Harrow	9	9.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	3	5
Havering	13	13.0	0	0	0	0	4	3	9	15	19
Hereford and Worcester	20	20.0	2	1	0	0	0	1	22	33	49
Hertfordshire	43	40.3	0	0	0	0	3	0	8	16	14
Hillingdon	10	10.0	0	0	0	3	3	0	2	0	1
Hounslow	9	9.0	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	8	2
Humberside	47	46.5	0	1	0	1	6	6	83	94	83
Isle of Wight	9	8.5	0	0	0	1	2	2	4	5	5
Isles of Scilly[3]	0	0.0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Islington	26	22.6	0	0	0	6	5	6	6	6	7
Kensington and Chelsea	15	15.0	0	0	1	2	4	4	11	23	4
Kent	47	42.0	2	1	0	0	8	4	96	236	244
Kingston upon Thames	6	6.0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	0
Kirklees	26	23.0	1	0	2	2	2	0	30	49	42
Knowsley	15	14.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	72	53	27
Lambeth	32	28.0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	11	0
Lancashire	86	84.8	0	0	0	0	3	4	40	36	57
Leeds	62	56.0	1	3	3	1	3	5	18	31	21
Leicestershire	39	38.5	1	0	4	1	7	11	25	35	69
Lewisham	17	14.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25
Lincolnshire	22	22.0	3	6	7	0	1	2	74	52	74
Liverpool	60	56.0	0	6	0	1	1	1	32	45	61
London, Corporation of	1	1.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Manchester	29	27.5	3	0	0	7	5	5	142	148	129
Merton	8	8.0	0	0	0	0	2	0	19	39	37
Newcastle upon Tyne	14	14.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	3	0
Newham	17	17.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	151	77	104
Norfolk	35	30.5	0	0	1	0	0	0	16	17	26
Northamptonshire	26	25.0	0	0	0	0	1	6	70	97	79
Northumberland	12	12.0	0	0	1	0	0	3	6	6	7
North Tyneside	12	11.3	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	6
North Yorkshire	37	35.0	0	1	0	0	4	3	4	17	21
Nottinghamshire	63	63.0	2	3	5	0	0	0	66	148	229
Oldham	7	7.0	0	0	0	0	0	14	11	14	39
Oxfordshire	25	20.0	0	0	0	2	0	7	5	5	12
Redbridge	10	9.8	0	0	0	0	3	1	6	13	5
Richmond upon Thames	10	9.0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	5	4
Rochdale	13	12.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Rotherham	19	18.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45	35	45
St. Helens	12	11.0	0	1	0	0	0	0	24	16	30
Salford	22	22.0	2	0	0	0	0	0	10	20	27
Sandwell	23	22.0	0	0	0	0	0	3	15	21	25
Sefton	24	23.5	0	0	0	0	5	3	8	21	18
Sheffield	53	48.5	1	1	0	0	0	0	14	21	23
Shropshire	18	17.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	44	59	25
Solihull	13	10.0	0	0	0	2	2	2	7	0	6
Somerset[4]	0	0.0	0	0	0	2	2	10	12	10	17
South Tyneside	17	16.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	21	14
Southwark	18	18.0	3	2	5	2	4	3	12	12	11
Staffordshire	57	57.0	0	0	0	0	3	15	33	8	50
Stockport	19	19.0	0	0	0	1	0	0	24	18	23
Suffolk	24	24.0	0	0	1	0	2	2	19	26	23
Sunderland	24	24.0	1	0	0	0	0	4	50	76	121
Surrey	28	26.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	14	18
Sutton	10	10.0	0	0	0	0	4	5	3	5	8
Tameside	16	16.0	0	0	0	1	8	8	53	43	35
Tower Hamlets	18	17.5	4	7	3	0	5	8	31	42	30

Enforcement of School Attendance

LEA	Education Welfare Officers[1] Total	FTE	School Attendance Orders[2] 1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	Education Supervision Orders[2] 1991–92	1992–93	1993–94	Prosecutions[2] 1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
Trafford	10	10.0	0	0	1	1	4	3	21	31	41
Wakefield	20	20.0	0	0	0	0	4	0	37	24	38
Walsall	21	21.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	64	44	54
Waltham Forest	14	14.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	12
Wandsworth	17	17.0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	12	9
Warwickshire	30	25.8	0	0	0	7	1	4	10	31	29
Westminster, City of	13	13.0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	3	2
West Sussex	27	24.0	0	0	2	0	4	30	0	12	25
Wigan	17	17.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0
Wiltshire	21	21.0	0	0	1	1	1	3	15	17	10
Wirral	21	20.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	9	1
Wolverhampton	18	18.0	0	1	1	3	5	10	21	21	48
Total	2,689	2,556.6	40	47	56	81	220	314	2,803	3,080	3,688

[1] Position as at September 1994.
[2] Relates to school years.
[3] On the Isles of Scilly, attendance problems are dealt with by headteachers (under 300 pupils in 4 schools).
[4] In Somerset, school attendance enforcement is dealt with by Education officers rather than EWOs.

Sixteen to Eighteen-year-olds

Ms Estelle Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many students between the ages of 16 and 18 were studying in *(a)* sixth forms, *(b)* sixth form colleges and *(c)* colleges of further education in each of the last five years.

Mr. Boswell: The following table shows the number of pupils in school sixth forms, and students in sixth form colleges and colleges of further education in each of the years 1989–90 to 1993–94.

16 to 18-year-olds in (a) school sixth forms (b) sixth form colleges, and (c) colleges of further education: 1989–90—1993–94

	Academic year—numbers (000s) 1989–90	1990–91	1991–92	1992–93	1993–94
School sixth forms	315.8	322.3	339.3	344.3	343.0
Sixth form colleges	73.8	77.7	84.1	91.4	98.7
FE sector colleges[1]					
Full-time	293.4	303.6	341.8	357.7	369.6
Part-time	311.8	265.4	217.2	172.6	148.7

[1] Excluding sixth form colleges.

Business Link, Wirral

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what financial help her Department or its agencies has given to the Business Link, Wirral since its inception.

Mr. Boswell: None. This Department is not responsible, either directly or indirectly, for the funding of Business Links.

School Budgets

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list in rank order the percentages of their total budgets under local management of schools which county councils delegate to individual schools; and if she will calculate how much extra per pupil Lancashire would have been able to spend if it had delegated as much as the authority which delegated most.

Mr. Robin Squire: The percentages of general schools budgets delegated to schools by county councils in 1994–95 are shown in the table below. The percentage delegated does not affect the total spending per pupil by the education authority concerned; but if Lancashire had delegated 78.8 per cent. of the general schools budget rather than 70.3 per cent., schools' delegated budgets would have been larger by approximateiy £200 per pupil.

English counties 1994–95

Local education authority	Percentage of GSB delegated
Hertfordshire	78.8
Northamptonshire	76.6
Suffolk	75.5
Berkshire	75.5
West Sussex	75.3
Avon	74.9
North Yorkshire	74.7
Northumberland	74.3
Staffordshire	74.2
Nottinghamshire	74.1
Warwickshire	74.0
Cheshire	74.0
Leicestershire	73.9
Hereford/Worcester	73.9
Hampshire	73.7
Somerset	73.2
Durham	72.8
Wiltshire	72.7
Gloucestershire	72.6
Bedfordshire	72.5
Cleveland	72.5
Humberside	72.4
Essex	72.2
Lincolnshire	71.9
Norfolk	71.7
East Sussex	71.1
Devon	70.9
Dorset	70.8
Kent	70.8
Buckinghamshire	70.7
Lancashire	70.3
Isle of Wight	70.1
Cornwall	70.1
Cambridgeshire	69.9
Oxfordshire	69.8

English counties 1994–95

Local education authority	*Percentage of GSB delegated*
Shropshire	69.1
Cumbria	68.9
Derbyshire	68.7
Surrey	67.9

Note:
The figures have been derived from budget statements published by local education authorities under section 42 of the Education Reform Act in respect of the financial year 1994–95, and received by the Department prior to 17 October 1994. The percentages have been rounded in the table to one decimal place.

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the bid for capital allocation—permission to borrow—by Kirklees metropolitan council to assist with the removal of surplus places; and what is the sum allocated.

Mr. Robin Squire: Kirklees metropolitan council bid for £445,000 in its 1995–96 annual capital guidelines to assist with the removal of surplus places. The notional allocation came to £165,000.

It is, however, for Kirklees to decide how much of the ACG is spent on surplus place removal.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State of Education how much her Department is allowing Kirklees metropolitan council in capital allocation, permission to borrow, for the upgrading of science facilities at St. John Fisher RC high school in Dewsbury.

Mr. Robin Squire: Kirklees metropolitan council has been allocated £16,000 to cover its liability on improvement minor works projects at voluntary aided and special agreement schools in 1995–96. The St. John Fisher RC high school project is in this category in the LEA's bid. All LEAs have received an allocation for their liability on such projects based on 20 per cent. of the total allocated for governors' expenditure.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the bids for capital allocation—permission to borrow—submitted by Kirklees metropolitan council for 1995–96 and the projects and amounts approved and rejected.

Mr. Robin Squire: The council's annual capital guideline for county and voluntary controlled schools for 1995–96 has been calculated on the following basis. It is, however, for the LEA to use the allocation as it wishes.

	Bid	*Allocation*
Commitments	£1,473,000	£1,026,000 (Provisional Indicator of £1,022,000, plus £4,000 for Fartown surplus place removal)
Basic need	£594,000	£137,000 (For Shelley First and Shelley High; bids for Fixby and Lydgate were unsuccessful)
Surplus place removal	£445,000	£165,000 (For Birkenshaw, Slaithwaite, Wooldale, Shepley and Marsden. Cover for Royd Edge bid was placed in the 1995–96 Reserve. Kaye Lorpe and Deighton bids were unsuccessful)
Special education	£1,085,000	Nil (unsuccessful bids were for Fairfield, Highfield and Turnshaws schools)
VA liability	£20,000	£16,000 (Formula allocation; St. Saviour's bid placed in the Reserve and All Saints bid was unsuccessful)
Remainder	£6,145,000	£110,000 (given by a national formula)
Total	£9,762,000	£1,455,000

Temporary Classrooms

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many temporary classrooms are in current use in each local education authority area in England and Wales.

Mr. Robin Squire: This information is not held centrally.

University of Cornwall

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will give her support to proposals to set up a university of Cornwall.

Mr. Boswell: Support in the form of public funding for this purpose is a matter for the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Schools Budgets

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make a statement about the amount by which Lancashire county council intends to cut its delegated schools budget; and if she will list the percentage increases and decreases of other local education authorities' schools budgets.

Mr. Robin Squire: Lancashire county council has provisionally fixed the size of its general schools budget for 1995–96, but the amount within that to be delegated to schools will not be finally determined until March. The information requested on other local education authorities' plans for their 1995–96 delegated school budgets is not yet available: authorities do not have to publish details of school budgets for that year until 31 March 1995.

Lancashire County Council

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when her Department last raised the base of surplus places in schools with Lancashire county council; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: The Department has had no specific contact with Lancashire county council on the issue of surplus places. In January 1994, there were 12,398—9 per cent.—primary surplus school places and 11,754—13 per cent.—secondary surplus school places in Lancashire LEA. Pupil population growth and the authority's plans to rationalise some provision will reduce the amount of surplus from these levels.

Surplus School Places

Mr. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the latest figure for surplus school places for Hampshire local education authority.

Mr. Robin Squire: In January 1994, there were 18,287—13 per cent.—primary surplus school places and 10,114—12 per cent.—secondary surplus school places in Hampshire LEA. The authority has recently completed a reorganisation which, together with pupil population growth, will have reduced the amount of surplus from these levels.

Staff Ratios

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will make an assessment of the ratio of administrative employees to teaching staff in each local education authority in England and Wales.

Mr. Robin Squire: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Local Education Authorities

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent per *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary pupil in each of the local education authorities in England in the most recent year for which figures are available, at constant prices.

Mr. Robin Squire: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) on 21 February, *Official Report* column *177–79.*

Feversham College, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if an official or Ministers at any time since Feversham college in Bradford submitted an application for the college to be guaranteed voluntary aided status have suggested that the college might consider applying for grant-maintained status; if applying for grant-maintained status enables schools to obtain loans from her Department for capital and revenue purposes before a decision on the application is made; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: Neither Ministers nor officials of the Department have suggested Feversham college might consider applying for grant-maintained status. The Department does not make loans available to the promoters of any school to approval of their proposals to become a voluntary aided or a grant-maintained school. The Funding Agency for Schools does not have powers to make loans to promoters of new grant-maintained schools.

Free School Meals

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what percentage of children either take or are entitled to free school meals at *(a)* William Parker school, *(b)* Helenswood, *(c)* Hillcrest, *(d)* The Grove, *(e)* Filsham Valley in Hastings and *(f)* Thomas Peacock in Rye.

Mr. Robin Squire: The information, from returns made by schools to the Department, is as follows:

School meal arrangements January 1994

	Number of day pupils	*Day pupils taking free meals*	*Pupils known to be eligible*
William Parker school	1,197	143 [12 per cent.]	210 [18 per cent.]
Helenswood school	1,073	159 [15 per cent.]	236 [22 per cent.]
Hillcrest school	1,250	158 [13 per cent.]	300 [24 per cent.]
The Grove school	1,340	255 [19 per cent.]	412 [31 per cent.]
Thomas Peacock community college	928	90 [10 per cent.]	147 [16 per cent.]

Figures are not available for Filsham Valley school, which did not open until September 1994.

Staffordshire County Council

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent in total on education in Staffordshire in each of the past 20 years, at constant prices.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table below shows total expenditure by Staffordshire local education authority from 1974–75 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available. These figures have not been adjusted for any changes of function.

Staffordshire county council

	Gross expenditure (1994–95 prices) £ million
1974–75	460.1
1975–76	472.9
1976–77	478.9
1977–78	460.0
1978–79	470.0
1979–80	460.2
1980–81	468.3
1981–82	475.8
1982–83	465.2
1983–84	470.4
1984–85	458.3
1985–86	449.2
1986–87	469.2
1987–88	481.9
1988–89	491.2
1989–90	466.5
1990–91	474.8
1991–92	479.3
1992–93	523.2
1993–94[1]	413.3

[1] Provisional.

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the pupil-teacher ratio in Staffordshire *(a)* in primary schools and *(b)* in secondary schools in each of the last 20 years.

Mr. Robin Squire: The pupil-teacher ratios in primary and secondary schools in Staffordshire in each of the last 20 years are shown in the table.

Pupil:teacher ratios in maintained primary and secondary schools in Staffordshire LEA
Position in January each year

Year	Primary	Secondary
1975	[1]—	[1]—
1976	24.2	17.2
1977	24.2	17.2
1978	23.8	17.0
1979	23.2	16.8
1980	22.5	16.7
1981	21.8	16.5
1982	22.4	16.6
1983	22.0	16.5
1984	22.3	16.4
1985	22.4	16.3
1986	22.8	16.6
1987	22.9	16.6
1988	23.2	16.4
1989	23.0	16.0
1990	23.3	15.8
1991	23.1	15.9
1992	23.5	16.1
1993	24.7	17.0
1994	25.1	17.5

[1] Not available.

Sir David Knox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how much was spent per pupil in Staffordshire *(a)* in primary schools and *(b)* in secondary schools in each of the past 20 years, at constant prices.

Mr. Robin Squire: The table shows expenditure by Staffordshire local education authority on *(a)* pre-primary and primary pupils combined, and on *(b)* secondary pupils from 1974–75 to 1993–94, the latest year for which provisional outturn figures are available.

Staffordshire County Council
Spending per pupil (1994–95 prices)

	Nursery/Primary	Secondary
1974–75	1,197	1,943
1975–76	1,204	2,006
1976–77	1,223	1,949
1977–78	1,167	1,828
1978–79	1,180	1,821
1979–80	1,195	1,783
1980–81	1,186	1,640
1981–82	1,253	1,711
1982–83	1,279	1,709
1983–84	1,324	1,763
1984–85	1,288	1,765
1985–86	1,281	1,822
1986–87	1,344	1,973
1987–88	1,418	2,113
1988–89	1,442	2,225
1989–90	1,451	2,247
1990–91	1,464	2,178
1991–92	1,527	2,236
1992–93	1,538	2,195
1993–94[1]	1,565	2,119

[1] Provisional.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. Howard: The information requested for the years 1991 and 1992 can be found in the reports of the Civil Service Commissioners for those years, which are available in the Library.

In 1993, two of the 10 fast streamers assigned to the Home Office were women, and one women joined the Department after deferring entry from an earlier year. In 1994 both those assigned were men.

Drug Abuse (Prisons)

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received alleging that prison staff may condone drug abuse in the interests of avoiding disruption in prisons.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Frank Cook, dated 28 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about representations received alleging that prison staff may condone drug abuse in the interests of avoiding disruption in prisons.

I have received one representation recently on this issue. Ministers have received none.

The Prison Service does not tolerate the use of illicit drugs within its establishments, nor do we accept staff condoning such use. This message will be reinforced shortly with the release of the new Prison Service drugs strategy.

A national drug testing programme for prisoners has just begun. This will emphasise further that the use of illicit drugs within prison is unacceptable and that anyone doing so will now run a far greater risk of being identified and punished.

Restriction Orders

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the people charged and to date fined as a result of offences committed before, during or after the recent Ireland *v.* England match in Dublin currently are subject to restriction orders.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Of those so far charged with offences connected to the Ireland *v.* England match on 15 February, none have been subject to restriction orders.

Refugees, Campsfield

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the compatibility of detention of refugees at Campsfield with the UN convention on refugees.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The Government are committed to their obligations under the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees, and the protocol to that convention, and are satisfied that United Kingdom legislation and practice do not breach these or other relevant international obligations.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those who have been detained at Campsfield over the past 12 months have *(a)* been given permission to remain in the United Kingdom as political refugees and *(b)* been deported to their country of origin.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many detainees in Campsfield have *(a)* died, *(b)* committed suicide and *(c)* attempted to commit suicide in the previous 12 months.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: No detainee has died or committed suicide at Campsfield house since it opened in November 1993. During the same period, two detainees have attempted to commit suicide.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those who have been detained at Campsfield over the past 12 months have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* been granted bail.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if all the detainees at Campsfield have *(a)* been told in writing why they are being detained and *(b)* been given the right to challenge that information in civil court.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: All immigration detainees at Campsfield house have been informed of the reasons for detention orally, in a language which they understand, with an interpreter present if necessary. They are entitled to challenge the lawfulness of their detention by applying for a writ of habeas corpus or by seeking judicial review.

I do not believe that any further written notification of the reasons for detention is necessary. All detainees are informed of their rights of appeal to the independent immigration appellate authorities, but the question of any legal challenge would be a matter for their representatives.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list *(a)* the nationalities, *(b)* the gender and *(c)* the age and the number of each nationality of all those currently detained at Campsfield detention centre;

(2) for how long the person who has been detained for the longest period of time has been in Campsfield detention centre;

(3) how many people are currently detained in Campsfield detention centre.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: On 18 February 1995, 191 people were detained in the immigration detention centre, Campsfield house.

A breakdown by age is as follows:

	Number
Under 18	0
18–20	4
21–30	102
31–40	67
41–50	18
Over 50	0
Total	191

A breakdown by nationalities and gender is as follows:

Nationality	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Albania	3	—	3
Algeria	7	1	8
Angola	4	—	4
Bangladesh	6	—	6
Cameroon	2	—	2
China	4	—	4
Colombia	1	2	3
Cyprus	10	—	10
Ecuador	1	1	2
Ghana	17	7	24
India	13	1	14
Ivory Coast	1	2	3
Jamaica	1	3	4
Kenya	—	3	3
Lebanon	1	—	1
Malaysia	1	—	1
Mauritius	1	—	1
Morocco	3	—	3
Niger	2	—	2
Nigeria	40	10	50
Pakistan	12	—	12
Philippines	—	1	1
Romania	1	—	1
Senegal	2	—	2
Sierra Leone	1	2	3
Somalia	1	—	1
South Africa	1	—	1
Sri Lanka	2	—	2
Sudan	—	1	1
Togo	1	—	1
Turkey	9	—	9
Uganda	—	1	1
Yugoslavia (former)	2	—	2
Zaire	5	—	5
Nationality doubtful	—	1	1
Total	155	36	191

The detainee who has been in Campsfield house for the longest period has been there since 5 March 1994.

Pop Festivals, Isle of Wight

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers the police have *(a)* to refuse and *(b)* to control pop festivals on the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Maclean: The grant or refusal of a licence for such events is at the discretion of the local authorities concerned, but in coming to their decisions they are required to have regard to any observations submitted to them by the police or fire authority. Chief officers of police do not themselves have powers to refuse such an event.

Part V of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 gives the police a new power, where two or more people are making preparations, for a large-scale rave on land in the open air or where 10 or more people have gathered on a site to attend a rave which is likely to cause serious distress to the local community through amplified music being played during the night, to direct those people to leave the land. It is a criminal offence to ignore the direction.

These measures are specifically aimed at the public nuisance of unlicensed night time raves on land which can cause a great deal of distress to local residents.

Crime, Lancashire

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about levels of crime in Lancashire.

Mr. Maclean: In the 12 months to June 1994, there were 128,534 recorded offences in Lancashire, a fall of 6.9 per cent. over the previous 12 months. The decrease for England and Wales as a whole was 5.5 per cent.

North-east London Probation Service

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders were supervised by the north-east London probation service on 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The latest available information is for December 1993, when the number of offenders supervised by the north-east London probation service was 3,887.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many court reports were completed by the north-east London probation service during 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: North-east London probation service completed 4,367 pre-sentence reports, social inquiry reports, family court reports and other reports for courts in 1992 and 5,105 such reports in 1993.

Gambling

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy in respect of stimulating the demand for gambling.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government's policy is to ensure that people are free to gamble if they wish but that there should be some controls on the encouragement of gambling. These controls will vary according to the type of gambling.

I am currently reviewing the controls on the advertising of commercial gambling and plan to go out to consultation in May.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish an independent panel to adjudicate on the cases of all those who seek asylum in Britain and are detained.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The decision to detain a person under Immigration Act powers is taken by a chief immigration officer or above and is reviewed within 24 hours by an immigration inspector. Thereafter, detention is reviewed locally at least every seven days and after one month the case is reviewed at immigration service headquarters monthly and at an increasingly senior level.

There is also an extensive system under which bail may be sought. Anyone refused asylum has a right of appeal and anyone who has an appeal pending may apply to the independent immigration appellate authorities for bail at any stage until the appeal has been finally determined. In addition, any passenger who has been detained for longer than seven days pending further examination may apply for bail to the appellate authorities. Detention may also be challenged in the courts by way of an application for habeas corpus, or bail may be sought from the courts once a case is before them in an application for judicial review. The Government believe that the internal review procedures, together with the opportunities available to apply for bail or to challenge detention through the courts, provide adequate safeguards and that a further independent review process is not justified.

Burglary

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to reduce the numbers of burglaries in England.

Mr. Maclean: Throughout the country, police forces have set up many initiatives which are successfully impacting on the number of domestic burglaries. The Metropolitan police's operation "Bumblebee" is the most widely known. West Yorkshire has run a "Hands Off" domestic burglary campaign and the Huddersfield division is currently developing and implementing a strategy for preventing repeat burglary. The Home Office will continue to encourage police forces to develop effective anti-burglary initiatives, including the project tackling the problem of repeat victimisation, and will support the police through its crime prevention training, publicity and research programmes.

Life Sentences

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 February, *Official Report*, column *589*, if he will name the prisoners who have been informed that Ministers have set a whole life tariff.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. The prisoners concerned have the right to make representations about the tariff set by previous Ministers. If they do so, their case will be considered afresh. No decision has yet been made in any of these cases. It would therefore be inappropriate to name the prisoners at this stage.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was his Department's expenditure on *(a)* prisons and *(b)* the probation service in Wales in the latest available year.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The net operating costs of Welsh prisons in 1993–94 were £18.8 million.

Expenditure by Welsh probation areas in 1993–94 was £18.4 million. The Home Office meets 80 per cent. of this expenditure and the responsible local authorities meet the remaining 20 per cent.

Pollok Free State

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what assessment he has made of the statement by the self-styled Pollok free state in Glasgow that foreign nationals are occupying the area claimed; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action he proposes to take to review the passports and visas held by the foreign nationals currently occupying the self-styled Pollok free state in Glasgow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I understand that people, including a number of overseas nationals, are protesting against the construction of the M77 motorway through the Pollok area of south-west Glasgow and have been using the area adjacent to the construction site to enter it.

I understand that while there are believed to be a number of overseas nationals involved in the protest, there is no information to suggest that any of them has breached the immigration laws. If the immigration service receives such information, it will be investigated and appropriate action will be taken.

Ethnic Minorities

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the allocation of section 11 grant for 1995–96 for each local authority, school or college *(a)* following the recent applications round and *(b)* in respect of existing projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to announce his decisions on applications made by local education authorities under section 11.

Mr. Howard: I am announcing today the outcome of the bidding round for new section 11 projects from 1995–96. Applicants are being informed. As I announced in reply to a question from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Sir I. Lawrence) on 22 November, *Official Report*, column *64*, we have doubled the amount of funding on offer in each of the next two financial years to around £30 million. In deciding on the allocation of the funding, I gave highest priority to applications concerned with addressing additional educational needs among members of ethnic minorities, and particularly those seeking provision for the teaching of English as a second language in schools. Authorities and local communities will be pleased to learn that it has been possible to accommodate the key needs in this category of all authorities whose current section 11 funding is due to run out entirely at the end of this financial year.

The table shows the allocations in relation to 1995–96 for new projects and for existing projects, allocations for which were recently notified separately to authorities and institutions.

Section 11 Budget allocations for 1995–96
Existing and new projects

Grant recipient	*New projects*	*Existing projects*	*Total allocation*
Local authorities and other public bodies			
Avon	568,144	0	568,144
Barking and Dagenham	258,362	0	258,362
Barnet	166,208	609,490	775,698
Bedfordshire	0	1,988,238	1,988,238
Berkshire	10,110	715,258	725,368
Bexley	19,900	110,848	130,748
Birmingham	43,676	3,324,125	3,367,801
Bolton	76,430	501,946	578,376
Bradford	3,612,026	0	3,612,026
Brent	155,693	986,294	1,141,987
Bromley	24,264	0	24,264
Buckinghamshire	884,119	0	884,119
Bury	0	300,468	300,468
Calderdale	0	709,517	709,517
Cambridgeshire	25,253	862,061	887,314
Camden	1,438,340	0	1,438,340
Cardiff	8,119	0	8,119

Section 11 Budget allocations for 1995–96
Existing and new projects

Grant recipient	*New projects*	*Existing projects*	*Total allocation*
Cheshire	0	68,369	68,369
Cleveland	93,483	323,058	416,541
Coventry	86,295	1,781,970	1,868,265
Croydon	431,698	678,440	1,110,138
Derbyshire	139,725	964,843	1,104,568
Devon	35,891	10,850	46,741
Doncaster MBC	0	86,240	86,240
Dorset	23,101	0	23,101
Dudley	776,954	0	776,954
Durham	0	117,811	117,811
Ealing	1,176,997	0	1,176,997
East Sussex	66,725	113,948	180,673
Enfield	423,923	810,966	1,234,889
Essex	24,258	0	24,258
Gateshead	25,803	0	25,803
Gloucestershire	68,213	185,988	254,201
Greenwich	845,944	0	845,944
Gwent	186,024	52,321	238,345
Hackney	147,091	2,377,959	2,525,050
Hammersmith and Fulham	449,738	0	449,738
Hampshire	0	513,435	513,435
Haringey	286,944	1,804,773	2,091,717
Harrow	27,286	496,519	523,805
Havering	35,875	0	35,875
Hereford and Worcester	177,430	0	177,430
Hertfordshire	29,319	1,340,169	1,369,488
Hillingdon	122,663	203,954	326,617
Hounslow	439,279	624,548	1,063,827
Humberside	17,187	232,011	249,198
Hyndburn	8,593	0	8,593
Islington	1,343,833	0	1,343,833
Kensington and Chelsea	0	721,151	721,151
Kent	174,943	736,981	911,924
Kingston	0	83,838	83,838
Kirklees	1,962,654	0	1,962,654
Lambeth	1,605,407	0	1,605,407
Lancashire	579,948	3,319,356	3,899,304
Leeds	118,702	709,138	827,840
Leicester	86,481	0	86,481
Leicestershire	165,605	2,399,322	2,564,927
Lewisham	1,069,847	0	1,069,847
Lincolnshire	18,640	52,332	70,972
Liverpool	127,746	112,985	240,731
London Boroughs Grants Committee	22,454	0	22,454
Manchester	243,642	1,937,597	2,181,239
Merton	136,574	415,668	552,242
Middlesborough	9,245	0	9,245
Milton Keynes	24,704	0	24,704
Newcastle	0	209,981	209,981
Newham	304,556	1,287,757	1,592,313
Norfolk	121,671	0	121,671
North Tyneside	0	95,879	95,879
North Yorkshire	0	44,675	44,675
Northamptonshire	114,936	324,943	439,879
Nottingham	57,122	0	57,122
Nottinghamshire	427,113	793,892	1,221,005
Oldham	91,495	1,595,492	1,686,987
Oxford	10,009	0	10,009
Oxfordshire	0	425,844	425,844
Peterborough	9,345	0	9,345
Redbridge	218,881	730,452	949,333
Redditch	13,686	0	13,686
Richmond	0	47,343	47,343
Rochdale	27,298	904,920	932,218
Rotherham	320,381	0	320,381
Salford	75,910	0	75,910
Sandwell	0	1,044,197	1,044,197
Sheffield	180,465	973,053	1,153,518
Shropshire	90,052	0	90,052
Somerset	28,875	0	28,875

Section 11 Budget allocations for 1995–96
Existing and new projects

Grant recipient	New projects	Existing projects	Total allocation
South Glamorgan	0	344,337	344,337
South Tyneside	99,071	0	99,071
South Yorkshire FCDA	12,328	0	12,328
Southampton	8,701	0	8,701
Southwark	710,672	0	710,672
St. Albans	28,070	0	28,070
St. Helens	15,367	0	15,367
Staffordshire	191,337	560,176	751,513
Stockport	0	70,839	70,839
Suffolk	11,121	196,388	207,509
Sunderland	0	79,456	79,456
Surrey	0	247,145	247,145
Sutton	71,781	0	71,781
Tameside	11,446	327,957	339,403
Tower Hamlets	120,688	4,958,796	5,079,484
Trafford	0	210,477	210,477
Wakefield	241,630	0	241,630
Walsall	1,198,599	0	1,198,599
Waltham Forest	23,080	1,266,507	1,289,587
Wandsworth	0	1,112,048	1,112,048
Warwickshire	762,421	0	762,421
West Glamorgan	244,221	0	244,221
West Midlands FCDA	56,191	0	56,191
West Sussex	0	192,511	192,511
West Yorkshire FCDA	51,142	0	51,142
Westminster	179,121	1,217,389	1,396,510
Wigan	57,627	0	57,627
Wiltshire	0	109,967	109,967
Wirral	0	65,439	65,439
Wolverhampton	1,185,096	0	1,185,096
Grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges			
Ash Green GM school	6,351	0	6,351
Beechview Middle GM school	6,913	0	6,913
Bishop Challoner RG GM school	5,298	0	5,298
Brentside High school	20,220	0	20,220
Brushwood Middle GM school	4,676	0	4,676
Burntwood GM school	0	50,820	50,820
Castle Hall GM school	6,976	0	6,976
Castlefield GM school	70,257	0	70,257
Chadwell Heath GM school	0	13,583	13,583
Claremont GM school	41,374	0	41,374
Copland Community school	63,693	0	63,693
Deacons school	23,003	0	23,003
Desborough school	11,627	0	11,627
Djanogly City Technology college	23,001	0	23,001
Dormers Wells Infants GM school	45,021	0	45,021
Dormers Wells Junior GM school	29,747	0	29,747
Drayton Manor school	25,275	0	25,275
Dunraven GM school	24,264	0	24,264
Francis Bacon school	13,143	0	13,143
George Dixon GM school	0	78,054	78,054
Graveney GM school	41,399	0	41,399
Greenford High school	55,656	0	55,656
Greenwood Dale school	23,828	0	23,828
Hall Green GM school	11,447	0	11,447
Hamilton Combined GM school	42,936	0	42,936
Hendon GM school	33,515	0	33,515
Holly Hall GM school	19,715	0	19,715
Holy Trinity school	10,182	0	10,182

Section 11 Budget allocations for 1995–96
Existing and new projects

Grant recipient	New projects	Existing projects	Total allocation
John Kelly Girls' Technical college	11,491	12,872	24,363
London Oratory GM school	27,868	0	27,868
Manor Park GM school	0	9,755	9,755
Marlborough GM school	0	18,347	18,347
Myton GM school	18,616	0	18,616
Northampton Boys GM school	11,615	0	11,615
Northolt High school	17,693	0	17,693
Prospect school	10,666	0	10,666
Queens Park GM school	75,825	0	75,825
Radcliffe GM school	11,627	0	11,627
Reading Girls school	11,472	0	11,472
Sacred Heart RC school	5,781	0	5,781
Salesian college	0	15,526	15,526
Small Heath school	62,991	0	62,991
St. Andrews RC GM school	13,329	0	13,329
St. Luke's GM school	0	1,508	1,508
St. Marks West Essex GM school	5,055	0	5,055
Stantonbury Campus	12,181	0	12,181
Stopsley High school	5,308	0	5,308
Stratford GM school	34,775	0	34,775
Surrey Square GM school	16,520	0	16,520
Wood End Infant GM school	7,406	0	7,406
Wood End Junior GM school	4,945	0	4,945
Wrenn GM school	25,199	0	25,199
Colleges of further education			
Arnold and Carlton college	17,964	47,620	65,584
Bexley FE college	9,782	0	9,782
Birmingham FE Consortium	950,000	0	950,000
Cambridge Regional college	15,165	0	15,165
Charles Keene college	210,000	0	210,000
City college Manchester	0	72,798	72,798
City and Islington college	52,000	0	52,000
Clarendon college	50,000	0	50,000
Coventry Technical college	26,539	0	26,539
Crawley college	4,158	0	4,158
Croydon college	36,752	0	36,752
Ealing Tertiary college	70,000	0	70,000
Enfield FE college	46,016	0	46,016
Greenhill college	130,000	0	130,000
Hackney Community college	46,759	0	46,759
Hendon college	106,155	0	106,155
Huddersfield Technical college	19,585	0	19,585
Kingsway college	25,000	0	25,000
Language and Literacy Unit Southwark	59,766	0	59,766
Luton 6th Form college	0	60,221	60,221
Mancat	0	30,079	30,079
Newham FE college	160,000	0	160,000
Oaklands college	43,000	0	43,000
Park Lane college	43,478	0	43,478
Sandwell college	0	36,928	36,928
Sheffield college	130,000	0	130,000
South Nottingham college	17,490	0	17,490
Southgate college	49,741	0	49,741
St. Francis Xavier 6th Form college	12,615	8,631	21,246
Tameside college of Technology	32,352	0	32,352

Section 11 Budget allocations for 1995–96
Existing and new projects

Grant recipient	New projects	Existing projects	Total allocation
Thomas Danby college	17,591	0	17,591
Tile Hill college	48,023	0	48,023
Tower Hamlets college	70,000	0	70,000
Uxbridge college	11,122	0	11,122
West Hertfordshire college	50,000	0	50,000
Wirral FE college	0	10,121	10,121

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Howard: None.

Female Prisoners

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women with children under five years of age are in prison at the present time.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Helen Jackson, dated 28 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about how many women with children under five years of age are in prison at the present time.

No information is held centrally on this subject. However, a census of mothers in prison is being undertaken by the Home Office Research and Planning Unit and the findings will provide information on the number of women with children under five years of age. It is expected that preliminary results will be available in June and a full report in September.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women are in Her Majesty's prisons in Britain currently one year ago, and five years ago; and what percentage this is of the total prison population.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mrs. Helen Jackson, dated 28 February 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question asking how many women are in Her Majesty's prisons in Britain currently, one year ago, and five years ago; and what percentage this is of the total prison population.

The total number of women, and the percentages of the total prison population, on 17 February 1995, and at the end of January in the years 1994 and 1990 in England and Wales and Scotland are given in the attached table.

The number of women in prison in England, Wales and Scotland, and the percentage of the total prison population

Date	Number of women	Percentage of total prison population[3]
17 February 1995	2,117	3.8
January 1994[1]	1,808	3.5
January 1990[2]	1,811	3.5

[1] The population for England and Wales is for 31 January 1994, and for Scotland is for 28 January 1994.
[2] The population for England and Wales is for 31 January 1990, and for Scotland is for 26 January 1990.
[3] Total population includes persons held in police cells.

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of female prisoners and the percentage of the total figures in each European Union country.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The countries of the European Union are covered by the statistics collated by the Council of Europe. The latest available information is given in the table. An article, "International comparisons of prison populations", by Collier and Tarling—Home Office research bulletin No. 23, pages 48 to 54—showed that the figures for different countries are unlikely to be strictly comparable because the definitions of prisons and prisoners vary from one country to another, reflecting different legal and administrative systems.

Female prison population in each of the countries of the European Union as at 1 September 1993[1]

Country	Number	Proportion of prison population
Belgium	348	4.8
Denmark	178	4.8
France	2,100	4.1
Germany	2,803	4.3
Greece	300	4.6
Ireland	34	1.6
Italy	2,775	5.5
Luxembourg	16	3.8
Netherlands	339	4.3
Portugal	795	7.3
Spain	4,300	9.4
United Kingdom	1,896	3.6

[1] Provisional figures.

Tote

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the future of the Horserace Totalisator Board.

Mr. Howard: I have been considering the future of the Horserace Totalisator Board, the Tote. In 1991, the Home Affairs Select Committee recommended that the Tote should be vested in a racing body which was truly responsible to representative groups of all who work in the industry. In their response, the Government accepted that the position of the Tote was anomalous but accepted the Committee's view that at that time no suitable body in the racing industry existed.

There have been a number of significant developments in the racing industry since 1991 including, most significantly, the setting up of the British Horseracing Board. I therefore believe that the time is now right to take forward consideration of the Committee's recommendation. I therefore intend to review the options

for the Tote in a way which preserves the extent to which racing benefits from the Tote's activities.

Any change to the Tote's status would require primary legislation. Before that, there will be full consultation on the many practical issues to be addressed with interested parties, including the Tote itself, the racing industry and bookmakers.

I intend to address all these issues in a consultation document which will be issued in the next six months.

In taking forward this process, I think it very desirable that we continue to benefit from Lord Wyatt's experience and expertise. I have therefore asked him to stay on as chairman for a further two years to enable him to contribute to the review process. This will be his last term and I would hope that by the end of his tenure a new framework for the organisation of the Tote will have been decided.

In addition, I have decided that in view of its role as the governing authority for racing in Britain, the British Horseracing Board should have its own seat on the Tote Board.

Research (Prisoners)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what public opinion research has been carried out since 1992 by or on behalf of his Department or the Prison Service Agency relating to prisoners and at what cost; and if he will place copies in the Library.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 8 February 1995]:* In January 1994, following a competitive tender, the Prison Service commissioned Market and Opinion Research International Ltd. to carry out some research into public attitudes towards the Prison Service for its own management purposes.

The total cost of the research work was £29,000, including VAT.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Repossession

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what help is being given to those who have lost their life assets through having their homes repossessed.

Mr. Roger Evans: People who become homeless through no fault of their own and who have a priority need for housing are eligible for rehousing by local authorities under the homelessness legislation. Furthermore, people whose homes have been repossessed may be entitled to housing benefit and council tax benefit, subject to the normal income and liability tests, where they move to rented accommodation. A number of other social security benefits are available to help people meet day-to-day living expenses.

Income-related Benefits

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women in (i) full and (ii) part-time employment receive housing or family income benefit;

(2) what is the number of people in work whose rates of take-home pay entitle them to housing or family income benefits.

Mr. Roger Evans: Information is not available in the precise form requested. The available information is in the table. Part-time employment has been interpreted to mean employment for fewer than 30 hours per week. Housing or family income benefits have been interpreted to mean housing benefit or family credit. A breakdown of full-time and part-time workers receiving housing benefit is not available.

In addition to those actually receiving family credit and housing benefit, there will be some families who have not taken up their entitlement to benefit. Latest estimates of housing benefit take-up, which are for 1992, show that between 310,000 and 600,000 people, 7 to 12 per cent. of those eligible, are not taking up their entitlement. Not all of these people will be in work. It is estimated that in 1991 and 1992, 160,000 families had levels of take-home pay that would bring entitlement to family credit if a claim were made.

From July 1995, a £10 premium will be introduced in family credit for those working 30 hours or more per week. It is estimated that 345,000 families will benefit from this change, including 50,000 who will become newly entitled to family credit.

Benefit cases where the claimant and/or partner has earnings

Thousands

Benefit		*Numbers where main earner works full-time*	*Numbers where main earner works part-time*	*Total*
Family credit[1]	Male main earner	202.9	43.1	571.7
	Female main earner	97.5	228.2	
Housing benefit[2]	—	—	—	390

Notes:

[1] Source: Family credit statistical system—5 per cent., sample of awards at July 1994. Estimates are rounded to the nearest hundred.

[2] Source: Housing benefit management information system—annual 1 per cent. sample of awards at May 1993. Estimate has been rounded to the nearest thousand.

1. Cases refer to benefit units which may be a single person or a couple. In couple cases where both partners are working the sex of the main earner has been used.

2. Individuals may be in receipt of family credit and housing benefit at the same time. The final column cannot be totalled because of the overlap between the benefits.

Compensation Recovery Unit

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has for the contracting out of all or of some of the functions of the compensation recovery unit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: None.

Income Support

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of habitual residence tests on claimants for income support are conducted by interview; and what proportions of those who have failed the test were interviewed in person.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review paragraphs 4 and 13 of Schedule 2 of the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987.

Mr. Roger Evans: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants have been refused income support under the habitual residence test *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each Benefits Agency office in England, Wales and Scotland; and how many in each case have won the appeal against this decision.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Keith Bradley, dated 27 February 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for statistical information in connection with the habitual residence test for each Benefits Agency district office.

Information about the number of people refused Income Support after failing the habitual residence test has been collated for the period 1 August 1994 to 31 January 1994 and is provided at Annex A. The table shows the twenty one Benefits Agency Area Directorates that make up Great Britain and lists the districts that make up each area. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Housing and Council Tax Benefits information is collected annually from Local Authorities by the Department of Social Security. Habitual residency test figures will not be available until after the end of the financial year.

Data regarding the number of successful appeals, in cases where Income Support has been disallowed as a result of the application of the test, is not collected in the format requested; this could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Sir Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the net gain for a person who is on income support and has worked at £3.20 per hour for *(a)* eight hours and *(b)* 16 hours, showing calculations in each case.

Mr. Roger Evans *[pursuant to his reply, 17 February 1995, c.872–74]:* The table provided included an incorrect figure for net pay for eight hours work at £3.20 per hour. The figure should be £25.60, not £25.50 as shown in the second column of the first row. The correct information is in the table.

Gain from work at £3.20 per hour

Hours worked	*Pay*	*Income support*	*Rent*	*Housing benefit*	*Council tax*	*Council tax benefit*	*Total net income*	*Net income after payment of rent and council tax when in work*	*Net income after payment of rent and council tax when not in work*	*Net gain from work*
8	25.60	25.10	30.91	30.91	6.60	6.60	88.21	50.70	45.70	5.00
16	51.20	—	30.91	30.59	6.60	6.50	88.29	50.78	45.70	5.08

Notes:
1. The person is assumed to be single, aged 25 or over, living in local authority accommodation and liable for average council tax and local authority rent.
2. The person is assumed to take-up full entitlement to income support, housing benefit and council tax benefit.
3. Tax and national insurance contributions are not payable at the earnings levels shown.

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* in 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. Hague: The figures for 1991 and 1992 are contained in the Civil Service Commissioners report for the relevant year, copies of which are in the Library.

The figures for 1993 and 1994 are as follows:

Grade	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*	*Percentage of women*
1993				
Administration Trainee/Higher Executive Officer (Development)	6	5	11	45
Assistant Statistician	3	2	5	40
Economic Assistant	0	3	3	100
Trainee Statistician	1	2	3	67
1994				
Administration Trainee/Higher Executive Officer (Development)	4	5	9	56
Assistant Statistician	0	1	1	100
Economic Statistician	2	1	3	33
Trainee Statistician	1	0	1	0

Social Fund

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the number of grants to funeral expenses made by his Department each year since the introduction of the social fund, together with the total and average costs of such grants.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not available for the first year of the funeral payment

scheme—1987–88. Information for subsequent years is set out in the table.

Year	Number of awards (000)	Gross expenditure (£m)	Average award (£)
1988–89	37	18.4	497
1989–90	44	23.9	545
1990–91	49	29.7	612
1991–92	57	40.1	706
1992–93	63	49.5	789
1993–94	72	62.5	873
1 April 1994 to 31 January 1995	55	51.1	923

Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of housing benefit claimants have changed the address for which they were claiming during each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what proportion of them moved into more expensive properties in each of these years.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information requested is not available.

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what proportion of housing benefit claimants have their rents paid in full for housing benefit; and what the comparable figure was for each year since 1979;

(2) what proportion of new housing benefit claimants had their rents paid in full by housing benefit for each year since 1979.

Mr. Roger Evans: The available information is set out in the table. Data are not available prior to 1989 and no separate records are kept for new housing benefit claimants.

Housing Benefit recipients—proportion who have their rents paid in full by Housing Benefit

Inquiry	All HB recipients	HB recipients who have their eligible rent paid in full by HB (000s)	Proportion who have their eligible rent paid in full by HB (Percentage)
May 1989	3,939	2,302	58
May 1990	3,979	2,290	58
May 1991	4,021	2,315	58
May 1992	4,320	2,725	63
May 1993	4,521	2,941	65

Source:
Housing benefit management information system, annual 1 per cent. sample inquiries with and without income support, taken at the end of May for each year.
Notes:
1. The numbers given refer to the number of benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.
2. The numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand and the percentages to the nearest whole percent.
3. Information on actual rent is not available, therefore the data given relates to rent eligible for HB.

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research he has undertaken on the effect of the changes to the eligible amount of rent for housing benefit purposes announced in the December 1994 Budget on the willingness of private landlords and potential private landlords to let properties.

Mr. Roger Evans: No specific research on the impact on landlords of the proposed housing benefit changes has been undertaken. However, the Department of the Environment has been undertaking more general research into the motives, experience and future intentions of landlords. Both Departments will be monitoring closely the impact of the proposed changes on both landlords and tenants through on-going research surveys and specific studies as necessary.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security pursuant to his answer of 13 February to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), *Official Report*, column *536*, how many of those receiving invalidity benefit in Great Britain in 1993 *(a)* are single people and *(b)* have partners.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available in the form requested.

On average, in the years 1991 to 1993, 30 per cent. of invalidity benefit recipients were single, and 70 per cent had partners.

Source:
1991, 1992 and 1993 family expenditure surveys.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants since the advent of statutory sick pay have been refused invalidity benefit on the basis that they would not have otherwise qualified for the national insurance sickness benefit; if he will divide these totals down into men and women claimants; what were the main causes of the failure of claimants to have full contribution records; and how many nevertheless gained full statutory sick pay.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer Monday 13 February 1995]:* The available information for the last five years is shown in the table below. Earlier figures can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sickness benefit spells commencing in the period where 28 weeks statutory sick pay has previously been paid and the contribution conditions not satisfied

Period	Men	Women
4 April 1988 to 1 April 1989	1,000	3,000
3 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	1,000	4,000
2 April 1990 to 30 March 1991	2,000	5,000
1 April 1991 to 4 April 1992	1,000	3,000
6 April 1992 to 3 April 1993	[1]—	3,000

Notes:
1. If after 28 weeks statutory sick pay has been paid and the contribution condition is not satisfied, the claimant is not entitled to invalidity benefit and the spell becomes a sickness benefit spell.
2. The information is based on a 1 per cent. sample of claimants to benefit within Great Britain, rounded to the nearest thousand.
[1] Sample insufficient size to provide a figure.

Information on the reasons for claimants' failure to have full contribution records is not available.

Pensions

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to alter the retirement age for men and women; and when he is proposing to present measures to the House;

(2) what plans he has to make changes in the provision of state pensions.

Mr. Arbuthnot: We have issued two White Papers outlining the Government's proposals on state pension age and occupational and state pension provision. The first, "Equality in State Pension Age" (Cm 2420) was published in December 1993 and the second, "Security, Equality, Choice: The Future for Pensions" (Cm 2594) was published in June 1994, copies are available in the Library. The legislation needed to implement these proposals is included in the Pensions Bill, which was introduced into Parliament on 15 December 1994.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Hague: Three items have been received, all of which were invitations to Ministers to attend a drinks engagement on 1 March.

EMPLOYMENT

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Miss Widdecombe: Information on 1991 and 1992 is contained in the Civil Service Commissioners' reports for those years, copies of which are available in the Library.

The numbers and percentage of women recruited by the Employment Department from the civil service fast stream recruitment programme in 1993 and 1994 are shown in the following table:

Year	Number of women	Percentage of women
1993	14	67
1994	7	58

Training Schemes

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what instructions his Department has issued, when, and to whom, as to the mechanisms required to monitor *(a)* youth training scheme performance, *(b)* adult training schemes' performance and *(c)* financial performance by training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Paice: The monitoring and financial information which the Department requires from training and enterprise councils is set out in the TEC operating agreement and TEC annual funding agreement. The TEC management information guide gives further details to TECs on what information is required. These documents are revised annually and are available in the Library.

Out-of-school Child Care Initiative

Mr. Pearson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information is currently available, or will be available shortly, on *(a)* the labour market impact of the out-of-school child care initiative and *(b)* the number of projects achieving the self-financing criteria.

Miss Widdecombe: An interim evaluation of the initiative was published on 8 February this year by the Department in its research series under the title "The Out-of-School Childcare Grant Initiative: an Interim Evaluation". At the time when the evaluation was carried out, it was too early to assess the labour market impact of the initiative and few schemes had reached the end of their period of grant support. I will arrange for a copy of the evaluation to be placed in the Library.

A further evaluation is currently in progress. The results will be available in late 1995.

Health and Safety (Fire)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, if the restriction contained within paragraph 12 of schedule 3 to the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 permits him to make regulations under that Act relating to general fire safety matters.

Mr. Oppenheim: Paragraph 12 of schedule 3 to the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 provides that health and safety regulations may require, in specified circumstances, the taking of specified precautions in connection with the risk of fire. Paragraph 23 of that schedule defines "specified" as specified in the regulations. This therefore enables regulations to relate to general fire precautions if the circumstances and precautions are specified in the regulations and the regulations are made for the general purposes of the Act as set out in section 1.

Young People (Employment)

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people are employed as full-time workers; and what this number is as a proportion of the total number of full-time employed in each industrial sector;

(2) how many young people are employed in each industrial sector; and if he will give the figures as a proportion of the total number employed in each sector.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested is given in the following tables:

Full-time employees and self-employed aged 16 to 24 working in the following industry sectors in Great Britain Summer: 1994

	Thousands	*As proportion of all ages (per cent.)*
Agriculture and Fishing	57	14
Energy and Water	29	10
Manufacturing	650	15
Construction	246	15
Services	1,831	15

All employees and self employed aged 16 to 24 working in the following industry sectors in Great Britain Summer: 1994

	Thousands	As proportion of all ages (per cent.)
Agriculture and Fishing	68	14
Energy and Water	29	9
Manufacturing	689	14
Construction	253	14
Services	2,763	16

Source:
Labour Force Survey.

Defence Industry, North-west

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what is his estimate of the number of people employed in the defence industry in the north-west region.

Mr. Oppenheim: The information requested is not available.

South Thames Training and Enterprise Council

Mrs. Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what severance package the former director of finance for South Thames training and enterprise council received when he left his post in August 1994.

Mr. Paice: I have no knowledge of this, nor would it be appropriate for me to seek such commercial information from the board of South Thames training and enterprise council.

Child Labour

Mrs. Llin Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is *(a)* the total amount of compensation paid to children injured in employment and *(b)* the number of children who received awards for the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Oppenheim: Children who are injured while working as a result of their employer's negligence may be entitled to compensation from the employer under civil law. Details of compensation paid by employers or their insurers to children is not available.

Mrs. Llin Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many children were killed or injured while in employment for the last year for which figures were available.

Mr. Oppenheim: For 1993–94, the provisional figures for fatal and other injuries to employees aged under 16 reported to the Health and Safety Executive's field operations division inspectorates and local authorities are:

Severity of injury

	Number of injuries[1]
Fatal	1
Major[2]	21
Over-three-day[3]	16
Total	38

[1]Including injuries to trainees.
[2]As defined under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985.
[3]Any other injury that results in incapacity for normal work for more than three days.

Football Pools

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the recent job losses announced by *(a)* Littlewoods and *(b)* Vernons.

Miss Widdecombe: Job losses are always regrettable and I sympathise with all those adversely affected. However, companies have to adjust to remain competitive in changing markets. The gambling sector is no exception, but the pools companies, as recently announced by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, will be allowed to advertise on television and modernise their operations in a number of other ways. People who are unfortunate enough to lose their jobs from any sector can benefit from the Department's extensive range of measures designed to help them find new jobs, re-train or set up in business.

EU Industrial Hazards Directive

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 15 February, *Official Report,* column *703,* if he has now decided upon the view on proposals put forward to be taken by his Department in respect of amendments to the EC industrial hazards directive 82/501.

Mr. Oppenheim: The European Parliament considered amendments suggested by its members to the proposed Council directive on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances at its session on 16 February. The amendment to article 15 of the proposed directive was agreed by the European Parliament, but I understand that the Commission of the European Communities has not accepted it and the amendment will not therefore be put to member states for consideration.

It is the view of the Health and Safety Executive and of the Department of Environment, which jointly lead on negotiations on the proposed directive, that the existing arrangements under directive EC 82/501 for member states to notify the Commission of major accidents has worked well and should continue. But no useful purpose would be served by having a duplicate requirement on member states to provide the same information to another EC institution.

Pregnant Employees

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received in the past year concerning the impact of European Union directive 92/85 and the Commencement No. 3 and Transitional Provision Order 1994, SI 1365, on the problems faced by pregnant employees handling horses.

Mr. Oppenheim: Ministerial colleagues and I have received three such representations, all from the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

Horse Riding Organisations

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received from the Association of British Riding Schools and the British Horse Society in the past year; and what meetings he has

held with representatives of these organisations within the same period.

Mr. Oppenheim: None.

Training Schemes (Women)

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many women are currently on Government training schemes by *(a)* training scheme and *(b)* individual TEC; and what is the overall figure as a percentage of the overall number of trainees on Government training schemes.

Mr. Paice: The information requested is given in the following table. The information covers those leaving youth training and training for work between April and September 1994. As these figures are estimated from incomplete information, it is possible only to give the percentage of women leavers and not the actual numbers.

April 1994 to September 1994

England and Wales and TECs	*Percentage of youth training leavers who were female*	*Percentage of training for work leavers who were female*
England and Wales	42	30
Bedfordshire TEC	41	29
Central and South Cambridgeshire TEC	39	32
North Derbyshire TEC	37	20
South Derbyshire TEC	47	37
Leicestershire TEC	43	29
Lincolnshire TEC	43	39
Norfolk and Waveney TEC	38	28
Northamptonshire TEC	47	30
Greater Nottingham TEC	41	23
North Nottinghamshire TEC	46	25
Greater Peterborough TEC	38	32
Suffolk TEC	45	31
County Durham TEC	38	23
Northumberland TEC	43	34
Teeside TEC	40	26
Tyneside TEC	39	25
Wearside TEC	n/a	25
Barnsley and Doncaster TEC	42	25
Bradford TEC	40	22
Calderdale—Kirklees	42	35
Humberside TEC	38	31
Leeds TEC	43	36
Rotherham TEC	43	22
Sheffield TEC	43	25
Wakefield TEC	40	16
North Yorkshire TEC	41	33
Bolton—Bury TEC	45	27
North Chesire TEC	46	33
South and East Chesire TEC	32	30
Cumbria TEC	41	36
East Lancashire TEC	40	32
West Lancashire TEC	42	28
Central Manchester TEC	42	24
Merseyside TEC	n/a	31
Oldham TEC	48	31
Rochdale TEC	43	26
St. Helens TEC	39	25
Stockport—High Peak	n/a	n/a
Wigan TEC	45	27
Wirral—Chester TEC	45	37
Birmingham TEC	n/a	n/a
Central England TEC	46	38
Coventry—Warwickshire TEC	43	30
Dudley TEC	45	22
Hereford—Worcestershire TEC	40	32
Sandwell TEC	45	28
Shropshire TEC	37	37
Staffordshire TEC	42	24
Walsall TEC	53	30
Wolverhampton TEC	46	36
Mid Glamorgan TEC	32	24
South Glamorgan TEC	n/a	n/a
Gwent TEC	40	29
Powys TEC	39	34
North East Wales TEC	42	28
North West Wales TEC	44	34
West Wales TEC	34	27
Avon TEC	46	36
Devon—Cornwall TEC	n/a	27
Dorset TEC	40	26
Gloucester TEC	42	25
Somerset TEC	39	28
Wiltshire TEC	39	31
Essex TEC	44	35
Hampshire TEC	40	31
Heart of England TEC	36	36
Hertfordshire TEC	36	32
Isle of Wight TEC	35	25
Kent TEC	44	31
Milton Keynes TEC	47	32
Surrey TEC	41	29
Sussex TEC	45	30
Thames Valley TEC	43	33
Aztec TEC	50	41
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	42	42
Brent, Harrow TEC	35	43
Islington, Hackney TEC	n/a	n/a
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	40	41
London East TEC	41	38
South London TEC	43	46
West London TEC	43	43
South Thames TEC	n/a	n/a

Source:
YT and TFW national leavers certificate databases.

Notes:
n/a—Not available due to low number of processed returns.

Ms Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the expenditure on women on training programmes by *(a)* training schemes and *(b)* individual TEC; and what is the figure as a percentage of overall expenditure on training.

Mr. Paice: The information requested is not available.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in this Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Miss Widdecombe: We have received one invitation to a reception from Messrs Ian Greer Associates.

Labour Force Survey (Women)

Ms Harriet Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 6 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *94*, if he will list for each year since 1984 *(a)* annually and *(b)* quarterly the number of women in Great Britain surveyed by the labour force survey who, although they are without a job, have looked for a job within the four weeks prior to their labour force survey interview or are waiting to start a job within the two weeks following their labour force survey interview, and the number of women who are neither in employment nor unemployed on the International Labour Organisation measure but who said that they would like a job, also expressing the number of women in both categories who are single parents.

Mr. Oppenheim: This information is available from the labour force survey and can be obtained via the Quantime LFS service available in the Library.

Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) who is the current Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members; what are the background and qualifications of the commissioner; how many days per week the commissioner is expected to work; and what remuneration the commissioner receives;

(2) what has been the total expenditure to date on the Commission for the Rights of Trade Union Members; how many staff are employed by the Commission; how many specific applications for help have been received since its establishment; and in how many cases actions have been pursued by the Commission.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the replies given to the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) on 17 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *852–61*.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to review the work and funding of the Commission on the Rights of Trade Union Members; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* Like other executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Department, the role and activities of the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members are monitored and reviewed in accordance with the arrangements set out in the Cabinet Office/HM Treasury publication "Non-Departmental Public Bodies: A Guide for Departments". The commissioner's grant in aid is reviewed annually as part of the normal public expenditure procedures.

Earnings

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) by what percentage the upper deciles weekly full-time earnings exceeded *(a)* the lowest deciles weekly full-time earnings for men, women and all full-time workers, *(b)* the lower quartiles weekly full-time earnings for men, women and all full-time workers, *(c)* the mean level of weekly full-time earnings for men, women and all full-time workers and *(d)* the upper quartiles weekly full-time earnings for men, women and all full-time workers in 1992;

(2) by what percentage the upper deciles weekly full-time earnings exceeded *(a)* the lowest deciles weekly full-time earnings for men, women and all full-time workers, *(b)* the lower quartiles weekly full-time earnings for men, women and all full-time workers, *(c)* the mean level of weekly full-time earnings for men, women and all full-time workers and *(d)* the upper quartiles weekly full-time earnings for men, women and all full-time workers in 1994;

(3) what was the percentage change in the gap between mean full-time weekly earnings and the upper quartiles full-time weekly earnings between 1992 and 1994 for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* all full-time workers;

(4) what was the percentage change in the gap between mean full-time weekly earnings and full-time weekly earnings for the upper decile between 1992 and 1994 for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* all full-time workers;

(5) what was the percentage change in the gap between mean weekly full-time earnings and the lower quartiles full-time weekly earnings between 1992 and 1994 for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* all full-time workers;

(6) what was the percentage change in the gap between mean full-time weekly earnings and the lowest deciles full-time weekly earnings between 1992 and 1994 for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* full-time workers;

(7) what was the percentage difference in pay rise between mean weekly full-time earnings and the lowest deciles weekly full-time earnings, adjusted for inflation, between 1992 and 1994 for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* all full-time workers;

(8) what was the percentage difference in pay rise between the upper deciles weekly full-time earnings and the upper quartiles weekly full-time earnings, adjusted for inflation, between 1992 and 1994 for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* all full-time workers;

(9) what was the percentage difference in pay rise between mean weekly full-time earnings and the lower quartiles weekly full-time earnings, adjusted for inflation, between 1992 and 1994 for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* all full-time workers;

(10) what was the percentage difference in pay rise between the upper deciles weekly full-time earnings and the lowest deciles weekly full-time earnings, adjusted for inflation, between 1992 and 1994 for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* all full-time workers;

(11) what was the percentage difference in pay rise between the upper deciles weekly full-time earnings and the lower quartiles weekly full-time earnings, adjusted for inflation, between 1992 and 1994 for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* all full-time workers;

(12) what was the percentage difference in pay rise between mean weekly full-time earnings and the upper deciles full-time weekly earnings, all adjusted for inflation, between 1992 and 1994 for *(a)* men *(b)* women and *(c)* all full-time workers;

(13) what was the percentage difference in pay rise between mean full-time weekly earnings and the upper quartiles full-time weekly earnings, adjusted for inflation, between 1992 and 1994 for *(a)* men, *(b)* women and *(c)* all full-time workers.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The mean, deciles, median and quartiles of weekly earnings for full-time men and women in 1992 and 1994 are published in table 15 of part A of the 1994 new

earnings survey report. Corresponding statistics for all full-time employees is in table 17.

The retail price index for April 1992 and for April 1994 can be found in table 6.4 of the *Employment Gazette* for June 1994. Changes in the index are in table 6.5.

Copies of both publications are available in the Library.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the statutory instruments which his Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The following is a list of statutory instruments produced by the Employment Department in the last 12 months:

List of Statutory Instruments introduced by the Employment Department from February 1994 to January 1995 inclusive:

The Offshore Installations (Safety Zones) Order 1994 (Johnson Field Development): Published 22 February 1994.

The Health and Safety (Fees) Regulation 1994: Published 3 March 1994.

The Redundancy Payments (Local Government) (Modification) (Amendment) Order 1994: Published 4 March 1994.

The Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Exemption (Amendment) Regulations 1994: Published 7 March 1994.

The Industrial Tribunals (Constitution and Rules of Procedure) (Amendment) Regulations 1994: Published 9 March 1994.

The Industrial Tribunals (Constitution and Rules of Procedure) (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 1994: Published 9 March 1994.

The Certification Officer (Amendment of Fees) Regulations 1994: Published 10 March 1994.

The Industrial Tribunals (Extension of Jurisdiction) (England and Wales) Order 1994: Published 10 May 1994.

The Industrial Tribunals (Extension of Jurisdiction) (Scotland) Order 1994: Published 10 May 1994.

The Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993 (Commencement No 3 and Transitional Provisions) Order 1994: Published 25 May 1994.

The Guarantee Payments (Exemption) Order No 29 1994: Published 6 June 1994.

The Race Relations (Remedies) Regulations 1994: Published 8 July 1994.

The Offshore Installations (Safety Zones) (No.2) Order 1994: Published 18 July 1994.

The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1994: Published 20 July 1994.

The Maternity (Compulsory–Leave) Regulations 1994: Published September 1994.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work (Amendment) Regulations 1994: Published 10 November 1994.

The Suspension from Work (on Maternity Grounds) Order 1994: Published 21 November 1994.

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1994: Published 22 December 1994.

The Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) General (Amendment) Regulations 1994: Published 6 January 1995.

The Chemicals (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 1994: Published 9 January 1995.

The Industrial Training Levy (Engineering Construction Board) Order 1995: Published 10 January 1995.

The Industrial Training levy (Construction Board) Order 1995: Published 10 January 1995.

The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 1994: Published 10 January 1995,.

The Employment Protection (Part-time Employees) Regulations 1995: Published 16 January 1995.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will ensure the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 apply to all regulations for which his Department is responsible, past, present and future; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given yesterday by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Zaire (Rwandan Refugees)

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what operational resources the United Nations has put in place to ensure that the Zairean military authorities comply with international standards including the international conventions on protection of the rights of refugees in relation to the army of Zaire policing camps for displaced Rwandese; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The UNHCR agreement with Zaire provides for a 50-man international "camp security liaison group" to organise material support, monitor the operation and liaise with the Zaire authorities. We have contributed £0.5 million towards the UNHCR's costs for the international liaison group. The first group of international monitors is undergoing selection by the UNHCR.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the reasons for the change in the cost of Britain's diplomatic presence in Indonesia since 1983–84 in relation to the number of United Kingdom based staff stationed in Indonesia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Goodlad: The change in the cost of Britain's diplomatic presence in Indonesia since 1983–84 results mainly from *(a)* substantial local inflation of about 125 per cent. *(b)* some upgrading of the United Kingdom based staff and an increase in locally engaged staff numbers and *(c)* the inclusion since 1990–91 of notional rent costs in respect of Government-owned residential properties.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 3 February, *Official Report,* column *884,* if he will divide the totals of numbers of United Kingdom based staff stationed at the British embassy, Jarkarta, into the Government Departments and agencies of which they were part for each year since 1992.

Mr. Goodlad: It is not our practice to provide a detailed breakdown of other Government Departments' and agencies' staff at individual posts. A description of individual staff functions is however available in the HM diplomatic service overseas reference list, a copy of which is placed in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any diplomatic staff

stationed in Indonesia since 1979 have been based outside of the British embassy, Jakarta.

Mr. Goodlad: There is no record of any diplomatic staff in Indonesia since 1979 having been based outside of the British embassy, Jakarta.

Nuclear-capable Aircraft

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is the policy of the British Government to decline to supply nuclear-capable aircraft *(a)* to NATO and *(b)* to non-NATO countries; and what was the date from which such a policy came into operation.

Mr. David Davies: Any military aircraft can be made capable of delivering nuclear weapons during manufacture or later. Applications for the export of all defence equipment, whether to NATO or non-NATO countries, are subject to case by case consideration against the international criteria to which we are committed. These include consideration of whether such equipment fulfils the legitimate domestic security needs of the recipient country.

Palestine

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met Mr. Yasser Arafat.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs last met Mr. Arafat on 28 November 1994 in Brussels.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Palestine National Authority.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no plans at present to meet Mr. Arafat. However, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister plans to meet him in Gaza in March.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy for the promotion of United Kingdom trade with the Palestine National Authority.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We encourage it. We consider such trade to be mutually beneficial in its own right and supportive of the middle east peace process. The Prime Minister will be accompanied by a party of senior business leaders on his visit to Israel, the occupied territories and Jordan next month.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what plans he has to visit *(a)* Gaza and *(b)* the west bank.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no plans at present to do so. However, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister plans to visit Gaza in March.

UN Summit on Social Development

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name the representatives of the United Kingdom Government at the United Nations summit conference on social development in March; and if he will list the names and status of the representatives of *(a)* United States, *(b)* the Japanese and *(c)* the French Governments whose attendance has been notified to him.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom delegation to the world summit for social development in Copenhagen from 6 to 12 March will be led by Baroness Chalker of Wallasey. She will be accompanied by officials from the Foreign Office, the Overseas Development Administration, the Department of Employment and the Department of Social Security. We understand that the United States delegation will be led by Vice-President Al Gore and the French delegation by President Mitterrand. We understand that no decision has yet been taken on the leadership of the Japanese delegation.

Northern Caucasus

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions Her Majesty's Ambassadors in the Baltic States have had with the Governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania about Russian military activity in Chechnya; what concerns they expressed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Governments of all three Baltic countries have raised the question of Russian intervention in Chechnya with our ambassadors. In particular they are concerned, like ourselves, about the disproportionate use of force and about abuses of human rights.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what estimate he has made of the numbers of Russian troops so far committed to the military operation in Chechnya.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We estimate that the Russian army has deployed some 40,000 to 50,000 troops to Chechnya, and the interior ministry a further 10,000 to 15,000 troops.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if his Department has yet made an estimate of the financial cost to the Russian Government of the military action in the northern Caucasus.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Because of the continuing uncertainty surrounding the situation in the region, we do not yet feel that we are in a position to make an accurate estimate of the likely costs. Russian official estimates have varied widely and indicate just how speculative such an exercise would be at this stage.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with President Shevardnadze about the security of the Republic of Georgia following the Russian military action in Chechnya; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed the situation in Chechnya with Mr. Shevardnadze when he was visiting the UK earlier this month. Mr. Shevardnadze expressed support for the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation and understanding for the Russian decision to intervene militarily.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed Russian military action in the northern Caucasus with the Turkish Government; what concerns the Turks expressed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: The Russian intervention in Chechnya was one of the subjects discussed when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, together with his French, German and Italian colleagues, met the Turkish Foreign Minister in London on 2 February. Mr. Karayalcin made clear to the press afterwards the importance of working for peace in the region.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed the sovereignty of the trans-Caucasian republics with the Russian Government; what assurances he received about non-interference in their domestic affairs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We fully support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. We have frequently made this clear in discussions with the Russian Government.

Mr. Oleg Gordievsky

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how much United Kingdom public money has been provided to Mr. Oleg Gordievsky since his defection to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hurd: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 July 1994, *Official Report*, columns *711–12*. It remains the Government's policy not to provide information on the operations, or detailed information about the expenditure, of the security and intelligence agencies.

Russian Human Rights Commissioner

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will invite Russia's human rights commissioner, Mr. Sergei Kovalev, to visit the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We understand that Mr. Kovalev has already been invited to visit the United Kingdom and therefore see no need to issue an official invitation at this stage.

WEU and Russian Federation

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *888*, if he will list the informal links between the Western European Union and the Russian Federation in which staff of his Department have participated in the last two years; what he attaches to such links; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: There has been only one informal contact between the Western European Union and the Russian Federation in which staff of my Department have been involved. This was an informal meeting in March last year between the Russian ambassador and permanent representatives of all full WEU members. However a number of informal contacts have also taken place involving the WEU Secretary-General and presidency.

European Court

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many cases are currently before *(a)* the European Commission on Human Rights and *(b)* the European Court of Human Rights; how many judgments were delivered by the European Court in 1994; how many member states have introduced the right of petition since 1989; and if he will make a statement on how it is proposed to speed up the procedures.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We understand from the human rights directorate of the Council of Europe that, as of 31 December 1994, the European Commission of Human Rights had before it 2,927 applications, of which 583 had been declared admissible. As of the same date, there were 67 cases before the European Court of Human Rights. The court delivered 540 judgments in 1994.

The following member states of the Council of Europe have recognised the right of individual petition since 1989:

Bulgaria
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Finland
Hungary
Poland
Romania
San Marino
Slovakia
Slovenia

In addition, Turkey, which recognised the right of individual petition in 1987, recognised the compulsory jurisdiction of the court in 1990.

Some streamlining of the procedures of the Commission and Court was introduced by additional protocol No. 8 to the European convention on human rights. A more radical reform is envisaged under additional protocol No. 11 to the convention, which provides for the present two-tier system of Commission and Court to be replaced by a single court. The aim is to enable the machinery to deal efficiently with the caseload arising from both the growing membership of the Council of Europe and increasing public awareness of the convention.

Protocol 11 must be signed and ratified by all of the member states before it can come into effect. All 34 member states have now signed the protocol. Four, including the United Kingdom, have ratified it and others are expected to do so soon.

Cyprus

Mr. Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the United States Government on joint policies which could lead to a settlement in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Davis: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs last discussed Cyprus in detail with the United States Secretary of State when he was in Washington on 22 June 1994. We are in regular contact with the US Administration over Cyprus at official level, most recently with Mr. Williams, the US special co-ordinator for Cyprus, on 22 February. We are also active in support of the UN Secretary-General's search for a settlement of the Cyprus problem.

Bangladesh (Chittagong Hill Tracts)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by Her Majesty's

Government to the Bangledeshi Government concerning the Chittagong hill tracts.

Mr. Baldry: We regularly discuss the Chittagong hill tracts with the Bangladesh authorities. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs raised this issue when he saw the Bangladesh Foreign Minister in Dhaka in January.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Baldry: None.

UN Obscene Publications Agreement

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which were the last five years in which a report was made to the United Nations under the provisions of the 1910 agreement for the suppression of the circulation of obscene publications; if he will place copies of those reports in the Library; if he will summarise the main provisions of the agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This information is not readily available. I will arrange for further research and write to the hon. Member shortly.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 1 March 1995

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Gas Safety

Mr. Raymond S. Robertson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when the Health and Safety Commission's report on gas safety will be published.

Mr. Eggar: I have today published, jointly with the Health and Safety Commission, its report on safety in the new gas market.

I welcome the report's recommendations for a comprehensive gas safety management regime. The proposals provide a firm framework which will allow the proposed safety regime to respond proportionately and flexibly to the unfolding impact of liberalisation.

The report examines the safety implications of liberalising the domestic gas supply market, and of a more open framework for gas pipeline systems. It describes the means which will be required to maintain, and if possible improve upon, the safety record of British Gas as the extent of unitary control of the pipeline system reduces over time.

Each system transporting gas to the public will be required to appoint a system manager, who will set out in a written safety case how management of the system will be achieved. Some of these safety cases are likely to be quite simple and straightforward. They will all, however, have to address key safety criteria approved by the Health and Safety Executive. The HSE will need to accept the safety case before operations can begin, although transitional arrangements will be put in place to avoid disruption as these new arrangements are introduced.

When a number of public gas transporter systems come together, a network manager will be appointed to be responsible for producing an over-arching safety case for the network as a whole, which will also have to be accepted by the HSE. It will set down the specified emergency conditions in which the network manager will have statutory powers to override the operation of the whole network, and how this should be done. These powers will be backed up by licence obligations on shippers and suppliers to co-operate in an emergency.

The report also covers other important issues, such as emergency response and safety downstream of the meter. Although adequate interim provision for safety is made in the Gas Bill, the HSC has set 1 April 1996 as a target date for agreeing new regulations and the associated documentation, to coincide with the opening up to competition of an initial area covering some 500,000 consumers.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Library of the House.

Gas and Electricity Industries

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce legislation which would place a duty on the regulators of *(a)* the gas industry and *(b)* the electricity industry to have regard to the environmental impacts of the companies they regulate.

Mr. Eggar: Section 3 of the Electricity Act 1989 places on the Director General of Electricity Supply a duty to take into account, in exercising his functions assigned or transferred to him under the Act, the effect on the physical environment of activities connected with the generation, transmission or supply of electricity. It is proposed to include a broadly equivalent provision in the forthcoming Gas Bill.

Inward Investment, Cumbria

Dr. John Cunningham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he has taken to promote west Cumbria as a destination for inward investment.

Mr. Heseltine: The Invest in Britain Bureau is responsible for promoting the UK as a destination for foreign investment. It has achieved some notable successes over recent years. At regional level the Invest in Britain Bureau part-funds a network of regional development organisations to promote overseas investment. Cumbria is served by INWARD, which received a grant of £1.29 million for 1994–95 to promote inward investment into the whole of the north-west region. The county also benefits from the activities of the Northern Development Company in this respect. At a more local level, my Department has contributed to the Cumbria marketing initiative and has worked closely with west Cumbria agencies to improve the attractiveness of the area for inward investment. West Cumbria benefits from the availability of regional selective assistance and a major investment programme by English Partnerships.

Domestic Gas Supplies

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many households in the United Kingdom use gas from cylinders for *(a)* cooking and *(b)* heating; and if he will make a statement on the scale and impact of recent increases in the price of such gas supply.

Mr. Page: It is estimated that about 300,000 households use gas from cylinders for cooking and/or heating in Great Britain and 150,000 households in Northern Ireland. There are no statistics available breaking down the use of cylinder gas between cooking and heating.

I understand a temporary gas price surcharge was introduced around the beginning of February, reflecting an exceptional supply/demand imbalance in the international market for propane. The surcharge appears to be around 10 to 20 per cent. The suppliers have indicated that they expect to remove the surcharge in March.

Correspondence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what items of correspondence were received by Ministers in his Department from Messrs Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 28 February 1995]:* As far as I am aware Ministers in my Department have received a total of six items of correspondence. They include one invitation for a reception and one invitation for drinks—both refused—one letter of congratulations to my right hon. Friend, the Minister for Industry and Energy for winding up the debate on regional electricity companies in the House of Commons on 20 February, and three letters of congratulations to my hon. Friend the new parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy.

PRIME MINISTER

St. David's Day

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister, what proposals he has to make St. David's day a bank holiday in Wales.

The Prime Minister: None.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Tourism

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the need for a tourist accommodation grading system in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dorrell: I have today published an agenda for action in the tourist sector which sets out the Government's assessment of the need for improved market signals in the accommodation sector.

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he is taking to promote jobs in the tourism industry.

Mr. Dorrell: I have over the past few months been conducting a review of the performance of the tourism industry and of our policies towards it. The analysis is complete and I have today published my agenda for Government action to help the industry improve its competitive performance. Details of my proposals are contained in a document entitle "Tourism: Competing with the Best", which I placed in the House of Commons Library earlier today, together with the analysis by McKinsey which underlies the agenda.

Fast-Stream Entry

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. Dorrell: The figures for the proportion of women accepted for fast-stream entry by my Department are as follows:

Year	*Total number of faststreamers*	*Proportion that were women (per cent.)*
1992	0	0
1993	1	100
1994	2	50

The Department was formed in April 1992 and therefore there are no figures for 1991.

Deregulation

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will ensure the enforcement provisions contained in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 apply to all regulations for which his Department is responsible, past, present and future, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* I refer to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 27 February 1995, *Official Report,* columns *431-32.*

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Court of Appeal

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list *(a)* the percentage of civil cases considered by the Court of Appeal that were successful and *(b)* the percentage of civil cases in which (i) the successful party was British and (ii) the unsuccessful party was foreign for each of the last five years.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The percentage of civil appeal cases disposed of by the Court of Appeal that were successful in each legal year from 1989–90 to 1993–94 inclusive was 25.5, 26.1, 27.9, 27.8 and 28.7 respectively.

Information relating to the nationality of parties is not recorded.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will give the arithmetic mean of the ages of the current judges that hear civil appeal cases in the Court of Appeal.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The arithmetic mean of the ages of the Master of the Rolls, the president of the family division, the vice-chancellor and the lords justices of appeal is 63. This figure is based on the judges in post on 27 February 1995, and their ages on that date. Lords justices are, of course, available to sit in both the civil and criminal divisions of the Court of Appeal. They are occasionally assisted by serving High Court judges and retired lords justices of appeal.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy to collate information on the number of civil appeals unsuccessful in the Court of Appeal for which applications for leave of appeal to the House of Lords were refused.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I have no plans to do so. As the hon. Member will know, information on the outcome of petitions to the House of Lords for leave to appeal to that House is available.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what system he employs to check on the performance of judges who hear cases in the Court of Appeal.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Lord Chancellor attaches the highest importance to the constitutional principle of judicial independence. He has established no procedures for monitoring the performance of the full-time judiciary. Recourse from a judicial decision in the Court of Appeal properly lies through the normal appeal process to the House of Lords.

Mr. Bryce Taylor

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department pursuant to his answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *845*, if the legal aid fund expects to pay the costs of Mr. Bryce Taylor.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I understand that the parties in this case have settled out of court and that the terms of the settlement are such that there will be no call on the legal aid fund.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Palestine

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made to *(a)* the United Nations and *(b)* the World bank for funds to assist construction projects with the Palestine National Authority.

Mr. Baldry: We are in close touch with both the United Nations and the World bank and discuss their programmes and priorities in detail with them. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency has planned a number of labour intensive projects and the World bank is funding an emergency rehabilitation programme with the Palestinian authority: both programmes include construction projects.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total amount of United Kingdom funds so far *(a)* pledged and *(b)* remitted for the purpose of assisting the Palestine National Authority; and to what purpose the funds are directed.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced last year our intention to provide £75 million during 1994–95 to 1996–97 to the Palestinians and in support of the peace process. This includes direct bilateral assistance and aid channelled through multilateral institutions, particularly the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and the European Community.

In 1993–94 we spent £3.3 million from our bilateral country programme, and we expect to spend around £6.4 million in 1994–95. This includes a £3 million contribution for police salaries. Most of the remainder will support a range of projects, in partnership with the Palestinian authority and non-government organisations, in public administration, finance and private enterprise, water and health.

Since the signature of the Israeli-Palestinian declaration of principles in September 1993, the European Commission estimates that it has spent 73 million ecu. Over the same period we have provided £9 million direct to UNRWA.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which specific projects the Overseas Development Administration is involved, or planning to become involved, in the Palestine National Authority.

Mr. Baldry: A wide range of projects is being implemented or planned in the priority sectors agreed with the Palestinian authority. Information about a number of projects is given in an information folder called "British Aid to the Palestinians", copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Announcements will be made about other significant projects as these are finalised with the Palestinian authority.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 6 December 1994, *Official Report*, columns *118–20*, if he will give the exact date of formal appraisal documents submitted by the Overseas Development Administration and the Department of Trade and Industry in respect of the aid and trade provision support for shortwave radio transmitters to Indonesia; and if he will place in the Library the relevant evaluation documents.

Mr. Baldry: The Overseas Development Administration engaged the transmitter projects group of the British Broadcasting Corporation to appraise the shortwave radio transmitters project, Indonesia. The appraisal report is dated 25 October 1990.

In line with established policy, the ODA does not publish its project appraisals.

Bangladesh

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much of the aid given to Bangladesh in *(a)* 1993 and *(b)* 1994 has been spent on assisting the training of Bangladeshi troops.

Mr. Baldry: No development funds have been used for the purpose of training Bangladeshi military officers. We do however provide assistance under the FCO-administered United Kingdom military training assistance scheme and the police and other training scheme—POLOT.

World Bank

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to make the World bank more accountable to its funders.

Mr. Baldry: We consider the arrangements which the bank has for accountability to the member Governments to be broadly satisfactory but, along with other shareholders, we continue to keep this matter under review.

Rwanda

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contributions *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other EC countries are making to the recovery of the humanitarian measures in Rwanda.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The EU and its member states have responded generously to humanitarian needs in Rwanda. The table, which is supplied by UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, gives the breakdown of contributions up to 31 December 1994:

Donor	*Value US$*
Austria	427,097
Belgium	9,569,819
Denmark	12,022,532
Finland	3,147,876
France	4,969,849
Germany	54,032,033
Greece	169,193
Italy	13,698,477
Luxembourg	1,621.114
Netherlands	30,642,032
Spain	4,162,772
Sweden	36,340,848
United Kingdom	52,998,195
EC	[1]223,875,090
Total	447,676,927

[1] Of which about 13 per cent. is provided by the UK.

The UK has already responded quickly to the 1995 UN consolidated inter-agency appeal for Rwanda with a pledge of £4 million.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member of Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 6 February, column *24-26,* in respect of contributions to Rwanda's rehabilitation needs.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Constabularies

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilians are currently serving in constabularies in (i) England and Wales and (ii) the west midlands; and how many were serving in 1979.

Mr. Maclean: The information is set out in the table.

	Police officers		*Civilian staff*	
As at 31 December	*England and Wales*	*West Midlands police*	*England and Wales*	*West Midlands police*
1979	[1]113,580	6,160	35,382	1,413
1994	127,358	6,996	50,978	2,611

Police Support Services

Mr. Booth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his proposals for bringing competition to bear on police white collar support services.

Mr. Howard: It is the Government's intention that compulsory competitive tendering should be introduced to police white collar support services as part of a rolling programme. Detailed consultation proposals for police legal services were issued on 3 May 1994, and for police construction-related and property services, and the proposed statutory accounting framework on 6 June 1994. The Government have now considered the responses received from the police service, local authority associations and other interested bodies.

With police legal services, the Government have decided that police authorities will be subject to the same CCT regime as other authorities defined under the Local Government Act 1988, except for a number of specific exemptions. The exemptions centre on the legal work associated with the criminal justice process, police complaints and discipline, unsatisfactory performance proceedings against police officers and licensing functions undertaken by police forces. The exemptions will protect operational policing and management functions special to the police service.

Similarly, with the police construction-related and property services, the Government have decided that the same CCT regime will apply to both police and other defined authorities except for one specific exemption. The work of police architectural liaison officers will not be included within this defined activity, but will be specifically excluded because such a specialist crime prevention role should properly remain within the police service.

The Government have also decided that police authorities will be subject to the same statutory accounting framework as other similar defined authorities, which will involve the annual publication of a statement of support service costs. The publication of SSSC's will enable informed discussion of support service costs, and promote efficiency and value for money.

Young Offenders

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the future arrangements for the placement of young offenders, sentenced under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, in local authority accommodation and youth treatment centres.

Mr. Howard: From 1 April 1995 the responsibility for seeking and financing placements for young offenders, sentenced under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, in local authority accommodation and youth treatment centres will transfer from the Department of Health to the Home Office.

Research (Non-Human Primates)

Dr. Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ban the use of wild-caught non-human primates in scientific procedures and introduce further administrative controls on the use of non-human primates in such procedures.

Mr. Howard: I have considered recommendations from the Animal Procedures Committee on the use of non-human primates in scientific procedures and have accepted its view that I should ban the use of wild-caught non-human primates except where a project licence applicant can establish exceptional and specific justification.

In the light of the committee's advice, I have taken a number of administrative steps to ensure the effectiveness of such a ban, I have decided that:

(i) a condition will be placed on a project licence authorising the use of non-human primates, requiring records relating to the breeding and conditions of housing and husbandry at the breeding centre(s) from which animals are obtained—and in the case of wild-caught animals the conditions in any holding centre—to be available for inspection by the Home Office;

(ii) waivers under section 10(3) of the 1986 Act to allow the use of purpose-bred primates from non-designated sources will be conditional upon lifetime records being supplied;

(iii) if the source of the animals is not know when the project licence application is prepared, or if the proposed source is likely to change, a condition will be placed on the licence that the source must be agreed by the Home Office before the animals are obtained and any procedure commences;

(iv) the inspectorate will take into account the potential adverse effects, for example during transport, which may occur to the animals concerned before arrival in the United Kingdom; and

(v) the Home Office will keep under review the availability of information about primate use, and will ensure that as much is published as is permissible within the restraints of the legislation and the need for commercial confidentiality.

I have agreed also a number of other changes to the condition upon which non-human primates may be used:

(i) applicants for project licences will be required to explain clearly why only non-human primates as opposed to any other species, including man where appropriate, are considered essential for the programme of research;

(ii) where applicable, the applicant will be required to provide a clear explanation in the project licence application of why the use of old world, rather than new world, primates is proposed;

(iii) procedures to be carried out using primates will be required to be described in separate protocol sheets on the project licence application, and primates must not be grouped with other species in such descriptions;

(iv) when old work non-human primates have been used under a toxicology project licence in procedures of more than mild severity, the licence holder will be required to provide a justification to the Home Office. The Department will keep such use under review and report to the Animal Procedures Committee;

(v) more detailed, collated data on primate use will be published either in the annual statistics of scientific procedures on living animals or in the annual report of the APC.

In the case of the requirement on the use of old work non-human primates under toxicology project licences, I have accepted the objective of a recommendation from the Animal Procedures Committee but have taken the view that this can be achieved by alternative means. The approach to be adopted will impose less burden on the companies involved in regulatory toxicity testing, and will ensure that the animals—scientific procedures—inspectorate is not diverted from its primary tasks of advising on applications for personal and project licence and visiting scientific establishments.

I have placed in the Library a copy of the committee's recommendations, and of the Home Office ministerial reply.

North East London Probation Service

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what will be the effect of the November 1994 budget statement on the North East London probation service;

(2) what was the effect of the November 1993 statement on the budget of North East London probation service.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The 1993 Budget statement resulted in a specific grant cash limit for 1994–95 for the North East London probation service of £7.2 million, 6.8 per cent. higher than for 1993-94. The 1994 Budget statement resulted in a specific grant cash limit for 1995–96 of £7.1 million, plus a further £200,000 to support probation service partnerships with the independent sector previously funded separately by the Home Office.

It is for the North East London probation service to decide how these resources are best used and to determine what specific changes within the service should be undertaken on the basis of the total expenditure limit implied by this level of grant support.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed, and what grade, by the North East London probation service on 30 June 1992, 30 June 1993 and 30 June 1994.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Information is given in the table.

Staff employed by the North East London probation service, in post at 30 June, whole-time equivalent[1] by grade and type

Number of staff, whole time equivalent

	30 June 1992	*30 June 1993*	*30 June 1994*
Probation Officers			
Chief	1	1	1
Deputy Chief	—	—	—
Assistant Chief	3	4	4
Senior	21	21	22
Main grade	102	114	109
Total probation officers	127	140	137
Non-probation grade staff			
Probation Services' Officers[2]	36	40	36
Clerical/secretarial	92	99	101
Administrative	11	13	12
Other non-probation grade staff, excluding hostel staff[3]	10	17	17
Hostel staff	12	17	13
Total non-probation grade staff	161	186	179
Total probation staff	287	326	316

[1] Whole-time staff plus whole-time equivalent of part-time staff. Figures rounded to the nearest whole number. Components and totals are rounded independently and so components may not add precisely to totals.

[2] Formerly ancillaries

[3] Figures include sessional supervisors on community service schemes, staff employed in student training units and on miscellaneous functions.

Employment of Children (Offences)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is *(a)* the maximum and *(b)* the average penalty imposed on any person convicted for offences relating to the employment of children, and *(c)* how many served a term of imprisonment in the last year that figures were available.

Mr. Maclean: Information for 1993—the latest available—is given in the table. 1994 data will not be available until autumn 1995.

Sentencing data for offences against the employment of children
England and Wales

Legislation	Offence description	Maximum sentence	1993 data: Prosecutions	Convictions	Conditional discharge	Total fined	Average fine given	Fine: Maximum fine given	Probation order	Immediate custody
Children and Young Persons Act 1933 Sec 4	Causing a child or young person to be in any street, &c, for the purpose of begging	£500 or 3 months or both	29	25	16	8	£31	£50	1	—
Education Act 1944 Secs 58–60	Employment of children or young persons	£200 or 1 month or both	2	1	—	1	£50	£50	—	—
Children and Young Persons Act 1933 Secs 18 to 21 (Sec 18 as amended by the Children Act 1972)	Restrictions on the employment of children (including street trading)	£1,000	5	4	—	4	£159	£300	—	—

Asylum Seekers, Haslar Prison

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for how long the person who has been detained for the longest period of time, while seeking asylum in the United Kingdom, has been in Haslar prison;

(2) if he will list *(a)* nationalities, *(b)* gender and age, *(c)* number of each nationality, *(d)* annual cost to Her Majesty's Government and *(e)* the total number of all those seeking asylum in the United Kingdom who are detained at Haslar prison.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: At 23 February 1995, a total of 83 people who had sought asylum were detained at the all-male Haslar holding centre. This figure includes people awaiting the setting of directions for removal following the refusal of their applications, as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal. Information on the nationality and age of these detainees is given in the tables. The longest currently detained person at Haslar who had sought asylum has been detained since 23 March 1994.

Haslar is a Prison Service establishment run almost exclusively to house people detained under immigration powers. The Prison Service does not separate out costs according to the category of inmate but, in 1993–94, the net operating cost per prisoner place in local prisons and remand centres was £21,400.

Numbers of persons detained at Her Majesty's Holding Centre, Haslar[1] who have sought asylum, by nationality, as at 23 February 1995

Nationality	Number detained
Europe and Americas	
Bulgaria	1
Columbia	1
Poland	1
Russia	1
Turkey	3
Turkish Cyprus	1
Yugoslavia	1
Middle and Far East	
Bangladesh	2
China	6
India	3

Numbers of persons detained at Her Majesty's Holding Centre, Haslar[1] who have sought asylum, by nationality, as at 23 February 1995

Nationality	Number detained
Iran	1
Pakistan	1
Africa	
Algeria	11
Benin	1
Eritrea	1
Ghana	18
Kenya	2
Liberia	2
Nigeria	21
Sierra Leone	2
Sudan	3
Zaire	1
Total	[1]84

[1] One Haslar detainee is currently in hospital.

Numbers of persons detained at HM Holding Centre, Haslar[1] who have sought asylum, by age, as at 23 February 1995

Age	Number detained
19 or under	2
20–24	18
25–29	30
30–34	17
35–39	12
40–44	4
45 or over	1
Total	[1]84

[1] One Haslar detainee is currently in hospital.

Carriers' Liability

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list of airlines which have been charged under the provisions of the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987, stating the number of passengers involved, the amount of charges paid and the amount of charges unpaid for each of the past five years.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I am unable, for reasons of commercial confidentiality, to provide details of the charges incurred by individual carriers, and the numbers of passengers involved. The total value of charges paid and outstanding for each of the last five years were as follows:

£ million

Year	*Total charges paid in each year*	*Total charges outstanding at the end of each year*
1990	3.433	[1]15.653
1991[2]	7.581	19.440
1992	4.789	25.775
1993	11.500	22.003
1994	8.652	[3]24.527

Notes:
[1] Includes charges outstanding from previous years. Figures for 1990 and subsequent years are therefore cumulative.
[2] Charge increased from £1,000 to £2,000 per improperly documented passenger on 1 August 1991.
[3] Of this sum, £13.514 million is currently the subject of settlement discussions.

Football Violence

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of state for the Home Department (1) what evidence he has of the involvement of people associated with Combat 18 in the recent football riot in Dublin;

(2) what investigation he has called for into the organised involvement of political extremists in the recent football violence in Dublin.

Mr. Howard: I understand from the police that they have no evidence that this violence was organised by Combat 18 or any other group of political extremists, although some of the individuals involved may have sympathies with such groups. Any further investigation is a matter for the police.

TREASURY

VAT

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the return to the Treasury of value added tax on works, maintenance and repair of buildings for which listed building consent is required, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Information on expenditure on repairs and maintenance of listed buildings is not readily available.

Sports Clubs

Dr. Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will encourage clubs which supply sporting services, with particular reference to golf clubs, to take carefully into account the representations and interests of its past and present members when considering the application or distribution of any refunded VAT resulting from the VAT exemptions for supplies of certain sporting services for the period following 1 January 1990.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Butcher) on 27 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *409*.

National Lottery

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current forecast of the revenue the Exchequer will receive from national lottery tax in the financial years *(a)* 1994–95 and *(b)* 1995–96.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In the financial year 1994–95, it is estimated that the Exchequer will receive £104 million from lottery duty. Receipts for 1995–96 are difficult to forecast because the national lottery instant game is due to start shortly. However, lottery duty receipts are included in a forecast yield of £1.2 billion for 1995–96 from all betting, gaming and lottery duties.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue has so far been received in lottery tax from the operators of the national lottery; and on what dates these payments were made.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The operator of the national lottery has made three payments of lottery duty. On 15 December 1995, the operator paid £11,629,122.72; on 16 January, £32,755,258.32; and on 15 February, £29,978,975.04. The total revenue so far received is £74,363,356.08.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what forecast he made of national lottery turnover in the financial years 1994–95 and 1995–96 when he set the rate of lottery tax at 12 per cent.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: At the time the lottery duty rate was set at 12 per cent., the forecast for national lottery turnover was £1.5 billion for a full financial year. At that time it was not known when the national lottery would start to operate and no separate forecast was made for 1994–95.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer at what frequency operators of the national lottery are required to pay lottery tax.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The operator of the national lottery is required to pay lottery duty on the 15th of the month following the month in which the liability arises.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what benefit accrues to the Exchequer from the interest earned on sums due from the promoters of the national lottery in lottery tax but not paid until the due date.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There are no arrangements for the payment of interest to the Exchequer in relation to lottery duty.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what dates during the financial year 1994–95 the operators of the national lottery are required to pay lottery tax.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In the financial year 1994–95, the operator of the national lottery is required to make payments of lottery duty on 15 December, 13 January—15 January is a Sunday and payment should be made on the last working day before—15 February and 15 March.

Pool Betting Duty

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer at what frequency football promoters are required to pay pool betting duty.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Pool betting duty is payable weekly on Thursday following the week, which ends on a Saturday, in which the liability for the duty arose. However, certain pools promoters have been granted an extension which allows them a further week before they are required to submit returns and payment.

Monetary Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what account the Government's monetary and exchange rate policies take of the role of the exchange rate as a market-clearing mechanism; and what assessment he has made of how the equilibrium rate is related to the current account of the balance of payments.

Mr. Nelson: Movements in the exchange rate are considered as part of the general assessment of monetary conditions in setting monetary policy. The current account of the balance of payments is affected by a large number of factors, including world trade, growth in United Kingdom export markets, export profit margins, domestic demand and competitiveness. The current account is only one of many factors which can affect the exchange rate.

Consultants

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his latest estimates of the expenditure on all external consultants, including management consultants, for each year since 1987, in 1994 prices, for his Department and its agencies; and what are the quantified annual cost savings which such expenditure has resulted in.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 9 February 1995]:* The cost of employing consultants in the years since 1991–92 at 1994 prices is shown in the table. Expenditure in earlier years and details of the level of savings, which are not held centrally, could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Value of Consultancy work (in 1994 prices) (in £million—excluding VAT)

Year	*£ million*
1991–92	10.70
1992–93	2.27
1993–94	5.90
1994–95	1.00

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the statutory instruments which his Department has sponsored in the last 12 months.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The information relating to the Treasury, for the 12-month period February 1994 to January 1995, is as follows:

S.I. Number	*Title*
1994/188	The Traded Securities (Disclosure) Regulations 1994
1994/236	The Distraint by Collectors (Fees, Costs and Charges) Regulations 1994
1994/265	The Trustee Investments (Additional Powers) Order 1994
1994/343	The Savings Certificates (Amendment) Regulations 1994
1994/350	The Superannuation (Children's Pensions) (Earnings Limit) Order 1994
1994/468	The Acquisition of Land (Rate of Interest after Entry) Regulations 1994
1994/469	The Acquisition of Land (Rate of Interest after Entry) (Scotland) Regulations 1994
1994/656	The Building Societies (General Charge and Fees) Regulations 1994
1994/657	The Friendly Societies (General Charge and Fees) (Amendment) Regulations 1994
1994/658	The Industrial and Provident Societies (Credit Unions) (Amendment of Fees) Regulations 1994
1994/660	The Industrial and Provident Societies (Amendment of Fees) Regulations 1994
1994/687	The Value added Tax (Sport, Physical Education and Fund-raising Events) Order 1994
1994/744	The Telecommunications Act 1984 (Government Shareholding) Order 1994
1994/776	The Pensions Increase (Review) Order 1994
1994/777	The Income Tax (Replacement Cars) Regulation 1994
1994/778	The Income Tax (Car Benefits) (Replacement Accessories) Regulations 1994
1994/955	The Travellers' Allowances Order 1994
1994/1188	The Value Added Tax (Education) Order 1994
1994/1257(c.22)	The Finance Act 1994, Section 45, (Appointed Day) Order 1994
1994/1307	The Taxes (Interest Rate) (Amendment) Regulations 1994
1994/1410	The Free Zone (Southampton) Designation (Variation) Order 1994
1994/1479	The Income Tax (Definition of Unit Trust Scheme) (Amendment) Regulations 1994
1994/1517	The Financial Services Act 1986 (Miscellaneous Exemptions) Order 1994
1994/1518	The Private Medical Insurance (Disentitlement to Tax Relief and Approved Benefits) Regulations 1994
1994/1567	The Taxes (Interest Rate) (Amendment No. 2) Regulations 1994
1994/1698	The Insurance Premium Tax (Taxable Insurance Contracts) Order 1994
1994/1819	The Insurance Premium Tax (Prescribed Rates of Interest) Order 1994
1994/1820	The Air Passenger Duty (Prescribed Rates of Interest) Order 1994
1994/1821	The Air Passenger Duty (Connected Flights) Order 1994
1994/1908	The Trustee Investments (Additional Powers (No. 2) Order 1994
1994/2216	The Free Zone (Port of Tilbury) Designation (Variation) Order 1994
1994/2508(c.50)	The Finance Act 1989, Section 165(2), (Appointed Day) Order 1994
1994/2509	The Free Zone (Birmingham Airport) (Substitution of Responsible Authority) Order 1994
1994/2542	The Value Added Tax Act 1994 (Interest on Tax) (Prescribed Rate) Order 1994
1994/2543(c.51)	The Friendly Societies Act 1982 (Commencement No. 8) Order 1994
1994/2656	The Capital Gains Tax (Gilt-edged Securities) Order 1994
1994/2657	The Taxes (Interest Rate) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations 1994
1994/2898	The Free Zone (Port of Sheerness) Designation Order 1994
1994/2904	The Alcoholic Liquor Duties (Beer-Based Beverages) Order 1994
1994/2905	The Value Added Tax (Increase of Registration Limits) Order 1994

S.I. Number	Title
1994/2969	The Value Added Tax (Education) (No. 2) Order 1994
1994/3009	The Retirement Benefits Schemes (Indexation of Earnings Cap) Order 1994
1994/3008	The Capital Gains Tax (Annual Exempt Amount) Order 1994
1994–3010	The Income Tax (Cash Equivalents of Car Fuel Benefits) 1994
1994/3011	The Inheritance Tax (Indexation) Order 1994
1994/3012	The Income Tax (Indexation) Order 1994
1994/3013	The Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land) Order 1994
1994/3014	The Value Added Tax (Transport) Order 1994
1994/3041	The Excise Duty (Amendment of the Isle of Man Act 1979) Order 1994
1994/3206	The Ministerial and Other Salaries Order 1994
1994/3207	The Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Estonia) Order 1994
1994/3208	The Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Isle of Man) Order 1994
1994/3209	The Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Guernsey) Order 1994
1994/3210	The Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Jersey) Order 1994
1994/3211	The Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Kazakhstan) Order 1994
1994/3212	The Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Mexico) Order 1994
1994/3213	The Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Russian Federation) Order 1994
1994/3214	The Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Estates of Deceased Persons and Inheritances) (Switzerland) Order 1994
1994/3215	The Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Switzerland) Order 1994
1994/3216	The Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Vietnam) Order 1994
1994/3218	The Value Added Tax (Means of Transport) Order 1994
1994/3224(c.79)	The Finance Act 1993, Section 165, (Appointed Day) Order 1994
1994/3225(c.80)	The Finance Act 1994, Chapter II of Part IV, (Appointed Day) Order 1994
1994/3226	The Exchange Gains and Losses (Transitional Provisions) Regulations 1994
1994/3227	The Exchange Gains and Losses (Alternative Method of Calculation of Gain and Loss) Regulations 1994
1994/3228	The Exchange Gains and Losses (Deferral of Gains and Losses) Regulations 1994
1994/3229	The Exchange Gains and Losses (Excess Gains and Losses) Regulation 1994
1994/3230	The Local Currency Elections Regulations 1994
1994/3231	The Exchange Gains and Losses (Insurance Companies) Regulations 1994
1994/3232	The Exchange Gains and Losses (Debts of Varying Amounts) Regulations 1994
1994/3233	The Currency Contracts and Options (Amendment of Enactments) Order 1994
1994/3277	The National Savings Stock Register (Amendment) Regulation 1994
1994/3278	The Overseas Life Assurance Fund (Amendment) Order
1995/201	The Public Supply Contracts Regulations 1995
1995/171	The Friendly Societies (Taxation of Transfers of Business) Regulations 1995

Child Pornography

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has concerning the number of occasions in each of the last five years upon which Her Majesty's Customs and Excise officers investigated individuals returning from overseas in connection with the possible import of child pornography; and in how many of these cases prosecutions resulted.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 28 February 1995]:* The information requested is not available in that form. Centrally collated statistics for the period prior to 1993–94 do not disaggregate Customs investigations into offences concerning indecent or obscene paedophile material from those concerning illicit importations of other obscene material. Furthermore, the statistics for 1993–94 onwards refer to all investigations of importations of paedophile material, including postal importations.

Between 1 April 1993 and the current date the following numbers of individuals have been investigated by officers of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in connection with suspected importation of indecent or obsence paedophile material, child pornography.

April 1993–March 1994: 70

April 1994–current date: 79

Of these, the following numbers have had proceedings instituted against them.

April 1993–March 1994: 34

April 1994–current date: 14

HEALTH

Health Authority Funding

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the funding available for *(a)* Barking and Havering health authority, *(b)* Redbridge and Waltham Forest health authority, *(c)* City and East London health authority and *(d)* Newham under the new capitation based funding formula and the previous funding formula.

Mr. Sackville: Weighted capitation formulae are used to set capitation targets and so inform, but not determine, the amount of funding made available to health authorities.

For 1995–96 the modified national weighted capitation formula has been used to set targets for regional health authorities. However it is for North Thames RHA to determine both its own sub-regional formula and how much funding is to be made available to its district health authorities. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir William Staveley, the chairman of North Thames regional health authority, for details.

Sir Duncan Nicol

Mr. Milburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the pensions and severance payments made to Sir Duncan Nichol when he left the NHS executive.

Mr. Sackville: Sir Duncan Nichol has been seconded to the national health service executive by Mersey regional health authority and on expiry of the secondment he was made redundant by the RHA. He received the benefits due to him under the NHS pension scheme after more than 30 years' service to the NHS—a superannuation lump sum and an annual pension—and statutory redundancy compensation. No other payments were made.

GP's Pay

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will give the average tabular index of deprivation since used in the payment of general practitioners for each family health services authority in order of deprivation, and the average figure for all of them.

Mr. Malone: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply Under-Secretary of State my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville), gave to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms Primarolo) on 20 July 1994, columns *355-57.*

NHS Overseas Enterprises

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish the gross administrative costs of NHS overseas enterprises in each year since 1990, together with any offsetting income.

Mr. Sackville: This information is shown in the table:

£000

Year	*National health services overseas enterprises Administrative costs*	*National health services overseas enterprises Total sales*
1990–91	529	1,000
1991–92	367	1,176
1992–93	377	1,127
1993–94	371	1,600

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will publish a list of the projects and their value together with the sponsoring NHS provider of projects *(a)* committed and *(b)* commenced under the auspices or as a result of the intervention of NHS overseas enterprises since 1990.

Mr. Sackville: National health service overseas enterprises uses a database of some 800 professional staff from NHS trusts and health authorities to provide under contract both student training for overseas health care organisations and consultancy support for overseas health care projects.

Since 1990, with help from 32 NHS hospitals and health authorities, it has trained some 240 students from five countries, predominantly in the technician grades, at a total contract value of about £1.7 million. In addition, it has completed or is involved in 41 other projects in 17 countries with a contract value of around £2.5 million, and involving some 40 NHS hospitals and health authorities.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether NHS overseas enterprises insures, or indemnifies, losses from cost overruns, defaults, or payments not received for projects under the auspices of NHS overseas enterprises; and how often such overruns or defaults have occurred since 1990.

Mr. Sackville: National health service overseas enterprises does not insure or indemnify against losses or bad debts. In the period form 1990–91 to 1993–94, its provision for bad debt, and the extent of write off, were as follows:

Year	*Bad debt provision £*	*Bad debts written off £*
1990–91	Nil	Nil
1991–92	Nil	1,151
1992–93	Nil	Nil
1993–94	10,000	Nil

Family Policies

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how often since 8 December 1994 Ministers have met to examine the impact of Government policies as a whole on the family; how often Ministers will be meeting for this purpose; and what assessment she has made of the outcomes to date.

Mr. Bowis: Frequently. Such meetings contribute to overall policy making. they are not assessed in the way described.

NHS Computer Costs

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS total computer costs are spent on *(a)* clinical information and *(b)* financial information required for the internal market.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available centrally.

GPs' Hours

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent consultation she has had with colleagues regarding the effects of stress on general practitioners with particular reference to working long hours.

Mr. Malone: I meet frequently with colleagues to discuss the terms and conditions of service of general medical practitioners.

HIV Education

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has for further HIV education development within the community.

Mr. Sackville: Fundamental to the United Kingdom's success in limiting the spread of HIV infection is community based education projects. The Government will continue to support a great range of initiatives, developed by health and local authorities to meet the needs of their resident populations in places of education, work and recreation. Such projects are also supported by the community-based sexual health programme at the Health Education Authority. Some £49.6 million will be available next year through the national health service for HIV prevention of which about half will be used purely on public education.

Training for Life Initiative

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding is available for the ACET—AIDS, care, education and training—training for life initiative.

Mr. Sackville: A grant of £20,000 was awarded in 1994 to ACET as a contribution to the development and distribution of its training for life initiative which provides sex education training for schools. This was in addition to the Department of Health's direct funding of £150,000 towards the administrative costs of providing home care services.

Illegal Employment of Children

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* convicted for offences relating to the employment of children for the last year that figures are available.

Mr. Bowis: I understand that the number of people prosecuted and convicted under the relevant statutory provisions were as shown in the table.

England and Wales: 1993

Offence description/legislation	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
Offences against the Education Act 1944 Secs 58 to 60 including offences against byelaws as to the employment of children (except offences relating to Mines, Factories or Workshops)[1]	2	1
Offences in connection with employment of children and young persons. Children and Young Persons Act 1933 Secs 18 to 21 (Section 18 as amended by the Children Act 1972)	5	4
Offences in connection with the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act 1920[2]	1	1

Source:
[1] Home Office, year beginning January 1993.
[2] Health and Safety Executive, year beginning April 1993.

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* inspections and *(b)* investigations were made into alleged offences relating to the employment of children in the last year that figures are available.

Mr. Bowis: This information is not available centrally.

Dental Services

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dental practices per region took NHS patients in 1992: what was the number in the last year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: The available information is shown in the table:

General Dental Services: number of dentists who had additions to their register for 31 December 1992 and 1994: England

Regions	*Number of dentists who had additions to their register by year* 1992	1994
England	15,295	15,217
Northern	883	889
Yorkshire	1,158	1,142
Trent	1,283	1,308
East Anglia	619	622
North West Thames	1,511	1,508

General Dental Services: number of dentists who had additions to their register for 31 December 1992 and 1994: England

Regions	*Number of dentists who had additions to their register by year* 1992	1994
North East Thames	1,314	1,315
South East Thames	1,392	1,374
South West Thames	1,298	1,300
Wessex	1,005	990
Oxford	861	842
South Western	1,248	1,237
West Midlands	1,427	1,443
Mersey	773	773
North Western	1,289	1,278

Source:
Dental Practice Board.
Notes:
1. Additions to the register include instances of patients reregistering with a dentist after a break in attendance and instances of reinstatement of registrations that have been cancelled in error.
2. Some dentists have contracts with more than one family health services authority. Dentists have been counted only once in the region which contains the family health services authority where the dentist does the majority of his/her work.
3. Regions were redefined from 1 April 1994; the previous regions have been used for both 1992 and 1994 to enable comparability.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been deregistered from their dentist since 1992 in each family health services authority area.

Mr. Malone: This information will be placed in the Library.

Welfare of Partners

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what financial and general welfare protection is ensured by the Government for the partners of seriously ill people; and if she will make a statement.

(2) what assessment Her Majesty's Government have made of the effects to the financial status, health, employment and general welfare of partners of the long-term seriously ill; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Bowis: This would depend on their circumstances. A wide range of support is available for those in need, ranging from the benefits system to community care and health respite support.

ENVIRONMENT

Energy Efficiency Campaigns

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library the work presented to his Department by BRMB International on the changes in public knowledge, attitudes and intended energy saving behaviour brought about by the Helping the Earth Begins at Home advertising campaign.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Yes. A copy of BRMB's report on the completed campaign will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State if he will place in the Library the findings presented to his Department by NOP on the Wasting Energy Costs the Earth advertising campaign.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The Wasting Energy Costs the Earth campaign, launched in October last year, is due to run until March 1996 and NOP will report on its completion.

Pop Festivals

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment under what legislation councillers on the Isle of Wight are liable for surcharging for refusing to license pop festivals.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Local authorities have discretionary powers to licence pop festivals under the provisions of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982. Councillors who exercise their discretion by refusing to licence pop festivals would be liable to surcharge only if the authority's appointed auditor decided to take action under section 19 or section 20 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982. Under these provisions, the auditor may seek to recover, by surcharge of those responsible, any financial loss sustained by the authority as a result of illegal action or wilful misconduct by officers or members of the authority.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he expects that the United Kingdom will meet its commitment under the current convention on climate change to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by 2000 on current policies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: We remain fully committed to meeting the requirements of the climate change convention. We are reviewing progress under our current climate change programme and will make an announcement shortly.

Construction Industry

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to issue a public consultation document on detailed proposals for legislation to implement the Latham report.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: Shortly.

Home Ownership

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next expects to meet the Council of Mortgage Lenders to discuss *(a)* prospects for home ownership and *(b)* the impact of current Government policies.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My right hon. Friend the Ministers in this Department have regular meetings and contacts with the Council of Mortgage Lenders. No dates have yet been set for any future meetings.

Westminster City Council

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Audit Commission concerning the resources available to the district auditor of Westminster city council, with particular reference to the possible need for additional resources.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None. This is not a matter for the Government. It is for the appointed auditor to determine what resources he needs.

Planning Application Appeals

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about appeals T/APP/C1435/A/90/161862/P3 and 161951/P3 against refusal of planning applications Nos. WD/87/3410/P and WD/89/1441/P made by Mr. F. M. Wood; if Mr. Wood had complied with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, with special reference to sections 27 and 36; if these appeals were valid; and if the use of the words "perspective purchaser" on form PA1 invalidated or prejudiced the planning applications or subsequent appeals in any way.

Sir Paul Beresford: Responsibility for these appeals has been delegated to the Planning Inspectorate executive agency under its chief executive, Mr. C. J. Shepley. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. Greenfield to Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, dated 28 February 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked the Chief Executive, Mr. Shepley, to reply to your question about the validity of the appeals made by Mr. F. M. Wood in respect of applications WD/87/3410/P and WD/89/1441/P. As Mr. Shepley is currently away from the office, I am replying.

As you know, the relevant appeals were dismissed by the Inspector on 10 May 1991. Before responding to the substance of your question, we need to recover the appeal files from our archives.

I will see that a considered reply is sent as soon as possible.

Environment Agency

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to which sectors of industry would incur financial costs if the duty to further nature conservation were extended to the pollution control functions of the Environment Agency; what is his estimate of those costs; and what costs are currently imposed by the duty to have regard to nature conservation.

Mr. Atkins: The costs to regulated organisations of either a qualified duty on the Environment Agency to further conservation or an unqualified duty on it to have regard to conservation will depend upon the way in which the duty is discharged in practice. In either case they will depend upon judgments to be made by the agency as to what is reasonable in the particular circumstances. However whereas a duty to have regard to the desirability of conservation applies to all cases, a qualified furtherance duty would not apply to those cases falling within the terms of the qualifications. This may be uncertain and difficult to establish in relation to pollution control functions.

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the purpose of the Environment Agency.

Mr. Atkins: The Government issued on 17 January a draft outline showing the scope of the statutory guidance Ministers propose to issue on the agency's aims and objectives, including a proposed principal aim for the agency to help to promote sustainable development through high quality, integrated environmental protection, management and enhancement.

Sustainable Development

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the key principles of sustainable development.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to "The UK's Strategy for Sustainable Development", Cm 2426, chapter 3.

Local Authorities (Companies)

Lady Olga Maitland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on his proposals for local authority participation in companies and for amending the capital finance regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales have received some 180 representations on our proposed order under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, including requests to exercise our powers under that Act to exempt specific local authority companies from our proposals and about 40 representations on our proposed amendments to the capital finance regulations. Having regard to these representations, we have concluded that it would be right to allow certain exemptions and to make certain technical modifications, including making special transitional provisions, to our originally proposed order, and to make some amendments to the regulations.

I have arranged for copies of a revised draft order and regulations, including those modifications, together with explanatory guides and a statement of our current intentions on exemptions, to be placed in the Library of the House. Department of the Environment and Welsh Office officials are continuing to discuss the detail of the draft order and regulations with the local authority associations, and we shall be considering further the applications received from individual authorities for exemptions. It is our intention to make the order and regulations by 1 April 1995.

TRANSPORT

QE2 (Safety)

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *3*, which agency was responsible for refusing the Queen Elizabeth 2 permission to sail from New York in December 1994 until further works had been undertaken on the vessel.

Mr. Norris: The requirements of both the Marine Safety Agency and the United States coast guard resulted in a delay to the departure of the Queen Elizabeth 2 from New York.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *3*, what discussions were held between the Marine Safety Agency and US authorities regarding the fitness of the Queen Elizabeth 2 to sail from New York in December 1994; what advice was received from the US authorities; and what action was taken as a result.

Mr. Norris: The Marine Safety Agency maintained a professional dialogue with the United States coast guard when they boarded the ship in New York. Both agencies advised the owners that further work was necessary before departure and action was taken to comply with these requirements.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *3*, what was the precise nature of the work which the Marine Safety Agency required to be undertaken to the Queen Elizabeth 2 before the vessel was allowed to leave New York in December 1994.

Mr. Norris: As I explained in my previous answer on 20 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *3*, the work which had been delayed due to heavy weather during the crossing had to be completed. This included materials being removed from the restricted access areas of the ship.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *3*, what breaches of the safety of life at sea convention were identified on the QE2 *(a)* during the vessel's voyage to New York in December 1994 and *(b)* whilst in New York in December 1994.

Mr. Norris: The ship had work outstanding on sailing from Southampton, some of which was SOLAS related. For this reason, a certificate was issued for a reduced number of passengers, subject to special provisions and procedures being in place during the voyage.

Humber Bridge

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement regarding the outstanding debt on the Humber bridge; and what proposals he envisages to repay the debt.

Mr. Watts: The debt currently stands at £435 million. Primary legislation will be needed to write off or suspend debt which cannot be serviced from toll revenue.

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for privatising the Humber bridge.

Mr. Watts: There are no present proposals to privatise the Humber bridge.

Leicester Western Bypass

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the daily number of vehicles which will use the Leicester western bypass when it is opened; what are the expected flow rates in each direction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter form Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 1 March 1995:

I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about forecast daily traffic flows on the A46 Leicester Western Bypass, which is currently under construction.

In line with current practice, we have calculated traffic flows based on high and low economic growth and other factors. For each

section of the bypass the forecast annual average daily traffic flow in each direction, at opening, ranges between:-

17,500—19,000 vehicles: M1 Junction 21A to A50

19,000—20,500 vehicles: A50 to B5327

13,000—14,000 vehicles: B5327 to A6

11,000—12,000 vehicles: A6 to A46

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the level of investment by British Rail in each year since 1979 on *(a)* the rail network excluding the channel tunnel and *(b)* the channel tunnel.

Mr. Watts: British Rail has not invested in the channel tunnel. Investment in infrastructure and rolling stock to run international services through the tunnel is shown in the table, together with investment on the existing railway.

	Existing railway £ million cash	*EPS and channel tunnel freight £ million cash*	*Total £ million cash*
1979	367	—	367
1980	431	—	431
1981	409	—	409
1982	378	—	378
1983	439	—	439
1984–85[1]	596	—	596
1985–86	550	—	550
1986–87	543	—	543
1987–88	693	—	693
1988–89	723	5	728
1989–90	865	27	892
1990–91	869	178	1,047
1991–92	969	350	1,319
1992–93	955	521	1,476
1993–94	650	515	1,165

[1] Fifteen month year due to change from calendar year accounting to financial year accounting.

Road Maintenance (Delays)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessments he has made of the delays to motorists arising from *(a)* structural maintenance of roads and *(b)* bridge strengthening and replacement.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Joan Walley, dated 1 March 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Transport what assessments he has made of the delays to motorists arising from structural maintenance of roads and bridge strengthening and replacement.

As this is an operational matter for the Highways Agency,I have been asked to reply.

The Highways Agency is committed to keeping the duration of schemes and the amount of delay they cause to a minimum, and is developing arrangements for monitoring performance.

Our most recent assessment is that the cost of these delays to road users on motorways is in the order of £600m per year. We do not have equivalent figures for other types of road.

Roadside Wages (Wildlife)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he is taking to encourage wildlife habitats on roadside verges.

Mr. Watts: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Elliot Morley, dated 1 March 1995:

The Minister for Railways and Roads, Mr. John Watts, has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning the measures taken to encourage wildlife habitats on roadside verges.

Since 1962 a substantial estate has been established alongside the trunk road network a large part of which is woodland or scrub. This significant area of woodland is now proving valuable for nature conservation. It links existing patterns of vegetation and often complements severed woodlands and forests adjoining the road. The species used are predominantly native and the land suffers little human disturbance. This has allowed natural colonisation by some of our rarest wildflowers which is now complemented by the selective sowing and planting of areas with wildflowers.

The practice of planting roadside verges with wildflowers has formed part of the landscape treatment of roads since the mid-1980s and our motorways are increasingly becoming nature reserves in their own right. For example, 384 species of wild flora have been identified along the M1 between London and Leeds. They include rare species as well as 54 species of grass.

Effective maintenance will ensure that the landscape and other environmental mitigation objectives are achieved and maintained throughout the life of the scheme. Maintenance is timed to avoid nesting and breeding seasons and glades and rides are created in solid woodland blocks. Where opportunities permit, balancing ponds and watercourses can be managed to create a mosaic of wildlife habitat. Trees, shrubs and wildflowers which fail to establish are removed and replaced and dominant species such as gorse which can stifle the growth of other species is controlled by cutting. The spread of weeds such as docks and ragwort (which is poisonous to livestock) is prevented by cutting or in some circumstances through the selective use of herbicides. To bring trees to maturity in a well-formed, stable and healthy manner periodic thinning will take place, removing those trees which were either planted as nurse crops or are preventing the natural growth of other trees within a planted area. In many cases the wood derived from this process is recycled to provide mulch for new planting.

Specific measures taken to encourage wildlife onto roadside verges include work on the A27 Brighton Bypass. On this scheme the use of plant species which attract the Chalkhill Blue is helping to preserve this rare species of butterfly. This work has won an award from Butterfly Conservation, and other measures to preserve butterflies are being planned throughout the country.

These examples of work are aimed at the protection of individual species, but much of the work that is implemented is directed at preserving areas of habitat which support a wide range of species. Examples include M1-A1 link road relocation of a wetland site; A31 Ferndown Bypass restoration of heathland SSS1; A361 North Devon Link Road restoration of moorland and re-creation of ponds; and M3 Winchester restoration of chalk Downland. Innovative techniques have been used in all these cases and long term monitoring is underway to help inform future work of a similar nature.

We also take measures to deter wildlife from straying onto roads. These include protective measures such as bird and bat boxes, toad and frog tunnels, special fencing for badgers and deer and the construction of otter holts. We also divert and maintain watercourses during construction to prevent stagnation. Rescue plans for dormice have also been implemented, new ponds created for great crested newts and butterfly habitats have been recreated.

Advice on the best measures to be taken to encourage wildlife habitats on roadside verges is obtained from English Nature and other conservation bodies and has been incorporated in Volume 10 of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges which is available from the House of Commons Library.

Radioactive Materials

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now intends to introduce regulations arising from the radioactive materials (Road Transport) Act 1991.

Mr. Norris: Regulations should be laid before the House in May.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what efficiency savings he has made in respect of the radioactive material transportation division.

Mr. Norris: A higher executive officer post has been given up, with estimated savings of £4,500 in the current financial year and £26,000 in 1995–96.

Joint Aviation Requirements

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions during the last four years the joint aviation requirements—JAR-OPS 1—now being promulgated by the CAA as alternatives to, or as an elaboration for, an air navigation order have been subject to the normal parliamentary process in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Norris: None.

Redundancies

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff have left British Rail since January 1993 under redundancy or early retirement arrangements; and what has been the total cost of payments made to staff leaving the industry.

Mr. Watts: For the period from 1 January 1993 to 31 January 1995, 19,183 employees left British Rail under voluntary redundancy or special severance terms, at a cost of some £377 million.

Birmingham Northern Relief Road

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the departmental preparation and supervision costs in trunk roads in England 1994 review, in respect of the proposed Birmingham northern relief road;

(2) how much his Department has spent to date on the administration of the public inquiry into the proposed Birmingham northern relief road; and how much he expects to spend by the time the inquiry is completed;

(3) how much his Department expects to spend on the compulsory purchase of land and property to make way for the proposed Birmingham northern relief road.

Mr. Watts: These are operational matters for the Highways Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Ms Joan Walley, dated 1 March 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for information on the Department's costs in respect of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road (BNRR).

The Highways Agency expects to spend in the order of £25 million acquiring land compulsorily for the construction of BNRR. This land would remain in the ownership of the Department, who would lease it to Midland Expressway Ltd for the duration of their Concession. The road itself will revert to the Department when the concession expires.

The preparation and supervision costs for this scheme referred to in the Trunk Roads in England 1994 Review relate to costs incurred by the Department in selecting the private sector promoter and negotiating the Concession Agreement. In addition, there are costs associated with carrying out certain statutory functions during the planning stage and the fees of consultants engaged to assist with the Department's supervision of the project. To date these costs amount to about £5.0 million.

You also asked how much the Department had spent to date on the administration of the public inquiry and the likely outturn costs. To date we have spent around £700,000 which includes fees, venue costs, the cost of servicing the inquiry and staff costs. We expect spend to continue at about £20,000 per week until the inquiry ends some time in the summer.

WALES

Non-departmental Public Bodies (Delegated Pay)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department which will *(a)* follow the pay arrangements of the sponsoring Department and *(b)* pursue an independent and separate route under the delegated pay option (i) from April 1995 and (ii) from April 1996.

Mr. Redwood: NDPBs in Wales operate a variety of pay systems. Where these are currently linked to national civil service pay settlements, it will be for the management in each NDPB concerned to develop and bring forward proposals for new pay arrangements to operate following the delegation of civil service pay to departments and agencies and in the absence of national pay settlements from April 1996.

Civil Servants (Fast Stream)

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. Redwood: The information for 1991 and 1992 is published in the Civil Service Commissioners' reports, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

For 1993 and 1994 the information is as follows:

	Total number of fast-stream entrants	*Number who were women*
1993	2	1
1994	6	1

Modern Apprenticeship Scheme

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which sectors the modern apprenticeship scheme will cover in 1995–96; and what funding he will make available for the scheme.

Mr. Redwood: I intend making over £6 million available to fund modern apprenticeships in 1995–96. My Department is currently in discussions with the training and enterprise councils to determine those sectors to which modern apprenticeships will be extended to meet the needs of the local economy, though a strong emphasis on manufacturing engineering will continue.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the value in today's prices of work contracted out by compulsory competitive tendering from local authorities; and how much has been won in value and in percentage terms by *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* in-house bids indicating when they were permitted to bid and giving the number of bids involved.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally.

NCM

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he intends to take to facilitate the smooth transition of NCM from Crown offices in Cathays park, Cardiff, to new offices in Cardiff bay.

Mr. Redwood: My Department is not directly responsible for the arrangements to move NCM out of Cathays park. However, my officials are in contact with the company and we will do anything we reasonably can to assist them within the constraints imposed by our own operational and budgetary requirements.

Market Testing

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the value in today's prices of work contracted out from his Department through market testing; how much has been won by the private sector and how much has been won by the public sector if permitted to bid; and what is the total number of contracts in each category.

Mr. Redwood: Details of the value of the three contracts awarded as a result of market testing during 1992–93 and 1993–94 are as follows:

Service	*Public/Private sector*	*Total contract value*
Building maintenance management	Private sector	Fee based call-off contract. Actual cost for first year, 1993–94, was £24,191, excluding VAT
Staff training	Private sector	Total not available. Part call-off contract. Fee for 3 year non-call of element £286,750, excluding VAT.
Catering services	Public sector when contract let	Costs dependent on turnover. Actual cost for first year, 1992–93, was £76,000, excluding VAT.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the cost of today's prices of the compulsory competitive tendering and market-testing programme.

Mr. Redwood: The costs for each of the years 1992–93 and 1993–94 for market testing is £360,000 if costs are annualised over the accepted investment appraisal period for central Government of 10 years, compared with the expected annual savings of £1.65 million.

Motorways

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many miles of motorway are currently *(a)* open in Wales, *(b)* under construction in Wales and *(c)* planned in Wales, either (i) as new motorway or (ii) as existing motorway being widened.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Seventy-eight miles of motorway are open. A further 4.4 miles and 14 miles of new motorway are under construction and planned respectively. Twelve miles of existing motorway are to be widened.

Gas Works Sites

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what information he has on remedial decontamination work undertaken at former gas works sites in Wales;

(2) how many abandoned former gas works sites there are in Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: The survey of contaminated land sites in Wales published by the Welsh Office in 1988 identified 76 former or existing gas works sites in Wales. A number of these have been or are being decontaminated under the Welsh Development Agency's land reclamation programme. British Gas also has its own programme of works to survey and treat gasworks sites in its ownership which might give rise to off-site contamination.

Dioxins Report

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to *(a)* publicise the existence and *(b)* make available to those organisations and communities in Wales known to be concerned with dioxin pollution, copies of the Government report on the United Kingdoms—comments on the United States Environmental Protection Agency's external review draft reassessment of dioxins, issued in January.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: On 25 January my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment announced the publication of the United Kingdom's response to the United States Environmental Protection Agency's draft report on dioxins. Since publication the Department of the Environment have distributed copies to a wide range of interests. Other interested organisations in Wales can obtain copies on request either from the Welsh Office or from the Department of the Environment.

Bowel Cancer

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what plans he has to introduce a screening system to identify bowel cancer before it spreads beyond the bowel wall.

Mr. Richards: None. The Government's screening policy seeks to ensure that a national screening programme is introduced only if research has shown it to be effective and affordable. The benefits provided by screening must also outweigh any disadvantages. These criteria are not met in respect of screening the whole population for bowel cancer.

Prostate Cancer

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to introduce an early diagnosis service for prostate cancer assessment following the trial evaluation programme of a selective screening system recently conducted in Gwent.

Mr. Richards: Although the trial evaluation in Gwent has now ended, I understand that publication of the findings is not expected until the end of the year. The Welsh Office has not been informed of the results, but will consider them when they are made available.

Public Appointments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the appointments he has made to non-departmental public bodies and NHS trusts since 1 March 1994.

Mr. Redwood: All current appointments made by me, including those made since 1 March 1994, are listed in "Appointments made by the Secretary of State for Wales". This document is updated quarterly and is available in the Library of the House.

SCOTLAND

Road Accidents

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the accident and fatal accident figures for each year since 1990, and any months of 1995 currently available for each stretch of A77, A74 and A96 and for the whole of each road, on a directly comparable basis.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the tables:

Route: A77
Section: Stranraer to Ayr
Length km.: 83.18

	Personal injury accidents				
Year	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total	Section accident rate
1990	0	20	45	65	0.43
1991	3	19	33	55	0.37
1992	6	24	47	77	0.51
1993	3	18	39	60	0.40
1994	0	26	48	74	0.49

Route: A77
Section: Ayr to Glasgow City Boundary
Length km.: 46.70

	Personal injury accidents				
Year	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total	Section accident rate
1990	8	27	75	110	0.29
1991	8	29	75	112	0.29
1992	5	31	72	108	0.28
1993	3	18	64	85	0.22
1994	3	22	57	82	0.21

Route: A77
Section: Stranraer to Glasgow City Boundary (Whole Trunk Road)
Length km.: 129.88

	Personal injury accidents				
Year	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total	Section accident rate
1990	8	47	120	175	0.46
1991	11	48	108	167	0.43
1992	11	55	119	185	0.48
1993	6	36	103	145	0.38
1994	3	48	105	156	0.41

Route: A77
Section: Within Glasgow City Boundary
Length kms.: 6.00

	Personal injury accidents				
Year	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total	Section accident rate
1990	0	16	83	99	1.76
1991	1	28	65	94	1.67
1992	0	21	57	78	1.38
1993	0	14	50	64	1.13
1994	0	20	42	62	1.10

Route: A74/A74(M)
Section: National Boundary to Millbank[1]
Length km.: 92.16

	Personal injury accidents				
Year	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total	Section accident rate
1990	8	31	67	106	0.14
1991	4	31	76	111	0.15
1992	8	26	55	89	0.12
1993	7	24	50	81	0.11
1994	1	21	37	59	0.08

[1] The construction work related to the upgrading of the A74 to motorway has been under way during the period covered making separation of individual dual and motorway sections impractical.

Route: M74
Section: Millbank to Maryville
Length km.: 35.83

	Personal injury accidents				
Year	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total	Section accident rate
1990	1	10	22	33	0.08
1991	4	9	23	36	0.09
1992	0	11	26	37	0.09
1993	1	8	20	29	0.07
1994	1	9	43	53	0.13

Route: A74/M74
Section: National Boundary to Maryville (Whole Trunk Road)
Length km.: 127.99

	Personal injury accidents				
Year	Fatal	Serious	Slight	Total	Section accident rate
1990	9	41	89	139	0.12
1991	8	40	99	147	0.13
1992	8	37	81	126	0.11
1993	8	32	70	110	0.09
1994	2	30	80	112	0.10

Route: A96
Section: Aberdeen to Fochabers
Length km.: 85.63

	Personal injury accidents				
Year	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*	*Section accident rate*
1990	7	20	80	107	0.40
1991	3	26	58	87	0.33
1992	3	28	71	102	0.39
1993	2	19	65	86	0.33
1994	5	16	52	73	0.28

Route: A96
Section: Aberdeen to Fochabers
Length km.: 85.63

	Personal injury accidents				
Year	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*	*Section accident rate*
1990	7	20	80	107	0.40
1991	3	26	58	87	0.33
1992	3	28	71	102	0.39
1993	2	19	65	86	0.33
1994	5	16	52	73	0.28

Route: A96
Section: Fochabers to Inverness
Length km.: 73.01

	Personal injury accidents				
Year	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*	*Section accident rate*
1990	3	15	54	72	0.24
1991	3	22	52	77	0.26
1992	6	13	56	75	0.25
1993	4	13	47	64	0.21
1994	2	12	42	56	0.19

Route: A96
Section: Aberdeen to Inverness (Whole Trunk Road)
Length km: 158.63

	Personal injury accidents				
Year	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Slight*	*Total*	*Section accident rate*
1990	10	35	134	179	0.32
1991	6	48	110	164	0.29
1992	9	41	127	177	0.31
1993	6	32	112	150	0.27
1994	7	28	94	129	0.23

Note:
[1] The accident rates shown in all the tables are expressed in numbers of personal injury accidents per million vehicle kilometres travelled. The traffic flows are estimated from sample counts taken at specific sites and updated annually using national growth factors.

Vocational Qualifications

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to *(a)* promote and *(b)* fund the Scottish vocational qualification in child care and education.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A national television and press advertising campaign to promote SVQs and other vocational qualifications will be conducted in Scotland during March and April this year. A second phase of the campaign is planned for later in the year.

Some £1.2 million has been given to the Scottish Vocational Education Council by the Scottish Office in the current financial year for the Scottish vocational qualification development programme, which includes the child care and education sector.

Paisley Gilmour Street Railway Station

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next plans to meet the appropriate officials of the relevant authorities to discuss making Paisley Gilmour Street railway station accessible to disabled people, including wheelchair users; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Paisley Gilmour Street railway station is owned by Railtrack and operated by the Strathclyde passenger transport executive. I have no plans, at present, to meet officials of either body. However, I understand that Railtrack has a scheme under consideration to refurbish the station, which will include the provision of lifts to the platforms and for the building of a subway to Sneddon street.

Gemini Housing Association

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if Gemini is registered with Scottish Homes as a bona fide housing association;

(2) what assessment he has made of the consistency with the code of conduct of Gemini distributing a newsletter to current Scottish Homes' tenants prior to formal registration of interest;

(3) if Gemini's financial packages for each ballot area will be appraised on a mutually exclusive basis, in direct competition with each of the alternative landlords;

(4) what is the full postal address of the Scottish Homes' office in the east end of Glasgow;

(5) how much and in what manner Scottish Homes is resourcing the Gemini bid;

(6) if Gemini is submitting stand-alone viable financial packages for each ballot area.

(7) what assessment he has made of the viability of Gemini as an organisation capable of attracting private funding if it is unsuccessful in a substantial proportion of its bids for balloted housing stock from Scottish Homes;

(8) what is the full postal address of Gemini housing Association.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is a matter for Scottish Homes. I have asked its chairman, Sir James Mellon, to write to the hon. Member.

Community Education Service

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, if he will make a statement on the value of the community education service in Strathclyde region.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I attach considerable importance to the work of the community education service throughout Scotland, as an integral part of the statutory provision for education made by local authorities. Total expenditure on community education by local authorities in Scotland in 1992–93 was almost £79 million, including over £37 million by Strathclyde region.

Royal Scottish National Hospital and Community NHS Trust

Mr. Gallie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what financial arrangements are being made for the Royal

Scottish national hospital and community NHS trust which was dissolved on 30 September 1994.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Pursuant to the dissolution of the Royal Scottish national hospital and community NHS trust, on 30 September 1994, and its reconfiguration with Forth Valley Healthcare a directly managed unit, as Central Scotland Healthcare NHS trust on 1 October 1994, my right hon. Friend proposes to create new originating capital debt for the new trust equal to the net assets transferred to it and therefore to remit the outstanding debt of the dissolved trust.

The operations consequent on the reconfiguration involve no loss to the Exchequer. Her Majesty's Treasury has today presented a minute to the House giving the particulars and circumstances of the proposed remission which it has approved in principle.

Fatal Accident Inquiries

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, column 18, in how many of the fatal accident inquiries were the managers or the owners, judged by the sheriff to have been negligent of the interests and well-being of the resident who died; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* It could be misleading to summarise the determinations of sheriffs on complex cases. I will therefore write to the hon. Member, enclosing copies of the relevant determinations.

Although the Government deplore the circumstances surrounding the "Glenglova" case, I would emphasise that an inquiry following the death of a resident in residential or nursing home care is not necessarily indicative of poor standards of care in such establishments.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, column 18, what proposals he intends to introduce in response to the recommendations of the sheriffs who conducted fatal accident inquiries into the deaths of several elderly residents of privately owned residential homes; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* I shall write to the hon. Member to clarify my earlier answer. This will indicate that there has in fact been only one fatal accident inquiry related to a private residential care home. The remaining six inquiries concerned private nursing home residents.

A working group is being set up to consider the registration and inspection issues concerning private and voluntary residential care establishments following the recent "Glenglova" FAI. The group will consist of Scottish Office officials and representatives from local authorities, independent providers and user groups. It is anticipated that recommendations will be put to Ministers this autumn.

Following discussion with the Department's health policy and public health directorate about the effectiveness of the Nursing Homes (Registration) (Scotland) Act 1938, health board general managers have funded a project to establish a nationally agreed and implemented set of core standards for the registration and inspection of nursing homes. The project steering group, which is chaired by the Scottish Office and includes representatives of health boards, local authorities, residents and nursing home owners, will ensure that all relevant information, including the determination of FAIs following deaths in nursing homes, are considered by the project team.

These developments demonstrate the Government's commitment to protecting the more vulnerable groups in society who require either residential or nursing home care.

DEFENCE

Defence Export Services Organisation

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff of the Defence Export Services Organisation were on short-term secondments from defence contractors in each year from 1988; and what proportion of the total staff they represented in that time.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is set out in the table.

	Contractor	*Period*
1988		
Sir Colin Chandler	British Aerospace	1985 to September 1989
H. L. Myers	Rolls Royce	November 1986 to July 1989
D. J. Hastie	British Aerospace	April 1988 to October 1989
S. Brett	British Aerospace	August 1988 to August 1989
1989		
Sir Colin Chandler	British Aerospace	1985 to September 1989
H. L. Myers	Rolls Royce	November 1986 to July 1989
D. J. Hastie	British Aerospace	April 1988 to October 1989
S. Brett	British Aerospace	August 1988 to August 1989
S. Barker	Westland Helicopters	July 1989 to July 1991
A. Thomas	Raytheon	July 1989 to September 1994
1990		
S. Barker	Westland Helicopters	July 1989 to July 1991
A. Thomas	Raytheon	July 1989 to September 1994
1991		
S. Barker	Westland Helicopters	July 1989 to July 1991
A. Thomas	Raytheon	July 1989 to September 1994
1991		
S. Barker	Westland Helicopters	July 1989 to July 1991
A. Thomas	Raytheon	July 1989 to September 1994
1992		
A. Thomas	Raytheon	July 1989 to September 1994

	Contractor	Period
1993		
Sir Alan Thomas	Raytheon	July 1989 to September 1994
D. Mitchell	British Aerospace	October 1993 to date
1994		
Sir Alan Thomas	Raytheon	July 1989 to September 1994
D. Mitchell	British Aerospace	October 1993 to date
C. Masefield	British Aerospace	September 1994 to date
1995		
D. Mitchell	British Aerospace	October 1993 to date
C. Masefield	British Aerospace	September 1994 to date

Note:
1. In all years, the number of secondees represented less than 1 per cent. of the total DESO staff numbers.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many former members of staff of the three Defence Export Services Organisation project offices have advised of business or employment interests relevant to the work of Defence Export Services Organisation; and in how many cases clearance was refused.

Mr. Freeman: Since January 1990, members of the Defence Export Services Organisation have made 33 applications to accept employment with defence-related companies. All were approved; 31 unconditionally; one subject to a waiting period; and one subject to a ban on the applicant's involvement in a specific area of work of the prospective employer.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff of the Defence Export Sales Organisation are covered by performance bonuses; and what aspects of performance are so rewarded.

Mr. Freeman: In line with arrangements applying across the civil service, the majority of civilian staff within the Defence Export Service Organisation are subject to performance-related pay arrangements, which can include bonuses. Performance criteria are intended to reflect the individual's contribution to the overall performance of the organisation.

The pay of service personnel within the organisation is not performance related.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of staff of the Defence Export Services Organisation since 1979 have left the service and subsequently taken up duties for, or on behalf of, a defence-related contractor; and whether the staff of the Defence Export Services Organisation are required to notify him of such duties.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available for the period before January 1990. Since then, 13 members of the Defence Export Services Organisation have made 33 applications to accept employment with, or on behalf of, a defence-related contractor. The rules do not require staff to notify my Department of whether appointments are taken up.

Jordan

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions prior written agreement was sought by the kingdom of Jordan to dispose of items exported to it under the Government-to-Government Jordan defence packages; and whether the United Kingdom Government acceded to such requests.

Mr. Freeman: This is a confidential matter between Governments.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is *(a)* the purpose of and *(b)* the statutory authority for payments under the subhead vote 2 H7 for the years 1988–89 to 1992–93; and in respect of which countries these payments were made.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 17 February 1995]:* The main purpose of these payments has been to provide interest rate support for Jordan. Additionally, in the years 1986–87 to 1988–89, payments were made to the Export Credits Guarantee Department from within the figures given to the House on 13 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *544*, to provide interest rate support for Oman. Contributions were made by the Ministry of Defence under the class I Supply estimates and confirming Appropriation Act.

Global Positioning System

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what payments, either in cash or by the provision of facilities of services, are made by the United Kingdom under any of the successive moves between the United Kingdom and the US for access to the global positioning system.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom Ministry of Defence makes no payments either in cash or in kind for access to the United States global positioning system.

International Military Services Ltd.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *1189*, on which occasions IMS Ltd. *(a)* applied for approval to seek business in new markets, *(b)* made applications which involved novel features and *(c)* made applications which were significantly different from previous business; if these guidelines were in written form; and on what date these guidelines were first issued to the management of IMS.

Mr. Freeman: The policy guidelines for International Military Services Ltd. were set out in writing by the Ministry of Defence in March 1979 and made available to the Public Accounts Committee. Consultations under the guidelines remain confidential between the Ministry and the company.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff of International Military Services have been transferred to other companies during the winding down of the company; and whether the normal Government rules of conflict of interest and business advantage have applied to the staff of International Military Services.

Mr. Freeman: The staff of International Military Services Ltd. were not public servants and consequently were not covered by Government regulations on future employment. When the company ceased trading in 1991, most staff were made redundant and made their own arrangements for future employment where appropriate.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when IMS discontinued its practice of reporting quarterly

to its board of its use of, and remuneration to, agents and consultants in furtherance of defence-related export sales.

Mr. Freeman: The internal reporting arrangements to the board are a matter for the company.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the legal or international arbitration action between the government of Iran and IMS Ltd. has now been resolved; and if he will make a statement on the settlement reached.

Mr. Freeman: Any discussions or proceedings between International Military Services Ltd. and its former customers remain commercially confidential.

Royal Marines School of Music

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will be announcing his decision on the future of the Royal Marines school of music at Deal and the proposal to relocate it at Portsmouth.

Mr. Soames: A consultation document on our proposal for the future relocation of the Royal Marines school of music was issued on 17 October 1994 and the consultation period ended on 16 December 1994. We are currently considering very carefully all the many representations made during this period before deciding on the way forward.

Overseas Contracts

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if all commitments made in memoranda of understanding signed with Nigeria prior to June 1993 have subsequently been honoured;

(2) on what dates in the last 10 years memoranda of understanding relating to defence have been signed with Nigeria.

Mr. Freeman: A detailed search of records has revealed that the MOU referred to in previous answers—24 February 1994, *Official Report*, column *383*, and 9 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *254*—between the Governments of the United Kingdom and Nigeria was never signed, although negotiations were conducted over a number of months in 1981. No defence MOU has since been signed with Nigeria.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 February 1985, *Official Report*, column *323*, what were the exact dates of the memoranda of understanding concerning defence contracts with the Government of Indonesia on September 1983, March 1984, April 1986 and November 1991.

Mr. Freeman: The exact dates are as follows: 21 September 1983, 30 March 1984, 12 April 1986 and 18 November 1991.

Aircraft Controllers

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft controllers have left to join civilian airports in the last two years; and what were the companies involved and the numbers joining each company.

Mr. Soames: Departmental records of those air traffic controllers who leave Crown service do not include their eventual employment in civil life.

Navy Personnel (Private Companies)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Royal Navy *(a)* nursing officers, *(b)* surgeons, *(c)* medical consultants, *(d)* occupational therapists, *(e)* pharmacists, *(f)* physiotherapists and *(g)* dentists, have left to join private health care companies in the last two years; and what were the companies involved and the numbers joining each company.

(2) how many Royal Navy *(a)* engineers and *(b)* metallurgists have left to join defence or defence-related companies in the last two years; and what were the companies involved and the numbers joining each company.

Mr. Soames: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Nuclear Weapons Convoys

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the emergency services which are informed when nuclear warheads are transported by road.

Mr. Soames: Civil police forces are always notified at least 24 hours in advance of nuclear weapon convoy movements through their area of jurisdiction.

Subcontractors

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what requirements are placed upon main contractors to the Ministry of Defence to make timely payments to subcontractors.

Mr. Freeman: The following term has been included in MOD contracts on main contractors since March 1992.

Where the contractor enters a subcontract with a supplier or contractor for the purpose of performing the contract, he shall cause a term to be included in such subcontract which requires payment to be made to the supplier of contractor within a specified period not exceeding 30 days from receipt of valid invoice as defined by the subcontract requirements.

Russian Armed Forces

Mr. Elletson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all planned military co-operation programmes, conferences and exchanges with the Russian armed forces.

Mr. Soames: The United Kingdom's military co-operation with Russia is at present confined to three main areas.

a. To assist in the removal of nuclear warheads and intercontinental ballistic missiles from places of deployment to destruction sites, we are providing 20 armoured transport vehicles and 250 armoured containers. A meeting of the Anglo-Russian steering group, which oversees this project is scheduled to take place at the end of 1995.

b. To UK has also offered modest assistance with the resettlement in civilian life of Russians leaving the armed forces. This would include training resettlement instructors, and equipping and maintaining a resettlement centre in Moscow for three years. Discussions on this proposal are continuing.

c. To meet the obligations of arms control treaties and agreements, there is an ongoing programme of military contacts and inspections in which the UK participates.

Routine defence staff talks are planned to take place in London towards the end of 1995. A Russian hydrography ship will visit the UK in March. A Royal Navy ship will visit St. Petersburg in May, to help commemorate victory in Europe. Agreement has also been reached in principle to hold a joint UK-Russian exercise, but no firm plans have been made, and no dates set for this.

Fertiliser

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions since 1 January HMS Brazen transported fertiliser from the United Kingdom to Gibraltar for use in the gardens at the official service residence; what was the quantity of fertiliser carried; and what was the cost involved.

Mr. Soames: None.

Porton Down

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the ethics committee overseeing the service volunteers programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down was set up; for what reasons it was established; what is the purpose and nature of the committee's work; how often it meets; how many members sit on the committee; how many of these members are drawn from outside Porton Down; and who is the current chairman.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework-document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 1 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking when the Ethics Committee overseeing the Service volunteers programme at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down was set up; for what reasons it was established; what is the purpose and nature of the committee's work; how often it meets; how many members sit on the committee; how many of these members are drawn from outside Porton Down; and who is the current chairman has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

a. Assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures.

b. Develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and,

c. Evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

No studies involving volunteers are carried out unless there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians.

3. The creation of an independent Ethics Committee at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment followed the publication of guidelines from the Royal College of Physicians. The CBDE Ethics Committee was established in July 1991. The Ethics Committee has subsumed previous arrangements for the ethical review of proposed volunteer studies. For some 30 years, a committee on the safety of human experiments had been set up at this Establishment involving all the medical officers on the staff of the Establishment whose task was to review all the protocols for proposed volunteer studies to ensure that they were as safe as possible; this committee had the right of veto. Following such reviews, protocols were then considered by an ethical sub group of the Medical Committee of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council which involved independent experts.

4. The purpose of the CBDE Ethics Committee is to consider the medical-ethical aspects of all proposed studies involving human volunteers. Its role is to review and approve detailed protocols for any studies carried out involving the use of volunteers. Such studies are only carried out if there is a clear military need and the protocol has been designed to ensure that any possible risks, however slight, are minimised. The protocol also includes a full explanation in lay terms of the study which will be read to the volunteer by a military officer unconnected with the study so that informed consent based on the volunteer's complete understanding of the nature of the study and any perceived hazards can be sought.

5. The CBDE Ethics Committee consists of 11 members of whom 9 are drawn from outside of the Ministry of Defence. It meets four times a year although there is provision to meet on a more frequent basis if required. The Committee is chaired by Professor Hugh Dudley, CBE, ChM, FRCSE, Professor Emeritus of Surgery, University of London.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the nature of the guidelines and rules provided by the Royal College of Physicians, London and the British Psychological Society with regard to the service volunteers programmes at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down; and when these guidelines were adopted by the establishment.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Dr. David Clark, dated 1 March 1995:

1. Your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Defence asking if he will make a statement on the nature of the guidelines and rules provided by the Royal College of Physicians (London) and the British Psychological Society with regard to the Service volunteers programmes at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down; and when these guidelines were adopted by the Establishment has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical or biological weapons may be used against them. In order to carry out this work, it is necessary to use Service volunteers to:

a. Assess the ability of Service personnel to function with new equipment and procedures.

b. Develop medical countermeasures to protect Service personnel and,

c. Evaluate the effects of very low and medically safe concentrations of CW agents on the ability of unprotected personnel to operate normally.

3. Studies and tests at CBDE which involve Service volunteers are only carried out where there is a clear military need and a detailed protocol has been reviewed and approved by an independent Ethics Committee in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Royal College of Physicians and British Psychological Society.

4. In 1984 the Royal College of Physicians published Guidelines on the practice of Ethics Committees in medical research which were subsequently updated in 1990 and taken into account when the CBDE Ethics Committee was established in July 1991. These guidelines provide advice inter alia on terms of reference, membership, methods of working, application, responsibilities, consent, definition and classes of research and payments. The British Psychological Society guidelines were taken into account shortly after their publication in 1993. These provide inter alia advice on

the code of conduct for psychologists and the ethical principles for work with human participants.

5. Although these guidelines have only recently been published, there has been an ethical review of proposed volunteer studies at CBDE for over 30 years. Prior to the establishment of the CBDE Ethics Committee there was a committee on the safety of human experiments which had been set up at this Establishment involving all the medical officers on the staff of the Establishment whose tasks was to review all the proposals for proposed volunteer studies to ensure that they were as safe as possible; this committee had the right of veto. Following such reviews, protocols were then considered by an ethical sub group of the Medical Committee of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council which involved independent experts.

RAF Bentwaters

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the RAF Bentwaters site was sold to the highest bidder; what consideration he gave to environmental factors in reaching a decision over the sale of the RAF Bentwaters site; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: I can confirm that the RAF Bentwaters site has been sold to the highest bidder; the proposal from the Maharishi Foundation complies fully with the agreed planning brief.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Maharishee Foundation provided a detailed business plan as part of its purchase bid for the RAF Bentwaters site.

Mr. Soames: It is not my Department's policy to divulge details or information provided by prospective purchasers of redundant military sites. However, it can be confirmed that the Maharishi Foundation provided full and sufficient information on which to assess the bid.

Attack Helicopters

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated in-service date for the Army's attack helicopter.

Mr. Freeman: The attack helicopter is expected to enter service with the Army at the end of the decade. It is not at present possible to be precise; the in-service date will depend on which of the contenders we choose to meet the Army's requirement.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts concerning the procurement of attack helicopters.

Mr. Freeman: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has not held any formal discussions with his foreign counterparts concerning the procurement of attack helicopters. Discussions continue with officials of the contender nationals and other Governments with requirements similar to our own.

EDUCATION

College Fees

Mr. Merchant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has for the future settlement of college fees.

Mr. Boswell: My officials have written today to the Higher Education Funding Council for England asking it to advise my right hon. Friend on the annual adjustment of the average college fee at the Oxford and Cambridge colleges from 1995 onwards. The council has been asked to base its advice on the annual movement in public funding at universities with a similar mission. In this way, the annual adjustment of college fees with reflect trends in public funding per student elsewhere in higher education. The Department will no longer engage in negotiations with the Oxford and Cambridge colleges. The funding council has also been asked to advise on future arrangements for the setting of college fees at the universities of Durham, Kent, Lancaster and York.

Higher Education Funding Council

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what is the level of underspend in the 1994–95 budget of the Higher Education Funding Council.

Mr. Boswell: No underspend is anticipated in the 1994–95 budget of the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Teachers

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are her Department's estimates of the total number of qualified teachers in England and Wales in 1994–95 and the forecasts for each subsequent year up to and including 2000–2001.

Mr. Robin Squire: Returns from the Department's 1994–95 census of teachers are incomplete: the results will be published later this year. Projections of teaching numbers are not available.

Pupil-teacher Ratios

Ms Hodge: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what are the Department's estimates of the average pupil-teacher ratios in (i) primary schools and (ii) secondary schools in 1994–95 and the forecasts for each subsequent year up to and including 2000–2001.

Mr. Robin Squire: Returns form the Department's 1994–95 censuses of pupils and teachers are incomplete: the results will be published later this year. Figures for future years will reflect the decisions of employers.

Local Education Authority Budgets

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) if she will list in rank order the shire county local education authorities showing the reserves held in their education budgets at the most recent date available;

(2) if she will list in rank order *(a)* the metropolitan district education authorities outside London and *(b)* the London boroughs to show the reserves held in their education budgets at the most recent date available.

Mr. Robin Squire: Reserves held by local authorities are not apportioned between education and other services.

For the financial year ending on 31 March 1994, the table shows the total amount of balances held by schools for each LEA for which the information is available to the Department. The figures are shown in rank order for *(a)* metropolitan districts outside London; *(b)* inner and outer-London boroughs; and *(c)* shire counties.

Total balances in schools—year ending 31 March 1994

LEA	Balance (£000)
a) Metropolitan districts outside London	
Birmingham	16,696
Sandwell	5,742
Bradford	5,632
Sefton	5,684
Sheffield	5,616
Coventry	4,802
Doncaster	4,735
Leeds	4,587
Solihull	4,504
Newcastle upon Tyne	4,271
Wolverhampton	4,155
Wigan	4,144
St. Helens	3,941
Kirklees	3,868
Wakefield	3,643
Walsall	3,594
Wirrall	3,249
Manchester	3,146
Barnsley	3,046
Stockport	2,741
Salford	2,456
Calderdale	2,330
Bolton	2,291
Bury	2,225
Knowsley	2,078
Sunderland	1,897
South Tyneside	1,861
Gateshead	1,577
Dudley	1,317
Tameside	1,303
Trafford	1,055
Rotherham	930
North Tyneside	372
Oldham	322
Rochdale	211
Liverpool	n/a
b) London boroughs	
Tower Hamlets	8,189
Croydon	5,499
Lambeth	5,325
Hounslow	4,969
Enfield	4,778
Camden	4,768
Newham	4,694
Brent	4,545
Barnet	4,279
Lewisham	4,270
Havering	3,544
Southwark	3,513
Haringey	3,352
Redbridge	3,247
Wandsworth	3,228
Westminster	3,195
Bromley	3,134
Merton	2,996
Ealing	2,971
Islington	2,549
Richmond upon Thames	2,440
Hammersmith and Fulham	2,366
Hillingdon	2,231
Hackney	2,171
Bexley	2,013
Barking	1,707
Harrow	1,640
Kensington	1,386
Sutton	1,303
Kingston upon Thames	774
Corporation of London	38
Greenwich	n/a
Waltham Forest	n/a

Total balances in schools—year ending 31 March 1994

LEA	Balance (£000)
c) Shire counties	
Lancashire	32,976
Hampshire	25,542
Essex	23,612
Hertfordshire	20,397
Cheshire	16,196
Leicestershire	15,750
Nottinghamshire	15,275
Hereford and Worcester	13,855
Suffolk	13,500
Derbyshire	12,475
Avon	12,093
Oxfordshire	11,951
Kent	11,675
North Yorkshire	11,470
Devon	10,340
Northamptonshire	10,067
Norfolk	9,199
Staffordshire	9,160
Bedfordshire	8,297
Cleveland	8,169
Buckinghamshire	8,316
Berkshire	7,985
Durham	7,799
Humberside	7,764
Wiltshire	7,341
Cornwall	7,241
Dorset	7,200
Lincolnshire	6,891
Warwickshire	6,576
Somerset	6,665
Cambridgeshire	6,585
Gloucestershire	6,240
East Sussex	5,990
Surrey	4,986
Shropshire	4,574
West Sussex	4,499
Northumberland	3,667
Cumbria	2,844
Isle of Wight	1,487
Isles of Scilly	n/a

Note:

The figures are derived from the LMS outturn statements—1993–94—prepared by LEAs under section 42 of the Education Reform Act 1988, with the exception of one figure which has been separately provided by the LEA concerned. "N/A" denotes that the information is not yet available to the Department, either because no statement has been received or—in one case—because the LEA has been asked to clarify the treatment of balances in its statement. All figures represent surpluses net of deficits and cover all county and voluntary schools, and special schools in the case of the eight LEAs whose LMS schemes covered them in 1993–94. They also include the final balances shown in respect of schools which became grant-maintained during the course of the financial year.

Deficit Budgets

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what powers she has to intervene where school governors set deficit budgets.

Mr. Robin Squire: A local education authority school governing body which sets a deficit budget will normally be in breach of its duties under its LEA's scheme for the local management of schools. It is for the LEA to decide how to proceed if the situation arises. If the governors of a school have been guilty of a serious breach of the scheme requirements, or of financial mismanagement more generally, the LEA has power to suspend their right to a

delegated budget and take over management of the school's finances.

Governing bodies of GM schools are under an obligation to remain solvent under the terms of their financial memorandum with the Funding Agency for Schools. Should a GM school submit a deficit budget it would be for the Funding Agency for Schools and the school to agree upon the action to restore the school's financial position.

In the last resort, my right hon. Friend has the power, under sections 68 and 99 of the Education Act 1994, to direct a LEA or a governing body that she considers to have acted unreasonably or to be in breach of its statutory responsibilities to take corrective action.

Pupils

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many pupils are covered by the local education authorities in *(a)* Suffolk, *(b)* Cambridgeshire and *(c)* Norfolk.

Mr. Robin Squire: In January 1994, 93, 282 pupils were being taught in schools maintained by Suffolk local education authority, 84, 515 pupils in schools maintained by Cambridgeshire local education authority and 93,702 pupils in schools maintained by Norfolk local education authority. This excludes pupils being educated in grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what per cent. of pupils stayed on to take A levels in *(a)* Suffolk, *(b)* Cambridgeshire and *(c)* Norfolk; and what percent in each of these counties obtained grades A to C last year in its A-level examinations in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Boswell: The exact information is not available in the format requested.

The estimated percentage of those in their last year of compulsory schooling in 1991-92 who subsequently enrolled in the first year of GCE A-level course in 1992-93 in schools and further education colleges was: 38.2 per cent. in Suffolk; 40.3 per cent. in Cambridgeshire; and 35.9 per cent. in Norfolk.

The estimated percentage of these students starting on a GCE A-level course in schools and colleges in 1992–93, who achieved at least one GCE A level at grade C or above after the second year of the course in 1994 was: 56.7 per cent. in Suffolk; 62.9 per cent. in Cambridgeshire; and 55.9 per cent. in Norfolk.

Special Needs

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what was the percentage of pupils statemented in each local education authority in England in the last year for which figures are available; and what percentage of the education budget, and what amount of money, was spent on special needs in each local education authority.

Mr. Robin Squire: The percentage of pupils in each LEA with a statement of special educational needs in January 1994 is given in the following table.

It is not possible to provide aggregated expenditure on special educational needs in each local education authority, as the data on such expenditure incurred by individual schools are not collected.

Percentage of pupils with statements in each local education authority in England (January 1994)

Local Education Authority	*Total children with statements as a percentage of the school population*
Corporation of London	0.33
Camden	2.30
Greenwich	3.07
Hackney	3.66
Hammersmith and Fulham	2.64
Islington	3.27
Kensington and Chelsea	1.46
Lambeth	1.83
Lewisham	3.21
Southwark	2.48
Tower Hamlets	3.03
Wandsworth	2.77
Westminster	2.11
Barking and Dagenham	1.84
Barnet	1.79
Bexley	2.61
Brent	2.13
Bromley	2.34
Croydon	1.95
Ealing	2.10
Enfield	0.94
Haringey	1.84
Harrow	2.13
Havering	1.92
Hillingdon	2.18
Hounslow	3.02
Kingston upon Thames	2.18
Merton	2.48
Newham	2.35
Redbridge	1.94
Richmond upon Thames	2.01
Sutton	2.61
Waltham Forest	1.65
Birmingham	2.27
Coventry	1.95
Dudley	1.88
Sandwell	1.28
Solihull	2.04
Walsall	2.53
Wolverhampton	2.33
Knowsley	2.88
Liverpool	2.67
St. Helens	4.33
Sefton	2.56
Wirral	2.64
Bolton	1.92
Bury	3.67
Manchester	1.65
Oldham	1.12
Rochdale	2.18
Salford	1.67
Stockport	2.98
Tameside	3.03
Trafford	2.21
Wigan	3.63
Barnsley	2.35
Doncaster	2.55
Rotherham	2.53
Sheffield	2.19
Bradford	1.52
Calderdale	1.63
Kirklees	3.04
Leeds	2.82
Wakefield	2.35
Gateshead	1.94
Newcastle upon Tyne	2.36
North Tyneside	2.73
South Tyneside	2.18
Sunderland	2.23
Isles of Scilly	0.69

Percentage of pupils with statements in each local education authority in England (January 1994)

Local Education Authority	*Total children with statements as a percentage of the school population*
Avon	2.56
Bedfordshire	2.94
Berkshire	2.50
Buckinghamshire	3.45
Cambridgeshire	1.93
Cheshire	2.94
Cleveland	2.32
Cornwall	3.66
Cumbria	3.19
Derbyshire	[2]n/a
Devon	3.14
Dorset	2.61
Durham	2.78
East Sussex	3.04
Essex	2.26
Gloucestershire	2.69
Hampshire	3.12
Hereford and Worcester	1.69
Hertfordshire	2.45
Humberside	1.86
Isle of Wight	2.27
Kent	2.49
Lancashire	3.24
Leicestershire	2.27
Lincolnshire	3.36
Norfolk	3.21
North Yorkshire	2.21
Northamptonshire	1.95
Northumberland	2.35
Nottinghamshire	1.11
Oxfordshire	1.80
Shropshire	3.24
Somerset	1.90
Staffordshire	2.39
Suffolk	3.02
Surrey	2.99
Warwickshire	2.26
West Sussex	2.09
Wiltshire	3.44
England[1]	2.49

[1] England figures exclude Derbyshire.[2] not available.

Further Education

Mr. James Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what has been the change in provision of further education following the end of local authority involvement;

(2) what is the projected change in provision in further education for 1995–96;

(3) what further education subjects have shown greatest growth in the last three years.

Mr. Boswell: Local authority recurrent expenditure on further education in 1992–93, the last financial year before the transfer of FE colleges to the new FE sector, was £2,341 million. Recurrent funding by the FEFC in 1993–94 was £2,549 million, and the estimated outturn for 1994–95 is £2,684 million. The Government plan for expenditure on recurrent funding to increase to £2,863 million in 1995–96.

Data on the growth in further education subjects in the last three years, on a basis consistent with the structure of the new FE sector, are not yet available.

EMPLOYMENT

Business Link Wirral

Ms Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what financial help his Department or its agencies have given to the Business Link Wirral since its inception.

Mr. Paice: Neither the Employment Department nor its agencies have given financial help to Business Link Wirral. However, I understand that CEWTEC contributed £35,000 to the development costs of Business Link Wirral in 1994–95. In addition, a further contract for £42,000 was placed to support training in local companies.

Training

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list the amount and type of funding or other support received from his Department by each occupational standards council in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the previous three years;

(2) if he will list the industry lead bodies, the industry training organisations and the awarding bodies for each industrial sector and the amount and type of funding or other support received from his Department by each in *(a)* the current year and *(b)* each of the previous three years.

Mr. Paice: The Department has contracted with the National Council of Industry Training Organisations to maintain an up-to-date list of occupational standards councils, lead bodies and industry training organisations. NCITO produces a regular listing of all those organisations. A copy of the latest listing has been placed in the Library. Awarding bodies are independent organisations and the Department does not maintain a list of them. However, details of all awarding bodies currently accredited by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications to award national vocational qualifications are contained in the latest edition of the "NCVQ Monitor", a copy of which is also available in the Library. The Department does not normally fund awarding bodies.

The Department's funding for OSCs, LBs and ITOs comes principally from three main programmes. The funding for these programmes for the years 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 is provided in the following table. More detailed information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Employment Department Funding

Year/Programme	*1991–92 £ million*	*1992–93 £ million*	*1993–94 £ million*	*1994–95 Budget £ million*	*Total £ million*
ITO Support	3.35	3.47	3.21	3.50	13.53
Standards Programme	12.00	11.47	11.62	11.35	46.44
Modern Apprenticeships	—	—	—	1.62	1.62
Total	15.35	14.94	14.83	16.47	61.59

Earnings

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the source or basis of the estimates given by him as to the number of employees earning below the national insurance lower earnings limit.

Mr. Oppenheim: The estimates were produced by firstly estimating the proportion of the "New Earnings Survey" sample with earnings below the April 1994 lower earnings limit of £57, then applying this proportion to the number of employees in employment, taking due account of the estimated number of employees, mostly part-timers, who were excluded from NES because they were not covered by a PAYE scheme.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on 30 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *520*, (1) how many of those who have been refused income support owing to the habitual residence test are European Economic Area nationals residing in the United Kingdom under EC rights of residence directives as students, pensioners, or non-economically active persons;

(2) what proportion of the British nationals who have been refused income support owing to the habitual residence test have one parent who is a British national and one parent who is a national of another country;

(3) what proportion of the British nationals have been refused income support owing to the habitual residence test had *(a)* never previously lived in the United Kingdom and *(b)* never previously been employed in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Roger Evans: This information is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what account he has taken of the advice given by the Social Security Advisory Committee that is possible to be habitually resident in more than one country or in none; and what responsibility the Government have to British nationals in this country who have been excluded from income-related benefits on the basis of the habitual residence test.

Mr. Roger Evans: Decisions about whether an income support claimant is habitually resident are made by the independent adjudication officer in the first instance. The chief adjudication officer has drawn attention to the fact that a person may be habitually resident in more than one country or in none in the guidance that has provided for adjudication officers.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is taking to monitor the impact of the habitual residence test on *(a)* unsuccessful claimants, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* benefits agency offices.

Mr. Roger Evans: Information about the number of claims to income support where habitual residence is considered is collected monthly. This includes information about the number of unsuccessful claims. The impact on Benefits Agency offices also continues to be monitored from these monthly statistical returns. The impact on local authorities will be monitored from the normal range of management information statistics which local authorities submit from time to time.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Islington (Mr. Corbyn) on 30 January 1995, *Official Report*, column *520*, how many European economic area nationals were estimated to claim income support in a year before implementation of the habitual residence test; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for the numbers of claimants being refused income support under the test.

Mr. Roger Evans: Information identifying claims for income support from EEA nationals was not available before the introduction of the test. However, our assessment of the reason why people have been refused income support under the test is that it confirms that until its introduction a number of people received benefit who had no close connection with this country.

Ms Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated administration cost of the habitual resident test from 1 August 1994 to 1 August 1995; and what is the amount of income support that the Government estimate will be saved by the application of this test.

Mr. Roger Evans *[pursuant to his reply 2 November 1994, column 2672]:* I regret that the information provided on the estimated annual income support saving contained an error. The correct information is as follows.

The estimated annual income support saving is about £3 million rather than "in excess of £7 million" as inadvertently stated in the earlier answer, which represented the estimated full saving including housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Housing Costs

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he now proposes in respect of his acceptance of recommendations relating to an exception to the restriction on income support housing costs for income support recipients other than disabled people and the elderly, for the interest on additional loans for repairs and improvements necessary to maintain the fabric of the dwelling occupied as home; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: As a result of our acceptance of these recommendations, the regulations originally referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee were amended so that when they took effect on 2 May 1994 income support recipients who took out additional loans for this purpose could continue to have the interest on such loans met.

Disablement

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps are taken by his Department to ensure that medical assessors are sufficiently trained with regard to medical evidence when interpreting the Social Security (Industrial Injuries) Prescribed Diseases Regulations 1993.

Mr. Hague: Assessments in connection with prescribed diseases are made by independent adjudicating

medical authorities, the members of which are fully registered medical practitioners with extensive knowledge and experience in general medicine. On appointment the medical practitioners are trained in the practical procedures and the medico-legal aspects of the industrial injuries scheme by experienced AMAs. In addition, all AMAs are supplied with the DSS publication, "Notes on the Diagnosis of Prescribed Diseases", and the "Industrial Injuries Handbook for Adjudicating Medical Authorities" which details and explains the legislation relevant to the assessment of disablement in industrial injuries and prescribed diseases. Copies of both publications have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals in each region have claimed industrial disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis or emphysema under the approved scheme to date; and how many have been approved.

Mr. Hague: The information is not available by region. Information from Benefits Agency area directorates as at 31 December 1994 is in the table.

Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema (PD D12) by Area Directorate

Area	*Claims*	*Awards*[1]
South		
Anglia	25	3
Chilterns	22	4
East London and Essex	21	0
South London and West Sussex	0	0
South East	479	33
Wessex	0	0
West Country	149	6
Wales and Central England		
East Midlands	5,813	646
Greater Manchester	329	32
Lancashire and Cumbria	2,297	151
Merseyside	509	49
Midlands South West	658	56
Wales	9,625	1,375
West Mercia	3,728	384
Scotland and North		
East Scotland	2,411	95
Glasgow	244	8
North and West Yorkshire	2,730	425
North, Central and West Scotland	1,908	60
South Yorkshire and Humberside	6,627	790
Tyne Tees	7,227	603
Totals	44,802	4,720

Notes:
1. Based on 100 per cent. count and subject to amendment.
2. Not all claims received by 31 December will have been decided.
[1] Awards are where industrial injuries disablement has been awarded at 14 per cent. or more (does not include aggregate awards).

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the savings to his Department referred to in his answer of 21 July 1994, *Official Report*, column *621*, resulting from each of the changes in the eligibility conditions for benefits under the industrial injuries scheme including *(a)* the amount of savings for each change by year, *(b)* the cumulative savings to date and *(c)* the amount of savings for each year and cumulatively at 1994–95 prices.

Mr. Hague *[holding answer 15 February 1995]:* Information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

	1987–88	*1988–89*	*1989–90*	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*£ million total*
1986 Industrial injuries changes	–7	–35	–45	—	—	—	–113
Abolition of REA new cases	—	—	—	–5	–20	–42	–72

Notes:
1. All figures shown are in £ million.
2. Figures shown are in cash terms except for the totals which are expressed in real terms at 1994–95 prices.
3. Figures should be regarded as estimates only.
4. The figures shown are for the forecast savings of Industrial Injuries benefits resulting from the changes shown during the relevant Public Expenditure Survey period. They are not necessarily the actual effect on II benefit or total DSS benefit expenditure.
[1] The main change to the Industrial Injuries scheme was the increase of disability threshold from 1 per cent. to 14 per cent.

Widower's Benefit

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to extend widow's pension provision to widowers with dependent children.

Mr. Arbuthnot: None.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether income support is payable to asylum seekers whose application for asylum has been rejected.

Mr. Roger Evans: When an asylum seeker's claim has been either finally refused or abandoned, entitlement to income support ends.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the amount of income support paid to *(a)* those seeking asylum and *(b)* those granted asylum.

Mr. Roger Evans: In February 1994, there were 41,960 asylum seekers in receipt of income support at an estimated annual cost of about £79 million. People who have been granted asylum as refugees are not separately identified within the income support scheme.

Disabled People (Housing Policy)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People has received,

including those from Habinteg, about the impact on disabled people of the Government's housing policies; what replies he has sent or will be sending; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hague: I have received two letters from Habinteg, one dated 6 December 1994 and another dated 15 February 1995 which was forwarded to me by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 16 February. I responded to the earlier letter on 19 January 1995 and have responded to the right hon. Member today.

The Department of the Environment has responsibility for the Government's housing policies and I am in regular contact with it in relation to the effect of policies on disabled people.

Unemployment and Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be *(a)* the gross cost and *(b)* the net cost, after income support and housing benefit savings, of making eligibility for short-term national insurance benefit conditional on (i) 25 times that year's lower earnings limit only and (ii) 50 times that years' lower earnings limit only; and if he will estimate the additional number who could become eligible for (1) unemployment and (2) invalidity benefit on the basis of their sickness benefit entitlement.

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* The estimated cost and difference in numbers of people becoming entitled to unemployment benefit and incapacity benefit as a result of changing the contribution conditions to requiring a claimant to have paid or have been credited with class 1 national insurance contributions on earnings of at least:

(i) 25 times the lower earnings limit in the last tax year before the benefit year in which the claim is made;

or

(ii) 50 times the lower earnings limit in the last tax year before the benefit year in which the claim is made;

are set out in the tables. Attention is drawn to table 1 note (v) and table 2 notes (v) and (vii). The estimates make no allowances for the uncertain number of people currently not claiming the benefits who would do so under new contribution conditions. They should therefore be treated with great caution.

Table 1—Result of changes in national insurance contribution conditions on claims to and cost of unemployment benefit

	Option (i)	*Option (ii)*
Gross cost (£ million)	230	115
Net cost (£ million)	35	20
Increase in number of unemployment benefit recipients	85,000	45,000

Notes:

The following assumptions have been made:

1. Costs have been rounded to the nearest £5 million and caseloads to the nearest 5,000.
2. Calculations are based on an unemployment benefit caseload of 500,000.
3. Calculations are made using current prices and benefit levels, and data taken from the 1992–93 national insurance recording system database, the 1993 Annual Statistical Enquiry and the 1990–91–92 Family Expenditure Surveys.
4. Some people who would satisfy revised contribution conditions may be disallowed, or disqualified for, unemployment benefit on other grounds (eg leaving work voluntarily, misconduct, compensation from an employer).
5. The figures are an under-estimate as no allowance can be made for people who sign as unemployed for the first time as a result of the change in the contribution conditions.

Table 2—Result of changes in national insurance contribution conditions on claims to and cost of incapacity benefit

	Option (i)	*Option (ii)*
Gross cost (£ million)	1,400	550
Net cost (£ million)	250	100
Long-term increase in number of incapacity benefit recipients	400,000	150,000

Notes:

The following assumptions have been made:

1. These are estimated figures of the long term effect. Costs have been rounded to the nearest £50 million and caseloads to the nearest 50,000.
2. Calculations have been made using current prices and benefit levels, and data taken from the 1992–93 national insurance recording system data-base, and the 1993 Annual Statistical Enquiry.
3. New entitlements come from either the current severe disability allowance caseload or from those, registering as sick, who are less than 80 per cent. disabled and who currently have insufficient contributions.
4. Allowance has been made of the effect of the incapacity benefit changes and the expected effect of the new medical test.
5. The new contribution conditions in the lower rate of short-term incapacity benefit are assumed to apply to long-term incapacity benefit. This means that all those who get lower rate of short-term incapacity benefit will move on to long-term incapacity benefit as long as their incapacity continues.
6. The figures are an under-estimate as no allowance can be made for people registering as sick for the first time as a result of the change in the contribution conditions.
7. These estimates are highly uncertain and should be treated with extreme caution.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Integrated Administration and Control System

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the requirements for IACS applications in England and Wales in 1995.

Mr. Jack *[pursuant to his reply, 24 January 1995, c. 187]:* The House will wish to note that the 1995 IACS forms and explanatory booklets are now available and are being sent out to farmers. I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has made an assessment of the hygiene standards in red meat slaughterhouses in England and Wales.

Mrs. Browning: Since early 1994 we have been operating the hygiene assessment system in red meat slaughterhouses. The HAS is the method developed and used by the state veterinary service to assess and monitor hygiene standards in slaughterhouses. HAS looks at specific aspects of performance within five main categories—ante-mortem, slaughter and dressing,

personnel and practices, maintenance and hygiene of premises and general conditions and management. Each category is scored according to the standards observed on the day, and the scores are weighted to reflect the importance of each category to the overall hygiene of operations; thus, a high score reflects a high standard of hygiene. As at the end of November 1994, the results of HAS in red meat slaughterhouses by type in England and Wales were as follows:

Score bands	*All types*	*Numbers by type of slaughterhouse*		
		Fully approved	*Low throughput*[1]	*Temporarily derogated*[2]
21–30	3	0	0	3
31–40	19	1	1	17
41–50	90	4	3	82
51–60	103	15	11	77
61–70	84	17	11	56
71–80	50	25	4	20
81–90	23	15	3	5
91–100	4	3	1	0

[1] Licensed slaughterhouses with a throughput of no more than 20 livestock units per week.
[2] These plants have until the end of 1995 at the latest to complete their work plans to meet the structural requirements of the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Sulphur Quotas

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make representations to the Department of the Environment to allocate unused sulphur quotas for England and Wales to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: Any increase in the limits set for Northern Ireland would necessitate a revision of the plan by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

As my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Energy said in his reply to the question from the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) on 8 February 1995, *Official Report* Column *315-16*, this matter is kept under regular review.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mr. Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many accident and emergency departments there are in Northern Ireland; what were the corresponding figures in each year since 1986; and how many accident and emergency departments have been relocated in each year since 1986.

Mr. Moss: The number of accident and emergency departments in Northern Ireland in each year since 1986 is shown in the table:

Year	*Number*
1986	29
1987	28
1988–89	27
1989–90	26
1990–91	26
1991–92	25
1992–93	23
1993–94	22
1994–95	21

Assuming A and E departments are defined as having been "relocated" when a new A and E department takes on their workload, since 1986 two A and E departments have been relocated following the opening of a new acute hospital.

Fair Employment Legislation

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the benefits of employers with fewer than 250 staff being obliged to keep a record of all job applications for monitoring purposes in any revised fair employment legislation.

Mr. Ancram: There is provision in the legislation for this threshold to be varied if necessary but, to date, it has been considered that this issue should await the wider review of the legislation. My right hon. and learned Friend has asked the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights to take forward the independent review of the fair employment legislation which was promised during the passage of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989. It is for SACHR to consider how this issue will be addressed in the context of the review.

Employment Practices (RUC)

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State of Northern Ireland if he will place in the Library the internal review of employment practices recently carried out by the Chief Constable of the RUC, Sir Hugh Annesley.

Sir John Wheeler: The position remains the same as when I replied to the hon. Member for Kingston Upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 25 May 1994, *Official Report*, columns *200–01*.

Transport

Ms Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to improve or extend public transport services between the major towns and cities.

Mr. Moss: We are currently engaged on a major investment programme for public transport facilities aimed at producing better public transport services across Northern Ireland. We have completed the Belfast cross-harbour rail bridge to unify rail services for the first time; built the new Euorpa bus centre in Belfast; and provided new or upgraded bus stations in Omagh, Enniskillen, Cookstown, Newcastle and Newtownards. Work is continuing on the Belfast to Dublin rail line and rolling stock upgrade, on the reinstatement of the line to a new station at Great Victoria street, Belfast, and on a

new bus station at Donegall Quay, Belfast. In addition work is due to start soon on the re-opening to scheduled services of the Antrim to Bleach Green rail line.

There has also been a significant modernisation of the bus fleet in Northern Ireland. This represents investment in public transport of some £110 millions since 1990, substantially assisted by the European regional development fund. As part of the guiding principles for future transportation planning which I announced on 17 January, the transport operation companies are to be restructured to provide a more co-ordinated approach to service planning and a more strategic use of resources and to cut out unnecessary bureaucracy and duplication.

Water Services

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to make an announcement on the options for water charging.

Mr. Moss: Options for new charging arrangements for water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland are still being examined. I intend to publish a policy document in advance of the introduction of new arrangements and I will make an announcement at that time.

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are his estimates of water leakage from the water supply system.

Mr. Moss: The latest estimate for overall leakage is 28 per cent., of which approximately one third occurs within consumers' premises.

HMS Caroline

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he is taking to ensure HMS Caroline stays in Belfast.

Mr. Moss: The Ministry of Defence has confirmed that is has no plans at present to move HMS Caroline from its present Belfast location.

Electricity

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the terms of the contract between Scottish Power and Northern Ireland Electricity in respect of denial of and third party access to the Scotland-Northern Ireland electricity interconnector for 15 years.

Mr. Ancram: The terms of the contract between Northern Ireland Electricity plc and Scottish Power plc are primarily a matter for the two private companies concerned. NIE considered that a term covering its exclusive use of the electricity interconnector for the first 15 years was necessary in order to secure a reasonable return on its considerable capital investment. Government endorsed this arrangement in granting a transmission licence to NIE.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the relative economic efficiency of power production for Northern Ireland of *(a)* an indigenous generator and *(b)* the Moyle interconnector.

Mr. Ancram: None. Following the privatisation of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland, responsibility for assessing the merits of new generating capacity rests solely with Northern Ireland Electricity plc.

Strangford Lough

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans exist to carry out flood defence works at Strangford lough; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland is currently undertaking a feasibility study into possible options for refurbishment works on sea defences on Strangford lough. These sea defences, known as the Newtownards, Ballyurnanellan and Kilnatierney dykes, are designated in accordance with the terms of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973 to provide protection against flooding from the sea to the town of Newtownards at its most northerly end, and to other valuable land and property on the Ards peninsula.

It is not possible to confirm any plans for flood defence works at Strangford lough until the feasibility study has been completed and all necessary consultations have taken place with environmental and other interests in this area, which is recognised as an area of high conservation value.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what criteria his Department applies when considering for designation as areas of special scientific interest those locations that are primarily being considered for their *(a)* ornithological and *(b)* marine life values; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: The criteria used when considering for designation of areas of special scientific interest for ornithological reasons are largely based on the numbers of each species of bird using the site. For marine sites an assessment is made of the naturalness, diversity, size and rarity of the habitats occurring at the site.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what advice he has received about the predicted scale of deterioration in respect of areas of special scientific interest due to *(a)* non-enforcement of management agreement conditions and *(b)* lack of monitoring; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: Management agreement conditions are generally respected, and there is little evidence of significant deterioration of the scientific interest of areas of special scientific interest due to non-compliance. However, it is accepted that, if management agreement conditions were not enforced, the scientific value would be likely to deteriorate significantly.

Monitoring is important in the management of ASSIs, but in itself it has no direct effect on whether or not a site deteriorates.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which areas of special scientific interest have suffered deterioration since their designation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: No declared areas of special scientific interest have deteriorated to such an extent as to lose the feature(s) which qualified them as such at declaration.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many management agreements with landowners and land occupiers have been established in *(a)* areas of special scientific interest and *(b)* prospective areas of special scientific interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moss: At present, 31 management agreements have been established with landowners and land occupiers in areas of special scientific interest, and there are five agreements for prospective areas.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what plans or machinery exist to monitor the protection of areas of special scientific interest in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: Conservation plans which will set out the monitoring requirements of individual areas of specific scientific interest are currently being prepared for some of the largest and most important sites, and it is planned to extend these to cover all areas by 1997. A trial monitoring exercise has just been completed, and it is planned to extend this work. In addition, it is intended to recruit more staff to help with the monitoring and management of ASSIs in the near future.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will publish the next tranche of areas of special scientific interest to be designated in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Moss: It is not our policy to publish lists of proposed areas of special scientific interest.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which areas of special scientific interest *(a)* have been designated in Northern Ireland *(b)* are being examined for possible future designation.

Mr. Moss: A list of declared areas of special scientific interest is set out in the following table. Other sites are being examined for possible future designation, but it is not our policy to publish these. It is the Government's intention to declare the remaining sites known to qualify as ASSIs by the year 2001.

Number	*Site name*
1	Carrickbrawn
2	Gortnagory
3	Moneygal Bog
4	Garry Bog
5	Teal Lough and Slaghtfreedan
6	Black Bog
7	Glenarrif
8	Cleggan Valley
9	Monawilkin
10	Lough Beg
11	Beagh Big
12	Garvros
13	Moneendogue
14	Lergan
15	Drumlisaleen
16	Inner Belfast Lough
17	Glenburn
18	Strangford Lough Pt 1
19	Ballymacormick Point
20	Strangford Lough
21	Kiltubbrid Lough
22	North Woodburn Glen
23	Dunloy Bog
24	Strangford Lough Pt 3
25	Moninea Bog
26	Fairy Water Bogs
27	Annacramph Meadows
28	Rathlin Island—Coast
29	Rathlin Island—Ballygill North
30	Rathin Island—Kinramer South
31	Rathlin Island—Ballycarry
32	Loughkeelan
33	Horse Island
34	Dernish Island
35	Sheep Island
36	Corraslough Point
37	Lough Neagh
38	Lackan Bog
39	Innishroosk
40	Slievenacloy
41	Crockaghole Wood
42	Glenmore Wood
43	Ness Wood
44	Ervery Wood
45	Drumlea and Mullan Woods
46	Altmover Glen
47	Strabane Glen
48	Owenkillew and Glenelly Woods
49	Deroran Bog
50	Portmore Lough
51	Banagher Glen
52	Culnafay
53	Pettigoe Plateau
54	Garron Plateau
55	Upper Lough Erne—Crom
56	Knockballymore Lough
57	Kilroosky Lough
58	Summerhill Lough
59	Burdautien Lough
60	Cuilcagh Mountain
61	Mill Lough
62	Killymacken Lough
63	Derryleckagh
64	Magilligan
65	Slieve Beagh
66	Ballynahone Bog
67	Upper Lough Erne Galloon
68	Teal Lough Part II
69	Murlough
70	Upper Lough Erne—Belleisle

Mr. MacKinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what environmental impact assessment is being carried out on actual and projected engineering works in and around the environs of Strangford lough; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ancram: The Government are conscious of the high conservation value and the protected status of Strangford lough and its environs both as an area of outstanding natural beauty and area of special scientific interest. Any engineering operations currently undertaken or proposed by the Department of Agriculture on the designated sea defences on Strangford lough or on designated watercourses discharging into the lough are subject to rigorous assessment of the environmental impact. Where any environmental effects are considered significant, a full environmental statement will be prepared and made available for public comment, before the designs for any proposed works are finalised and works commence.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Indonesia

18. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has held with representatives of the Indonesian Government regarding the issue of human rights in that country.

Mr. Goodlad: We have regular discussions with the Indonesian Government on a wide range of issues, including human rights.

35. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to pay an official visit to Indonesia to assess the human rights situation.

Mr. Goodlad: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no plans to visit Indonesia at present.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

22. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress to date in negotiations for a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

Mr. David Davis: The negotiations for a comprehensive test ban treaty began in the conference on disarmament in January 1994. A draft text containing the elements of a treaty has now been completed. The United Nations General Assembly has welcomed this progress. The conference on disarmament continues to work to achieve consensus on both the treaty text and on an international monitoring system to verify compliance with the treaty. The United Kingdom is playing a full part. We remain committed to negotiating an effective and verifiable comprehensive test ban treaty.

Pakistan

23. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations between the United Kingdom and Pakistan.

Mr. Baldry: We have good relations with Pakistan. We look forward to deepening and extending our political, commercial and cultural contacts.

Chechnya

26. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his Russian counterpart about the situation in Chechnya.

Mr. Hurd: I had a full discussion of the situation in Chechnya with Mr. Kozyrev in Stockholm on 14 February.

United Nations (Conflict Settlement)

28. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the United Nations' role in the settlement of international conflicts.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The process of assessing the UN's role in the settlement of disputes is a continual one. In the last few years we have come forward with a number of initiatives designed to strengthen UN capabilities and improve the UN's performance in this field.

European Union

29. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if border controls will be one of the issues on the agenda of the next meeting of EU Foreign Ministers which he will attend.

Mr. David Davis: The next Foreign Affairs Council meeting is on 6 and 7 March. Border controls are not on the agenda.

Middle East

30. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he is preparing for members of the Government to visit the Lebanon to discuss the middle east peace process.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Members of the Government meet regularly with their Lebanese counterparts to discuss the middle east peace process and other issues. My noble Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning will be visiting Lebanon in April.

32. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's role in the middle east peace process.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Prime Minister's visit to Israel, the occupied territories and Jordan from 12 to 15 March will underline Britain's full political and economic support for the peace process.

Social Development Summit

31. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to attend the United Nations social development summit in Copenhagen.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Baroness Chalker will represent the United Kingdom.

Iraq

33. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment the United Kingdom Government have made of the latest report of the United Nations special rapporteur on Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We welcome Mr van der Stoels' report and share his condemnation of the Iraqi regime for the continuing abuses of human rights. We will continue to press Iraq to comply in full with the terms of all United Nations Security Council resolutions.

38. **Lady Olga Maitland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United Nations in respect of Iraqi compliance with resolutions seeking the release of Kuwaiti prisoners of war and missing persons.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We attach great importance to the resolution of this issue. We take every suitable opportunity to raise it at the United Nations—for example, at each 60-day Security Council review of sanctions against Iraq.

Western Sahara

34. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Moroccan Government regarding access to United Nations vote identification centres in Western Sahara; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have made no representations to the Moroccans on this issue. The United Nations is responsible for organising the referendum in the Western Sahara. As a member of the informal Security Council

group of friends of the UN Secretary-General in relation to the Western Sahara, we remain in close contact with the UN about all aspects of the organisation of the referendum.

Patagonia

36. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposals he has to improve trading relations between the United Kingdom and Patagonia.

Mr. David Davis: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Welsh Affairs will lead a group of business men to Argentina from 13 to 17 May. He is considering going to Patagonia as part of the visit, which will aim to improve trading relations between the United Kingdom and Argentina in general.

Information Technology

37. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps British embassies are taking to promote United Kingdom interests in information technology and the information super-highway.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: UK posts offer support, advice and briefing to UK companies doing business overseas in all fields. They also monitor market conditions and opportunities and send information back on a regular basis for onward distribution to industry to help them take advantage of business opportunities. FCO commercial staff in the US, Canada, France and Germany are working closely with the DTI to research the commercial opportunities for UK companies in multi-media and information highway products in these countries.

World Summit for Children

39. **Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what practical steps the Government will implement to fulfil its commitment in achieving the goals set by the 1990 world summit for children.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are responding positively to the summit's goals. The UK was one of the first industrialised countries to publish a national response to the summit. The needs of children in developing countries are also a priority goal of the British aid programme.

UNESCO

40. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received about the United Kingdom rejoining UNESCO; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has received 38 letters from both MPs and members of the public in the last five months about the United Kingdom rejoining UNESCO. In addition, there have been 10 parliamentary questions in the same period, the most recent in this House having been answered by me on 1 February 1995.

We are continuing to keep this issue under review but as of yet have taken no decision.

France

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on measures being taken to strengthen United Kingdom relations with France.

Mr. David Davis: Our relations with France are extremely sound and developing in many important areas. This was confirmed at the Franco-British summit in Chartres last November.

We continue to consult frequently and closely on all issues of mutual concern.

Land Mines

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards the establishment of a UN anti-personnel mine clearance fund.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We welcomed the UN Secretary-General's decision last year to establish a voluntary trust fund for assistance in mine clearance. The UK made the first financial contribution to the voluntary trust fund in September 1994 when we gave $150,000 for de-mining in the Yemen.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 2 March 1995

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Child Care Facilities

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick on Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission what decisions have been taken by the House of Commons Commission following the debate on child care facilities on 12 January.

Mr. Beith: The Commission has now considered its policy on child care facilities, and has taken into account the survey of demand by Research Services Ltd., the claim for child care voucher scheme by the trade unions representing House staff, and the views expressed by hon. Members during the debate on 12 January.

Since 1991, it has been the policy of the Commission as the employer of the staff of the House of Commons that, if a viable scheme for child care help could be devised, it would want it to go ahead. The Commission has concluded that a child care voucher scheme is immediately practicable and commands wide support. The Commission has decided to implement a voucher scheme in line with those currently in operation in the National Audit Office and the House of Lords. Vouchers will be available to employees of the Commission who work for at least 15 hours per week and who demonstrate that they need to pay someone other than their partner to look after their child or children. The scheme will cover children under the age of five or who are not yet attending full-time education, at a rate of £6 per day worked per family, which is taxable. It is hoped to have the new arrangements in place from 1 April. Further details will be issued to staff by the Establishments Office.

The Commission, in seeking to follow best employment practice, has taken full account of the arguments for assistance with child care. It hopes that the voucher scheme will provide effective help to existing staff, and benefit future recruitment. The introduction of these arrangements also firmly underlines the House's commitment to a policy of equal opportunity.

Divisions

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many Divisions of the House have taken place on Thursdays since the new procedures introduced on 19 December 1994 came into force.

Mr. Newton: Between 19 December 1994 and 1 March 1995 there were three Divisions on Thursdays. During the same period last year there were eight Divisions on Thursdays.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Lord President of the Council if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs. C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J .W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Low Bell, *(o)* People Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd., and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Newton: I have had no such meetings.

Privy Council

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the duties and functions of the Privy Council.

Mr. Newton: The Privy Council advises the sovereign on the making of royal proclamations and Orders in Council, and on the grant and amendment of royal charters. It approves rules made by statutory registration councils responsible for the medical and certain other professions, and makes instruments of Government for higher education corporations. The Privy Council is also responsible for certain appointments to statutory councils and to the governing bodies of universities and colleges, and for the appointment of high sheriffs. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is the final Court of Appeal from courts of the United Kingdom dependencies and from courts of those independent Commonwealth countries which have retained the right of appeal. The committee also hears appeals from courts of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, and from the disciplinary and health committees of the medical and allied professions, together with some ecclesiastical appeals.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Servants

Ms Hodge: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many employment vacancies in the civil service in grades 1 and 2 have been (i) externally advertised and (ii) filled by external applicants since the publication of the White Paper on the reform of the civil service.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Since the publication of the civil service White Paper "The Civil Service: Continuity and Change" in July 1994, five vacancies at these levels or with equivalent pay rates have been externally advertised.

So far, appointments have been made to three of these posts, of which one was an external applicant and one was an agency chief executive originally recruited as an external applicant.

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd., and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: No.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: For the departments and agencies for which my right hon. Friend is responsible, and other areas which fall to the Cabinet Office vote, the information is as follows:

	Cabinet Office (including No. 10)/CCTA	*RAS*	*Chessington*	*CS College*	*OHSA*	*COI*	*HMSO*
Men	1	0	1	0	0	2	0
Women	19	2	6	5	1	3	9

No staff have had their employment terminated while on a career break.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department, or agencies for which it is responsible, in 1994 giving, in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Two White Papers were produced by the Office of Public Service and Science in 1994. These were "The Civil Service: Continuity and Change" and "Next Steps Review 1994". All costs were borne by HMSO, which aims to recover these from sales revenue.

The following pamphlets were issued by the Cabinet Office and Office of Public Service and Science in 1994:

Publication	*Total cost £*
Response to Priorities for the Science Base	904
Science Connections	17,633
Key Events Leaflet	2,090
Technology Foresight Programme	2,236
The Context of Foresight	1,725
Innovation and Foresight	3,250
Turning Research into Wealth: The Japanese Way	4,334
Technology Foresight: An Information Technology Way	4,830
Proceedings of the Foresight Forum	11,900
Foresight No. 1	3,115
Foresight No. 2	3,552
LINK Newsletters (3 per annum)	26,000
Europe: Funding from the 4th Framework Programme—Collaboration in the 21st Century	23,321
The UK/Japan Relationship	10,364
The Zuckerman Lecture	1,291
The Rising Tide	1,894
The Human Genome	3,592
Innovation and the Tax System	1,254
Government response to The Rising Tide	1,896
Routes Response	502
Review of UK Culture Collections	4,485
Review of Fast Stream Recruitment	7,200
Responsibilities for Recruitment to the Civil Service	2,100
"The Facts You Need to Know"—Booklet for Prospective Executive Officer Candidates	3,500
Racial Equality in the Civil Service	1,500
Top Management Programme Brochure	800
Citizen's Charter Second Report 1994 (inclusive of audio, braille and large print versions)	408,000
Complaints Task Force (CTF) Interim Report	6,882
CTF Leaflet	652
CTF Effective Complaints Systems: Principles and Checklist	2,083
CTF Discussion Papers	22,082
CTF Literature Review	12,161
Open Government Code of Practice and Explanatory Leaflet	18,522
Total	615,650

Two minor pamphlets were also issued where production and distribution was 60 copies or less and the total cost negligible.

The Department did not exist in its current form in 1980 and therefore no comparable information for that year is available.

Contract Research Posts

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) what proportion of contract research posts paid for from research council funds were for three years or less in each year from 1990–1994:

(2) what proportion of contract researchers paid for by research councils left employment before completing their contracts in each year from 1990 to 1994;

(3) how many contract researchers were paid for by the research councils in each year from 1990 to 1994.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The information is not held centrally. Primary responsibility for employing contract staff, howsoever funded, rests with the individual universities as employers. The Universities' Statistical

Record collects staff data on behalf of the universities funded by the former University Funding Council, but has no separate category for "contract researchers".

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Children's Play

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what decision he has taken on future central support arrangements for children's play.

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to all those who submitted comments in response to our recent consultation on the implications of Sports Council restructuring for children's play. I am today inviting interested organisations to a meeting to discuss the new arrangements which we propose to introduce. Under these, existing bodies will be invited to bid for funds to carry out work in the areas of information dissemination, playground safety, playwork education and training, and policy advice. The new arrangements will take effect from October 1995 and will be based on a continuation of the existing level of funding of £400,000 per annum.

Boxing

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will set up an investigation into reforming the rules of boxing to avoid injuries to the head but allow participants to demonstrate combative skills.

Mr. Sproat: No. It is for the boxing authorities to determine their own rules and regulations.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has to reconsider any grants that are made in support of boxing and other activities with risks of injury and death to their participants.

Mr. Sproat: Most Government moneys specifically for sport are channelled through the Sports Council who allocate these funds according to their own policies and priorities. However, an important criterion in deciding which governing bodies are eligible for grant is for the council to satisfy itself that proper safeguards for the sport are in place.

National Trust

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to commemorate the centenary of the National Trust; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I was pleased to join with the National Trust on 12 January, in the presence of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, to celebrate the trust's centenary. As the guardian of some of our most important historic buildings and landscapes, the trust has made an invaluable contribution towards the preservation of the nation's heritage for the enjoyment and understanding of this and future generations. The trust's work in safeguarding our heritage over the past 100 years has also played a major part in increasing the awareness of the value of our heritage for both the cultural and the economic well being of the country.

Royal Fine Arts Commission

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he intends to publish the report of Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield into the Royal Fine Art Commission, and what was the final cost of the report.

Mr. Dorrell: I am giving careful consideration to Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield's report and will in due course place it in the Library of the House with my conclusions. The final cost of the report was £4,700.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage on what date Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield delivered to him his report on the Royal Fine Art Commission.

Mr. Dorrell: Sir Geoffrey Chipperfield delivered his report on 3 June 1994.

Film Industry

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what is his policy in respect of *(a)* tax incentives for European film producers and *(b)* levies on non-EU films; and what assessment he has made of the impact of levies on non-EU films on transnational distribution of European audio-visual products.

Mr. Dorrell: Tax arrangements are a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The rate of duty applied to non-EU films imported into the UK ranges between 0.28 and 1.9 ecu per 100 m, depending on the type of film. No assessment has been made of the impact duties on non-EU films may have had on transnational distribution of European products.

Public Libraries

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment he has made of the Library Association poll relating to closures of branch libraries in the financial year 1995–96, a copy of which has been sent to him; if he will consider amending the guidelines of the national lottery funding agencies to help public libraries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sproat: My officials were already aware of some of the issues identified in the Library Association poll, and have already discussed them with several authorities. Where there is reason to believe an authority may be failing in its statutory responsibility, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will investigate in line with the requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

The national lottery is not intended to fund projects which would normally be funded from existing public expenditure, such as core public library services, for which local authorities have a statutory responsibility. The national heritage memorial fund's guidelines to applicants for lottery funds state that grants can be made where library buildings or collections are of recognised importance to the heritage. Copies of the these guidelines are available in the Library of the House. The Arts Council of England has stated that it can make grants out of lottery funds for the enhancement of library facilities through the provision of space for activities such as readings, literary events, exhibitions, concerts and performances.

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Belle, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

Information Technology

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what role he envisages for projects to encourage the popular use of information technology in the distribution of the millennium fund.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* This is a matter for the Millennium Commission. I will write to the hon. Member in my capacity as chairman of the commission, placing a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

TRANSPORT

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs C. S. M Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C, *(f)* G.J.W, *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International Ltd., *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good relations, (m) Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible in 1994 giving in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Norris: My Department is compiling a list of publications issued in 1994. I will send the list to the hon. Member as soon as it is available and place a copy in the Library. Information is not available on the total costs involved or what was issued in 1980.

ScotRail (Fort William Services)

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye, (Mr. Kennedy) on 6 February, *Official Report*, column 11, what form consultation on whatever railway proposal is or is not included in respect to Fort William will take; when it will take place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The Franchising Director will be consulting the Rail Users Consultative Committee for Scotland and Scottish regional councils in early summer on his draft passenger service requirement for the ScotRail franchise, including services to Fort William.

Highway Access to Hospitals

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what rules govern the funding of major highway access works to hospital premises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Watts: The funding of access works to major highways is governed by sections 274 and 278 of the Highways Act 1980.

Settle to Carlisle Railway

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the annual cost of maintaining *(a)* the track and *(b)* the viaducts on the Settle to Carlisle line.

Mr. Watts: Railtrack advises me that the costs on its maintenance contracts cannot be separated out to the level of detail requested. These costs will, anyway, be affected by negotiations now in progress.

Railtrack has assured me that it has met and will continue to meet its maintenance obligations in respect of this route.

Parcel Services

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what account will be taken of potential job losses and the possible environmental impact of transferring parcel delivery from rail to road when deciding who will be successful in taking over Red Star parcel services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: BR is the vendor of Red Star. In selling the business it will take account of the statutory objectives set out in section 113 of the Railways Act 1993.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures the Government intend taking to ensure that the purchasers of Red Star parcel service cannot pull out of rail delivery of parcels; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: Under BR ownership, Red Star turnover has declined significantly in recent years. It is in the commercial interests of Red Star that the purchaser should be able to develop the business without continuing restrictions imposed by Government.

Advanced Motorists Test

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines his Department issues to drivers taking the advanced motorists test.

Mr. Norris: None.

Rail Privatisation

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds he has made available to the office of the Rail Regulator to implement rail privatisation; and what is his estimate for the financial years 1995–96 and 1996–97 and 1997–98.

Mr. Watts: The Office of the Rail Regulator is a separate non-ministerial Government department funded by moneys voted by Parliament.

The Rail Regulator informs me that the forecast outturn for expenditure by his Department until the end of 1994–95 is £10.8 million. Planned expenditure for 1995–96, 1996–97, and 1997–98 is £8.6 million, £7 million, and £7 million respectively.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds he has made available to the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising to implement rail privatisation; and what is his estimate for the financial years 1995–96, 1996–97 and 1997–98.

Mr. Watts: The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising is a separate non-ministerial Government department which is funded by moneys voted by Parliament.

The forecast outturn for expenditure by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising until the end of 1994–95 is £19.1 million. Planned expenditure for 1995–96, 1996–97, and 1997–98 is £10.6 million, £9.7 million and £9.7 million respectively.

Access Grants

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many track access grants to reduce Railtrack charges have been made since the announcement of this facility.

Mr. Watts *[pursuant to his answer, 27 February 1995, c. 466]:* No grants have been made, but eight are under consideration, one has been withdrawn and one has been rejected.

Roads Programme

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 19 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *874*, in respect of the roads programme, if he has changed the Highways Agency's 1994–95 published targets.

Mr. Watts: Yes. I have reduced the original target for the number of new publicly funded scheme starts to 13 and have today placed a revised version of the "National Roads Programme: Summary of Milestones for 1994–95" in the Library.

HEALTH

Audit Reports and Management Letters

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from which NHS authorities and trusts she has now received *(a)* the audit report and *(b)* the audit management letter for 1993–94.

Mr. Sackville: At the end of each annual audit, the statutory auditor issues a management letter to each health authority and national health service trust. This summarises the audit findings over the year and is addressed to the authority or trust board rather than to the Secretary of State. Apart from this, auditors do not issue any other report on authorities and trusts on an annual basis.

HIV and AIDS (Funding)

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of funds allocated by her Department for HIV and AIDS work in each year since 1985 has been devoted to the voluntary sector.

Mr. Sackville: The percentage of the Department's HIV-AIDS funding directly allocated to the voluntary sector through section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 is shown in the table. Actual expenditure is also shown. The percentage increases over time are as a result of substantial increases in the Department's total HIV-AIDS funding over the same period. Details of this total funding are also shown.

Government support for the voluntary sector is not confined to section 64 grants as we also provide funding for special projects from centrally administered funds. Thus, for example, in 1993–94 more than £100,000 was provided from these funds and for 1994–95 funding from this source totalled £200,000.

In addition to direct funding from the Department, voluntary organisations in the HIV-AIDS field receive funding from health and local authorities purchasing services for people with HIV-AIDS. This is in accordance with Departmental guidance which stresses that the voluntary sector's participation is vital to the efficient and effective delivery of care and support for people with HIV-AIDS.

	Section 64		*Total funding*
	Percentage	*£*	*£*
1985–86	19.23	100,000	620,000
1986–87	2.11	160,000	7,760,000
1987–88	3.58	1,300,000	37,610,000
1988–89	1.52	1,090,000	72,790,000
1989–90	1.13	1,600,000	143,400,000
1990–91	1.22	1,800,000	149,100,000
1991–92	1.20	1,900,000	160,400,000
1992–93	0.96	1,987,000	210,012,000
1993–94	0.81	1,927,000	240,233,000
1994–95	0.71	1,789,000	252,729,000
1995–96	0.56	1,547,000	[1]274,547,000

[1] Excludes allocation to HEA—helpline which has yet to be settled.

Public Appointments

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what restrictions there are on a person being a member of more than one trust board or on a trust board and a health authority board;

(2) what restrictions there are on a person being on a trust board or health authority board where they also are a provider for that trust or health authority.

Mr. Malone: Details of those disqualified for appointment as chairman of non-executive director of

national health service authorities and trusts are contained in the relevant membership and procedure regulations.

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Ministers in her Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd, *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd., and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Sackville: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science gave him today.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by her Department or agencies for which it is responsible in 1994, giving, in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Sackville: All White Papers and Green Papers are published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

In respect of those and other publications published by HMSO, all costs are borne by HMSO which aims to recover these from sales revenue. The estimated costs of copies of these publications purchased by my Department during 1994–95 are £73,000.

Estimated costs for 1994–95 for leaflets, booklets, newsletters, issued by the Department and its agencies, excluding the Medicines Control Agency, including production and distribution are £5,678,000. This largely represents public health campaigns designed to improve health and information for the national health service, general practitioners and the medical professions.

A full list of all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Figures for 1980 are not available.

GP LISTS

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will include in the patients charter a requirement for patients to be given the reasons in writing for their removal from a general practitioner's list.

Mr. Malone: No. The General Medical Services Committee issues advice in this context to all general practitioners.

Ambulance Service (Salaries)

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the annual salaries of leading ambulance paramedics in each ambulance service.

Mr. Malone: Most ambulance services are now provided by national health service trusts, which are free to employ staff on such terms and conditions as they see fit. Information about the salaries of ambulance staff on locally determined terms is not available centrally, but most staff are still engaged on pay and conditions of service negotiated in the ambulance Whitley council. The national salary rate for a leading ambulance man is £15,036 per year and, for extended trained staff required to use paramedical skills, further allowances of £208, £301, £509 or £707 per year may be payable according to the level of training and skill. Additionally, for staff in the London area, allowances of £188, £667 and £1,646 are payable depending on location. Since 1990, all ambulance authorities have within the national agreements had the ability to introduce further local payments to staff linked to improvements in efficiency.

Electro-Convulsive Therapy

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were given electro-convulsive therapy in the national health service in each year from 1990 to 1994.

Mr. Bowis: The information requested is not held in the precise form requested, but data on finished consultant episodes where electro-convulsive therapy is given are published in "Hospital Episodes Statistics", volume 1, finished consultant episodes by diagnosis, operation and specialty England, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines or protocols are in place in the national health service to prevent the misuse of electro-convulsive therapy;

(2) what guidelines or protocols are in place in respect of the use of electro-convulsive therapy for patients under 18 years of age;

(3) what guidelines or protocols are in place in the national health service to govern the use of electro-convulsive therapy for patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mr. Bowis: Specific guidance on professional practice is a matter for the appropriate professional body. The Royal College of Psychiatrists recently approved revised guidelines for psychiatrists on electro-convulsive therapy. These will be published shortly. The guidelines will include recommendations on the use of electro-convulsive therapy in young people. For patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983, the Act and the code of practice published in 1993 clearly state that electro-convulsive therapy may be administered only where the patient's consent or where a second opinion is given under section 58 of the 1983 Act.

Boxing

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has to discourage participation in boxing or other activities that create risks of deaths and injuries to their participants and subsequent cost to the NHS.

Mr. Sackville: None. Individuals should have the freedom to participate in the activities of their choice so long as they are within the law and they are fully aware of the risks involved.

Particulates

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been carried out by her Department into the health impacts of particulates of *(a)* vanadium and *(b)* nickel of less than 0.3 microns and between 0.31 microns and 10 microns.

Mr. Sackville: The Department has not recently funded research into these specific areas.

PRIME MINISTER

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Prime Minister if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowlands Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* People Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd., and discussed issues relating to clients of these companies.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minster if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 March.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 2 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Northern Ireland

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister what arrangements he has made for the framework document on Northern Ireland to be available to the public in Great Britain.

The Prime Minister: Copies are issued by first class post in response to requests to the Northern Ireland Office freephone or freepost facilities. A full summary of the document is running on the teletext system nationally and the full text of the document is on the Internet system worldwide.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Prime Minister, how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

The Prime Minister: For these purposes, my Department is part of the Cabinet Office. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

EDUCATION

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if Ministers in her Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Boswell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if she will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by her Department or agencies for which it is responsible in 1994, giving in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Forth: The Department did not issue any White Papers or Green Papers in 1994. Information on pamphlets produced in 1994, and total equivalent costs in 1980, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Department's agencies are responsible for their own expenditure on publications. Such information is not held centrally.

Boxing

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proposals she has to discourage participation in boxing in schools and draw attention to the risks of long-term injury.

Mr. Forth: Boxing is not a part of the compulsory school curriculum and there are no plans to make it so. The revised national curriculum for physical education requires that proper regard is given to safety in all physical activity.

Bedfordshire Education Budget

Sir David Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what conclusions her Department has drawn from the consequences of the budget figures of Bedfordshire county council on 23 February as they affect school budgets and children's education in Bedfordshire; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: It is for the voters of Bedfordshire to draw conclusions from the priority given to schools in the county council budget.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Goodlad: I refer to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible in 1994, giving in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Baldry: The major publications produced in 1994 by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, including the Overseas Development Administration, will be listed in the departmental report, Cm 2802, 1995, to be published on 8 March. In addition, a range of promotional booklets are published for distribution overseas.

In respect of those White Papers, Green Papers and other publications published for the FCO by HMSO, all costs—apart from pre-production costs of £13,034 for the 1994 departmental report—are borne by HMSO which aims to recover these from sales revenue. The cost of publications promoting Britain abroad and of consular material for the 1994–95 financial year is £2,240,000 compared with £2,583,500 for 1984–85, the earliest year for which figures are available.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts are being made to extend the current four-month truce in Bosnia-Herzegovina beyond the 1 May deadline; what use of the remaining period before that date is being made in the peace process; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: UNPROFOR is continuing its efforts to extend the implementation of the cessation of hostilities agreement. The contact group remains actively engaged in the pursuit of a political settlement.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what pressure he is putting on the Croatian Government to permit the presence of UN forces in Croatia beyond 31 March; what pressure is being applied by the European Union and the contact group; what has been the response; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Along with our EU partners and other contact group members, we have made clear our deep concern over the Croatian decision not to renew UNPROFOR's mandate in Croatia, and are pressing President Tudjman to reverse this decision. To date he has declined to do this.

We remain concerned that the departure of UNPROFOR from Croatia will increase the tension in the United Nations protected areas and could lead to a renewal of the war in Croatia. We urge the Croatian Government to reconsider.

Ethiopia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Oromo people in Ethiopia about their treatment by the Government of Ethiopia; and how he has responded.

Mr. Baldry: We have received representations from the Oromo Liberation Front and others about the treatment of Oromos by the transitional Government of Ethiopia. Together with our EU partners and other major aid donor countries, we have registered concerns about human rights in the Oromo and other regions.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Ethiopia about human rights abuses by that Government; and what were the areas of concern.

Mr. Baldry: We have made a number of representations to the transitional Government, both bilaterally and with our EU partners, particularly with regard to the arrest and detention of political figures.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken by the international community on human rights issues in Ethiopia.

Mr. Baldry: The members of the European Union and aid donors generally continue to monitor the human rights situation in Ethiopia. Concerns have been raised with the transitional Government of Ethiopia on a range of issues.

Veal Crates

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Fisheries and Food what approaches he has made to the Government of EU member states to secure the same legislation in those states with regard to the prohibition of veal crates as is currently the case in the United Kingdom; if he has raised this matter within the Council of Ministers; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Browning: I have been asked to reply.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has been pressing hard for the abolition of the close confinement veal crate system across the Community. He raised the issue in the Agriculture Council on 23 January and again on 20 and 21 February and, with the support of many other member states, has secured the advancement to this year of the review of the current EU rules on welfare of calves. I have undertaken a programme of visits to EU capitals to enlist support for a Community-wide ban. Reactions to my visits have been most encouraging.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Sierra Leone

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the number of refugees from Sierra leone now in Guinea; and what assistance is being given by the international community to deal with their humanitarian needs and with the causes of their flight from Sierra Leone.

Mr. Baldry: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates the total number of refugees who have fled since January 1995 at 45,000, bringing the total to 206,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea since the outbreak of the civil war in 1991. UNHCR is dispatching food, blankets, shelter materials and a water engineer to the region and a World Food Programme chartered vessel is discharging 3,000 tonnes of rice in Conakry both for Liberian and for Sierra Leonean refugees. The United Nations department of humanitarian affairs is currently preparing a regional consolidated inter-agency appeal to cover humanitarian needs.

The United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Organisation of African Unity and others are engaged in bringing about a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Ethiopia

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how well the Government of Ethiopia meet his criterion of good governance in respect of aid decisions; and what discussions he has had with the Government of Ethiopia on this matter.

Mr. Baldry: Since the transitional Government of Ethiopia came to power in 1991, progress has been made in establishing a legitimate, representative and accountable system of government. National elections are scheduled for 7 May 1995. A programme of economic reforms supported by the international financial institutions is also in place. We discuss these areas and human rights issues on a regular basis with the transitional Government.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Attorney-General if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs. C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

The Attorney-General: There have been no such meetings.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible in 1994, giving in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service published the following pamphlets for the benefit of the general public in 1994:

Statement of Purpose and Values/Datganiad	*Cost* £
o Bwrpas a Gwerthoedd	2,542.92
CPS Welsh Language Policy/Polisi iaith Gymraeg	1,153.83

The Crown Prosecution Service did not issue any White or Green Papers in 1994. There is no equivalent cost for 1980 as the Service was not then in existence.

None of the legal secretariat to the Law Officers, the Treasury Solicitor's Department or the Serious Fraud Office issued White Papers, Green Papers or pamphlets in 1994 for the benefit of the general public. The Serious Fraud Office was not in existence in 1980 and information on equivalent costs in that year for the legal secretariat to the Law Officers and the Treasury Solicitor's Department is not available.

Expenditure, Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Attorney General if he will estimate the money his Department spent in Wales with respect to *(a)* the Crown Prosecution Service and *(b)* magistrates courts in the latest available year.

The Attorney-General: During 1993–94, the last full year of which figures are available, the Crown Prosecution Service in Wales spent a total of £14,652,000.

Expenditure on magistrates courts is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor. I understand that for 1993–94, the last year for which data are available, the money spent on magistrates courts in Wales was £17.698 million. This figure includes both revenue and capital expenditure.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messers C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Howard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary

Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science in response to a similar question.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department, or agencies for which it is responsible, in 1994 giving, in each case, the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Howard: The information requested is as follows:

White Papers

Home Office annual report 1994: the Government's expenditure plans 1994–95 to 1996–97 for the Home Office and the Charity Commission, HMSO, 1994—Cm 2508, ISBN 0101250827. The costs to the Home Office of production and distribution were £21,917.

Green Papers

Tackling drugs together: a consultation document on a strategy for England, 1995–98, HMSO, 1994—Cm 2678, ISBN 0101267827. This Green Paper was jointly produced with other Departments which bore the publication costs.

Other Consultation papers

All except the first and last papers listed were produced and distributed in-house and their costs are not separately identifiable.

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984: codes of practice: draft revisions for consultation. Home Office, 1994. The total costs to the Home Office of production and distribution were £2,407.

Criminal appeals and the establishment of a criminal cases review authority: a discussion paper. Home Office, 1994.

National standards for the supervision of offenders in the community: near final revised drafts. Home Office, 1994.

Proposed changes to the law on greyhound totes. Home Office, 1994.

Revised proposals for Fire Precautions (Places of Work) Regulations and associated guidance. Home Office, 1994. Distribution was contracted out at a cost of £9,500.

A selective list of other publications is given in the Home Office annual report which will be published later this month. I shall be happy to provide further information to the hon. Member if he requires more details of papers listed there.

Information on the cost of publications issued in 1980 could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

Food Safety

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 code of practice in respect of powers provided by the Food Safety Act 1990.

Mr. Maclean: Section 67(9) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 provides that persons other than police officers who are charged with the duty of investigating offences shall have regard to any relevant provisions of codes of practice issued under the Act.

Code B, on the searching of premises and the seizure of property, sets down arrangements for obtaining search warrants and for conducting searches with the consent of the property owner, including a requirement to inform him of the purpose of the search and to seek his consent before the search commences.

An amendment to code B has been made to provide that the code does not apply to officers exercising statutory powers of entry and inspection, such as food safety inspectors, where the powers are not dependent on there being suspicion that an offence has been committed and the person exercising the power has no such suspicion. The order implementing the revised code has been approved by both Houses of Parliament and comes into effect on 10 April 1995.

Football Violence

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will arrange for the police to seek restriction orders to be placed on any British citizen *(a)* arrested, *(b)* charged and *(c)* convicted of any offence before, during or after the recent England *v.* Ireland football match in Dublin.

Mr. Maclean: Under the terms of section 22 of the Football Spectators Act 1989, courts in England and Wales may impose restriction orders on persons convicted of a football-related offence abroad, providing that there exists a bilateral agreement with the country concerned. There is no such agreement with the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 February, *Official Report*, columns *329–30*, what information has been provided as to why the second person subject to a restriction order did not comply with the restriction order on the day of the recent England *v.* Ireland match; and what action is being taken against the person concerned.

Mr. Maclean: The restriction orders authority is not yet in a position to confirm whether the second person subject to a restriction order breached the terms of that order. As indicated on 23 February, column *330*, where an order is breached it is an operational matter for the police, and ultimately for the courts, to take action. It is not a matter in which Ministers can intervene.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to his answer of 22 February, *Official Report*, column *226*, what plans he has to introduce legislation or amending legislation to give powers to the police to remove a passport from a convicted troublemaker or any person the police reasonably believe to be seeking to travel overseas to engage in violence;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 22 February, *Official Report*, column *235*, what plans he has to introduce legislation or amend existing legislation to give powers to the police to stop convicted troublemakers from travelling outside the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: I shall consider what additional measures may be needed to deal with football hooligans travelling abroad in consultation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage and in the light of the report of the inquiries being conducted by the English and Irish football authorities. As the hon. Member will be aware, part II of the Football Spectators Act 1989 already empowers the courts to impose restriction orders on those convicted of football-related offences to prevent them from attending key matches abroad. Those subject to restriction orders are required to

report to a police station—of their choice—roughly when an appropriate match is taking place. It is an offence to fail to do so.

Combat 18

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 February, *Official Report*, column *236*, when he expects the Metropolitan police to complete its investigation of the publication and distribution of written material by Combat 18.

Mr. Maclean: I understand from the Metropolitan police that it is not yet possible to say when a report of this investigation will go to the Crown Prosecution Service; and that the American embassy has informed it that the Dixie Press has closed down.

Immigration Detention Centres

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the rules governing the running of Her Majesty's prisons are applicable to the running of the Campsfield and Harmondsworth detention centres.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The immigration detention centres at Campsfield house and Harmondsworth are not Prison Service establishments and are therefore not subject to Prison Service rules.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the manual which governs the administration of Campsfield and Harmondsworth detention centres.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Operating instructions for the management of immigration detention facilities, including Campsfield house and Harmondsworth, contain information which is sensitive from both commercial and security points of view. It would not therefore be proper to disclose their contents.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the lower age limit for the detention of asylum seekers at Campsfield and Harmondsworth;

(2) how many children below the age of 18 years have been detained at Campsfield and Harmondsworth within the last five years; and from which countries they came to seek asylum in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There is no lower age limit for detention at Campsfield or Harmondsworth. However, in practice unaccompanied young persons under the age of 18 are detained only in the most exceptional circumstances. Temporary admission is normally granted into the care of a suitable sponsor—usually a relative or close family friend—or the social services department.

Since November 1993, when Campsfield house opened, nine people who were, or claimed to have been, under 18 have been detained there. Of these, five have been confirmed as asylum seekers. Their nationalities were Turkish, Ghanaian, Angolan, Chinese and Cote d'Ivoirean.

The information requested is not available in relation to Harmondsworth and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of Judge Tumim's recent report on Campsfield detention centre.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The report by HM chief inspector of prisons, following his inspection of the detention facilities at Campsfield house, has not yet been finalised. Consideration to placing the report in the Library of the House will be given in due course.

National Lottery

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to permit licensed bookmakers premises to sell national lottery tickets; if any review undertaken by him will apply to Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

I have no plans to amend the regulations issued under section 12 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993 which prohibit the sale of national lottery tickets in licensed bookmakers premises. These regulations apply equally to all areas of the United Kingdom.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total number of dogs currently held in respect of charges under *(a)* the Dogs Acts and *(b)* the Dangerous Dogs Acts; what is the daily costs of keeping those animals in custody; how many of those animals are alleged to be pit bull or pit bull type; how many of those animals have been in custody for more than *(a)* three and *(b)* six months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: There are presently 133 dogs held in police custody in England and Wales under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. No dogs are being held under other dogs Acts. Ninety-seven dogs are alleged to be of the type known as the pit bull terrier.

Thirty-one dogs have been held in custody for more than three months and 73 dogs for more than six months.

The daily cost of keeping dogs in custody ranges between £1.76 and £9, depending on the police force concerned.

Prevention of Terrorism

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conclusions he has reached on the recommendations of Mr. J. J. Rowe QC concerning the future of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989.

Mr. Howard: I have now considered Mr. Rowe's report, which was placed in the Library of the House on 17 February, and decided to accept his recommendation that the legislation should be renewed in its entirety for a further 12 months. A draft order to give effect to that is today being laid before the House.

Crime Victims

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue a leaflet for victims who have suffered from criminal activities to instruct them on their rights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The "Victims of Crime" leaflet is already available. It was first published in 1988 and a revised and augmented version was issued last October. The leaflet is given by the police to all victims of reported crime and tells them, among other things, how the crime

will be investigated, what will happen if the case goes to court, how they can apply for compensation, and what further sources of help and advice are available.

Later this year, we shall build on the victims charter by publishing a statement to service standards for victims of crime. This new, charter-style, document will tell victims in greater detail what they can expect of the criminal justice agencies and how they can complain if they do not receive the level of service which it specifies.

North East London Probation Service

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many offenders were being supervised by the North East London probation service on 30 June 1994;

(2) how many court reports were completed by the North East London probation service during 1992 and 1993.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Timms) on 28 February, *Official Report*, column *531*.

Vafi Sita Kamara

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Vafi Sita Kamara arrived in the United Kingdom; what was her age on arrival, when she first applied for asylum; what decisions were taken on her application and when; when she was detained; what was her age on detention; how long she has spent continuously in detention; and if he will make a statement on her current state of health.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: It is not our normal practice to give detailed information on individual cases. I will write to the hon. Member.

Redundancies

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* regulations or *(b)* guidelines govern his Department's accounting system in respect of the allocation of payments for redundancies in the data processing occurring in contract year one of the accounts and allocated over other years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is assumed that this question relates to the contract with Sema Group plc awarded following the market test of Home Office administrative information technology services. The Home Office did not make any staff redundant as a consequence of this market test and the allocation of expenditure for such redundancies does not arise. All payments to the Sema Group in connection with this contract, including payments associated with their transitional and restructuring costs, will be allocated to the financial year in which the payments are made in accordance with the normal rules of Government cash accounting.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the longest time someone currently seeking asylum has been detained;

(2) what is the number of people seeking asylum who are presently detained, either awaiting a hearing or awaiting deportation.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: As at 23 February 1995, the longest currently detained person who had sought asylum has been held in detention since 14 August 1990. The individual concerned was detained following the Home Secretary's decision that his deportation would be conducive to the public good on grounds of national security. He subsequently applied for asylum, and his application was refused on 27 March 1991. My right hon. and learned Friend has given an undertaking that he should not be removed pending the exhaustion of rights of appeal before the domestic courts and the European Court of Human Rights, should the individual wish to exercise these rights.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member from Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on 2 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *813*, which gave the available information on the number of people detained pending an appeal or awaiting removal.

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will publish a list of all the prisons and other establishments which people for asylum in the United Kingdom are being detained, and the numbers of detainees in each place;

(2) how many of those people seeking asylum in United Kingdom and who are detained at Haslar prison have, in the past 12 months, *(a)* been given permission to remain in the United Kingdom as political refugees, *(b)* been deported to their country of origin, *(c)* died in detention, *(d)* committed suicide, *(e)* attempted to commit suicide, *(f)* applied for bail and *(g)* been granted bail;

(3) how many people who are seeking asylum in Britain are currently held in prisons.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The majority of people detained under immigration powers are housed in immigration service detention centres at Harmondsworth and Campsfield house, or at Haslar, a Prison Service establishment run almost exclusively for this purpose. At 23 February 1995, 635 persons who had sought asylum were being detained. Of these, 268 persons were being detained in prison in the United Kingdom, including Haslar holding centre, and the remainder were being held in other immigration service detention centres. A list of the numbers of detainees in each place of detention is given in the table.

Details on persons who had sought asylum and were detained at Haslar holding centre in 1994 are not available. There were no incidents of death by suicide or otherwise among the asylum detainees at Haslar holding centre in 1994, but one person attempted suicide.

Number of persons detained who have claimed asylum as at 23 February 1995, by place of detention.

Place of detention	*Number detained*
Prisons	
HMP Haslar	77
HMP Rochester	71
HMP Brixton	17
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	7
HMP Hull	4
HMP Pentonville	4
HMP Birmingham	28
HMP Horfield, Bristol	4

Number of persons detained who have claimed asylum as at 23 February 1995, by place of detention.

Place of detention	*Number detained*
HMP Bullingdon	2
HMP Billingdon	1
HMP Blunderston	1
HMP Winchester	3
HMP Wandsworth	6
HMP Belmarsh	5
HMP Chelmsford	2
HMP Dorchester	1
HMP Armley, Leeds	4
HMP Erlestoke	1
HMP Highdown	1
HMP Liverpool	1
HMP Norwich	3
HMP Crumlin Road	1
HMP The Mount	1
HMP Whitemoor	1
HMP Bullwood Hall	1
HMP Exeter	1
HMP Greenock	4
HMP Hindley	1
HMP Holme House	1
HMP Lewes	1
HMP Manchester	3
HMP Risley	1
HMP Wayland	1
HMRC The Wolds	3
HMYOI Brinsford	5
	268
Other places of detention	
Campsfield House	151
Harmondsworth	95
Beehive, Gatwick	15
Queens Building	11
Newhaven	10
Dover Harbour Board	10
Stansted	5
Others[1]	70
	367
Total	635

[1] Includes other immigration service detention centres and police cells.

Data Processing

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost to his Department of putting together the work in-house bid for his Department's data processing work.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I regret that the information is not available.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 9 February, *Official Report*, column *492*, how many people were employed at Corby on data entry operation; how many were made redundant following its acquisition by Sema Group; and which organisation will be paying toward the redundancies.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Following the award of a contract to Sema Group for the supply of Home Office administrative information technology services, staff in the undertaking were transferred to Sema Group on 1 November 1994; this included 42 data entry staff employed at Corby.

Although subsequent redundancies by Sema Group are a matter for it, we understand from the company that all data entry staff in Corby were invited on 3 January 1995 to apply for voluntary redundancy, that as a result all 42 staff are to be made redundant by Sema Group; the costs of the redundancies will be paid by Sema Group. It is the intention of Sema Group to use a subcontractor for the provision of data entry services which is in accordance with the terms of its contract with the Home Office. We understand that the subcontractor is offering similar employment locally to all staff.

Immigration (Overstayers)

Sir Ivan Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many overstayers have been removed from the United Kingdom in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The information available relates to persons removed following deportation action in respect of a breach of conditions to enter or remain. Such persons comprise mainly overstayers but also include persons working in breach of conditions. Data on such persons removed, and those who departed voluntarily when served with a notice of intention to deport, in 1984–93 are given in table 7.3 of "Control of Immigration: Statistics, United Kingdom, 1993"—Cm 2637—a copy of which is in the Library. The corresponding numbers of removals and voluntary departures in 1994 were 1,264 and 199 respectively.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications have been received by the Metropolitan police for police recruitment in each of the last five years.

Mr. Maclean: The following is the information requested:

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Men	4,425	7,006	2,174	5,583	10,254
Women	1,729	2,470	799	1,989	2,881
Total	6,154	9,476	2,973	7,572	13,135

These figures exclude applications to join the special constabulary.

Internet

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers are available *(a)* to Her Majesty's Government and *(b)* individual citizens to combat (i) criminals and (ii) pornographers using the Internet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Users of the Internet are subject to the relevant provisions of the criminal law. Thus, for example, those who use the Internet to transmit obscene material will be liable to prosecution under the Obscene Publications Acts 1959 and 1964, while those who use the system to plan criminal activities may be liable to prosecution for conspiracy. Those who believe that the system may be being used for illegal purposes should report the matter to the police.

Pop Festivals

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers Parliament has granted local authorities on the Isle of Wight *(a)* to refuse pop festivals and *(b)* to regulate pop festivals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 enables district councils in England and Wales outside Greater London to adopt powers requiring the licensing of outdoor musical entertainments held on private land. The grant or refusal of a licence is at the discretion of the council. Licences may be issued subject to conditions concerning safety, public hygiene and prevention of unreasonable noise disturbance. I understand that each of the two district councils on the Isle of Wight has adopted these powers.

Prisons (Television)

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his decision not to authorise in-cell television in new prison cells was a policy or operational matter.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The provision of in-cell television is something which has both operational and policy implications. It has operational implications for the way prisons are managed and it also has policy implications in terms of the privileges which are allowed to prisoners, which is properly a matter of policy concern.

Parkhurst Prison (Geophones)

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the occasions since 1979 when the governors of Her Majesty's prison, Parkhurst requested the installation of geophones; and what action was taken in each case.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for this matter has been delegated to the Director General of the Prison Service, who has been asked to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Derek Lewis to Mr. Chris Mullin, dated 2 March 1995:

The Home Secretary has asked me to reply to your recent Question about the number of occasions since 1979 when the Governors of Parkhurst have requested the installation of geophones and what action had been taken in each instance.

Disproportionate cost would be incurred to fully answer your Question. The issue was first raised in 1987, but at this stage, it was felt that geophones should not be installed until the major redevelopment programme at the prison had been completed. Mr. Marriott, who became the Governor of Parkhurst prison in 1990, made a number of requests for geophones to be installed around the internal perimeter fence (geophones were already in place around the Special Secure Unit).

At the time of the escape in January, geophones were being installed around the perimeter fence at Parkhurst. The Prison Service decided not to install geophones in the prison earlier because, as Ministers made clear at the time, the building work would have severely limited their effectiveness. It was those building works which dictated the timing of the installation. While building work, itself related to security, was going on, it did not make sense to install geophones because they could not work effectively in those circumstances.

Installation of geophones around the perimeter fence will be completed in April 1995.

Fire and Civil Defence Authorities

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that financial arrangements and support will enable each fire and civil defence authority to achieve and to maintain Home Office minimum standards in 1995–96; and if he will list those authorities which on present estimates are unlikely to meet that requirement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* It is for each fire and civil defence authority, in the light of the provisional criteria for council tax capping, to set a budget for 1995–96. The budget should allow it to comply with its statutory duties to provide fire cover. Where an authority is convinced that it cannot set a budget within the provisional capping limits, it can set a budget above the provisional cap and make a case to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for those limits to be redetermined.

TREASURY

Growth Rate

11. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current rate of growth of the economy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Gross domestic product grew by 3¼ per cent. in 1994.

Neo-classical Endogenous Growth Theory

15. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies he has made of neo-classical endogenous growth theory; and if he will make a statement.

17. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what studies he has made of neo-classical endogenous growth theory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Aitken: The post neo-classical endogenous growth theory is receiving the study it deserves.

Fund Flows, Japan

16. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of fund flows between the United Kingdom and Japan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: Recent figures suggest that the UK current account with Japan for the first half of 1994 moved into surplus.

Taxation

18. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has had from Opposition parties about current tax policies.

Sir George Young: Since the Budget, the Chancellor has received a very small number of written representations from the hon. Members on the Opposition Front Benches.

23. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total taxation cost for an average manual worker currently; and what it was in May 1979.

Sir George Young: The tax paid by any particular individual depends on their income, household type and spending pattern. Real take-home pay is what matters. Real take-home pay for a one-earner couple on average earnings with two children has risen by 40 per cent.—over £80 a week—since 1978–79.

25. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the plans the Government have to extend the 20 per cent. income tax band.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hendry) earlier today.

Incomes

19. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the increase in real disposable income over the past 15 years; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Real household disposable incomes per head have risen by nearly £50 a week, or 47 per cent., since 1979. They rose by only £8 a week, or 9 per cent., between 1974 and 1979.

Cash Machines

20. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had about hole in the wall cash machines.

Mr. Nelson: The number of representations has declined in recent years. For example, in 1992 my colleagues and I received some 26 letters from other hon. Members on this issue. In 1993, we received 23 and in 1994 only one. So far this year, we have received none.

Governor of the Bank of England

21. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to meet the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss prospects for the economy.

Mr. Nelson: The Chancellor's next monthly monetary meeting with the Governor of the Bank of England will take place on 8 March.

Inequality

22. **Mrs. Liddell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has in respect of inequality.

Sir George Young: Government policies provide a firm basis for lasting economic recovery and are the best way to safeguard living standards of all groups, including the least well-off. The best way to tackle inequality is, as the Government are doing, by ensuring increased opportunities, not by restricting choice and levelling everyone down.

Demand

24. **Sir David Knox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the level of total demand in the economy.

Mr. Aitken: Total domestic demand grew by 1.2 per cent. in the fourth quarter of 1994.

Football (Finances)

26. **Ms Hoey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what inquiries he has made in respect of financial irregularities in English football.

Sir George Young: The Inland Revenue special compliance office is carrying out investigations into alleged financial irregularities in football clubs. These investigations are continuing and it is not appropriate to comment further until they are complete.

Privatisation

27. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which countries have asked his Department for advice on privatisation over the past 12 months.

Sir George Young: In the last three months, the Treasury has talked privatisation to colleagues from Australia, Azerbaijan, Canada, China, Croatia, Cuba, Ethiopia, Hungary, Indonesia, Malaysia, Romania, Spain, Thailand, Trinidad, Turkey, the Ukraine, Vietnam and Zimbabwe.

Home Help

28. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce tax relief on home help.

Mr. Aitken: The Government have no plans to introduce a tax relief on home help.

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Minister in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs. C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C. *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* People Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: No such meetings have taken place involving Treasury Ministers.

Tax Bulletin

Mr. Stern: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will request the Board of Inland Revenue to review its interpretation of section 360(3) *(b)* of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 as set out in the tax bulletin for December 1994, with special reference to the expressed interpretation of management as being of a company as a whole rather than of one particular area of the company's operations.

Sir George Young: It is for the Inland Revenue to apply existing law as voted by Parliament to the facts of individual cases, and it is not customary for Ministers to intervene in this. The tax bulletin article in question—in fact, published in November 1993—sets out the Revenue's understanding of the particular legislation considered. But the normal rights of appeal are of course available, as the tax bulletin always spells out, to any

taxpayer who wishes to take issue with the Revenue's view.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual cost of exchanges between sterling and other EU currencies for *(a)* exports and imports of goods and services, *(b)* stock exchange and banking transactions and *(c)* expenditure by (i) tourists and (ii) business travellers.

Mr. Nelson: The Government have not made any overall or detailed estimate of currency conversion costs between the pound sterling and other EU currencies. However, the European Commission estimates that currency conversion costs amount to 0.4 per cent. of gross domestic product for the EC as a whole.

European Monetary Institute

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual cost to the European Monetary Institute of *(a)* wages, *(b)* benefits in kind, *(c)* travel allowances and *(d)* rent for its premises.

Mr. Nelson: Information on the running costs of the European Monetary Institute is expected to be published in its annual report in the spring.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many persons are currently employed by the European Monetary Institute.

Mr. Nelson: The European Monetary Institute currently employs around 150 people.

Next Steps Agencies

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many civil service jobs are now performed by agencies, quangos, trusts and other bodies, *(a)* overall in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in each Government Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: The total number of civil servants employed in next steps agencies, or on next step lines, at 1 October 1994 was 331,956, of which 25,466 were employed in trading funds. The civil service staff in post summary gives details of the number employed in these Agencies, listed by Government Department. Posts in non-departmental public bodies, trusts and other bodies are outside the civil service. "Public Bodies 1994" gives details of those employed in non-departmental public bodies, listed by Government Department. The annual article on "Employment in the Public and Private Sectors" in the Central Statistical Office's publication "Economic Trends", January 1995, gives information on total numbers employed in general government and public corporations. The article also gives details of major changes between 1983 and 1994. All these publications are available in the Library.

Departmental Reports

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the 1995 departmental reports to be published.

Mr. Aitken *[pursuant to his answer, 23 February 1995, c. 275-76]*: The departmental report for HM Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's other small departments and net payments to EC institutions will now be published on 9 March.

SCOTLAND

Health Service Contacts

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what health service contracts have been awarded to *(a)* Hospital Design Consortium and *(b)* IDC Ltd., by the Scottish health boards or trusts in the past five years; and if these contractors remain on current contractors' lists for Scottish health service contractors.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have no information about either Hospital Design Consortium or IDC Ltd. being awarded a health service building contract in Scotland.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons with learning difficulties were looked after in the community in 1993–94.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As at 31 March 1993 there were 2,535 people being cared for in residential care homes for people with learning disabilities. At the same date, there were 8,439 people attending day centres for people with learning disabilities. The number of people with learning disabilities who are being cared for at home is unknown. Complete information for 1994 is not yet available.

Scottish Enterprise

Mrs. Liddell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the equity partners of Scottish Enterprise in projects supported by them over the past three years;

(2) if he will list the number of occasions 3i has acted as equity partners in Scottish Enterprise projects.

Mr. Kynoch: Equity participation in projects that it supports is an operational matter for Scottish Enterprise. I have asked the chairman of Scottish Enterprise to write to the hon. Member.

Quarry Proposal, Elderslie

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to announce his decision in respect of the application by Scottish Aggregates to develop a quarry at Windyhill farm, Elderslie; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch: The reporter appointed to hear evidence at the public local inquiry into the proposed quarry will very shortly circulate to parties, for comment, part I of her report containing the summary of evidence and her findings of fact. The reporter will, thereafter, complete the report and submit it to my right hon. Friend with her recommendation. A decision is expected towards the end of the summer.

Local Government Finance

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the budgeted expenditure per head of population of each of the Scottish *(a)* regional and *(b)*

district councils in 1994–95 and 1995–96; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch: The information requested for 1994–95 is given in the table. The comparable information for 1995–96 is not yet available.

Total 1994–95 budgeted expenditure per head of population

	£
Regional Councils	
Borders	1,064
Central	964
Dumfries and Galloway	1,052
Fife	972
Grampian	918
Highland	1,170
Lothian	960
Strathclyde	1,026
Tayside	1,008
District Councils	
Berwickshire	152
Ettrick and Lauderdale	153
Roxburgh	164
Tweeddale	159
Clackmannan	203
Falkirk	168
Stirling	227
Annandale and Eskdale	148
Nithsdale	160
Stewartry	136
Wigtown	197
Dunfermline	163
Kirkcaldy	173
North East Fife	185
Aberdeen	213
Banff and Buchan	157
Gordon	153
Kincardine and Deeside	127
Moray	163
Badenoch and Strathspey	179
Caithness	167
Inverness	151
Lochaber	210
Nairn	152
Ross and Cromarty	219
Skye and Lochalsh	239
Sutherland	213
East Lothian	198
Edinburgh	276
Midlothian	177
West Lothian	166
Argyll and Bute	295
Bearsden and Milngavie	166
Clydebank	268
Clydesdale	201
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	172
Cumnock and Doon Valley	188
Cunninghame	203
Dumbarton	210
East Kilbride	177
Eastwood	136
Glasgow	318
Hamilton	235
Inverclyde	221
Kilmarnock and Loudon	202
Kyle and Carrick	206
Monklands	238
Motherwell	213
Renfrew	221
Strathkelvin	203
Angus	157
Dundee	251
Perth and Kinross	177

Notes:
1. The total 1994–95 budgeted expenditure is taken from figures returned by local authorities in March/April 1994.
2. The population figures used were the latest available from the General Register Office of Scotland dated 29 April 1994.

Councillors' Allowances

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase the level of councillors' allowances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) gave on 19 January, *Official Report*, columns *665–66*, which covered allowances for all councillors. In respect of the existing scheme, which continues to apply to the members of the regional and district councils until 31 March 1996, the usual annual review is currently under way.

Scottish Homes

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the *(a)* names, *(b)* employment or previous employment, *(c)* date of appointment, *(d)* date for reappointment and *(e)* salary, honorarium and/or allowance payable to each member of the board of Scottish Homes, including the executive and non-executive directors; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is set out in the table. Appointments and reappointments are considered by my right hon. Friend in terms of the most effective mix of expertise required by Scottish Homes at the appropriate time.

Name	*Occupation*	*Date of appointment*	*Period of current appointment*	*Salary* £
Sir James Mellon KCMG (Chairman)	Former Diplomat	1.4.89	1.4.93–31.3.96	38,330
Mrs. Frances McCall MBE	Member, Management Committee, Calvay Co-operative	1.12.88	1.4.91–31.3.95'	6,660
Professor Duncan Maclennan MA MPhil FRSA	Director of the Centre for Housing Research at Glasgow University	1.12.88	1.4.93–31.3.97	6,600
Dr. Tom Begg OBE JP BA PhD	Lecturer in Economics at Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh	1.12.88	1.4.91–31.3.95	6,600

Name	Occupation	Date of appointment	Period of current appointment	Salary £
Mrs. Heather Sheerin OBE	Co-director family-owned retail carpet business	1.12.88	1.4.93–31.3.97	6,600
Mrs. Daphne M.W. Sleigh	Freelance Market Researcher	14.9.90	14.9.90–31.3.95[1]	6,600
Cameron Parker OBE	Non-executive Vice Chairman, Lithgows Ltd.	1.4.92	1.4.92–31.3.96	6,600
Professor John R. Small CBE	Deputy Principal, Heriot Watt University and Professor of Accountancy and Finance	1.4.93	1.4.93–31.3.97	6,600
Alistair Dempster	Chief Executive, TSB Bank Scotland plc; Deputy Chairman TSB Bank Channel Islands Limited	1.10.93	1.4.93–31.3.98	6,600
Peter McKinlay (ex-officio)	Chief Executive, Scottish Homes	7.10.91	7.10.91–6.10.97	76,599

[1] Mrs. Frances McCall and Mrs Daphne Sleigh have been offered and have accepted re-appointment for a period from 1.4.95–31.3.98 and 1.4.95–31.3.99 respectively.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out the precise duties and responsibilities of *(a)* the chairman and *(b)* the chief executive of Scottish Homes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The chairman of Scottish Homes is responsible to my right hon. Friend for its overall direction and management within the policy framework set by him. He is the principal spokesman for Scottish Homes and the main contact with Ministers, raising issues with them as appropriate. The chief executive is designated as accounting officer and is personally responsible for the proper stewardship and expenditure of public funds and the day-to-day operation and management of Scottish Homes.

Community Councils

Mr. Mcmaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new powers, duties or responsibilities will be given to community councils under the provisions of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994; what plans he has to give local authorities a statutory duty to consult community councils on matters of local interest, planning applications and community planning policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch: Following local government reorganisation, community councils will have a statutory right to be consulted on planning issues if they so wish and on the decentralisation schemes which the new authorities will draw up for their area. Local authorities will also be encouraged to keep community councils fully informed about local licensing issues.

Fox Hunting

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the policy of the Scottish Office in relation to fox hunting.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government have consistently adopted a position of neutrality towards field sports. We believe that participation in these activities, including fox hunting, is a matter on which people should make their own decision according to their conscience.

Carpet Industry

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the importance of the carpet manufacturing industry to the local economy of Renfrewshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch: The carpet manufacturing industry makes a valuable contribution to the economy of Renfrewshire. It currently employs about 440 people, who represent approximately 2 per cent. of Renfrewshire's total manufacturing employment.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Stewart: To ask the Secretary of state for Scotland if the prior options study of Scottish Homes which he announced on 12 July 1994 has yet been completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I am pleased to announce that the prior options study, undertaken as the first stage of the five-yearly policy and financial management review of Scottish Homes, has now been completed.

The study was carried out by my Department under the guidance of a steering group chaired by the Secretary of the Scottish Office Environment Department. My announcement on 12 July included an invitation to interested parties to submit comments and the Department wrote to a number of individuals and bodies with a clear interest in the functions of Scottish Homes. I am grateful to all those who took the trouble to respond. A total of 36 responses were received and the views expressed were taken into account. The majority of respondents saw a continuing need for a strong national housing agency.

I have accepted the overall conclusions of the study. Scottish Homes will continue as a single national housing agency playing a major role in taking forward the Government's housing policies in Scotland and supporting local authorities in their role as statutory housing authorities. It will continue to provide development funding to housing associations and other housing providers, promote housing research and innovation and carry out the statutory function of registration and monitoring of housing associations. It will, however, become a more focused organisation as it

sheds its landlord role in line with the Government's policy to diversify the rented sector in Scotland.

The second stage of the review, which will examine Scottish Homes's performance and financial management in detail, will now get under way. Many of the comments submitted as part of the prior options study will be relevant to the second stage.

Separately, the Government will be examining the issue of housing associations wishing to operate in more than one part of the United Kingdom.

Copies of the report of the prior options study will be placed in the Library and can be obtained from the Scottish Office Environment Department, room 423B, St Andrew's house, Edinburgh, EH1 2DG, Tel. 0131 244 2234.

Housing Associations

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if a housing association which was not a co-operative housing association subsequent to 2 January 1989 granted a tenancy to an individual, either alone or jointly with others, who immediately prior to being granted tenancy had held, alone or with others, the secure tenancy of a different house from the same housing association if *(a)* the new tenancy would be secure, *(b)* the new tenancy would be subject to the provisions of the part IV of the Rent (Scotland) 1984, and *(c)* that house would be subject to the right to purchase under section 61 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 and related provisions.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 February 1995]:* While it is not for the Government to interpret statute, it is the Government's view that housing legislation provides that where a secure tenant of a housing association transfers to another property owned by the same landlord, the tenancy remains a secure tenancy and is subject to the provisions of the Rent (Scotland) Act 1984. It is also the case that under section 61 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 a secure tenant has a statutory right to purchase this home, subject to certain exemptions.

Raves

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce legislation to implement the recommendations made by Sheriff Neil Gow following the fatal accident inquiry on Hanger 13; and if he will make a statement on the outcome.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 1 March 1995]:* The determination in this fatal accident inquiry has underlined the dangers of taking drugs such as Ecstasy and helpfully complements the recommendations in the report of the ministerial drugs task force led by my noble and learned Friend the Minister of State. Particular consideration is being given to Sheriff Gow's recommendation that model conditions in licences for raves should be prepared in legislative form. The task force made a similar recommendation, while recognising that responding to the problems associated with rave events through the licensing system was not straightforward. Consultations are now taking place with the police and local authorities, in the light of which we shall consider what action is appropriate, including possible legislative amendment.

Medical Negligence Proceedings

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average length of time needed to bring to a conclusion legal proceedings concerned with a claim of negligence against medical practitioners employed in *(a)* general practice and *(b)* hospital posts; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* Information on general medical practitioners is not collected centrally. They are independent contractors and as such insure themselves independently. For hospital practitioners, the length of time taken to settle claims on medical negligence will vary depending on the nature of the case. If agreement is reached before the case goes to court, it can be settled within six to nine months of the claim being lodged. Where the claim is determined by the courts, the average time taken to reach a conclusion is around five years.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many legal cases involving negligence on the part of medical practitioners have been brought to a conclusion in each of the past 10 years; what were the sums of compensation paid to complainers who were found by the courts to have suffered from such negligent conduct; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 February 1995]:* The information collected centrally on the compensation paid on medical negligence claims makes no distinction between agreed out of court settlements and damages awarded by the courts.

Information on the costs of settlements and the number of cases concerned can be provided only from 1 January 1990 when financial responsibility for medical negligence was assumed by health boards. The costs, as recently updated and including claimants' costs, for this period were as follows:

Year	*Settlements (court and out of court)* £	*Number of cases*
1989–90	957,956	22
1990–91	1,327,080	50
1991–92	1,143,151	49
1992–93	1,215,627	40
1993–94	646,038	27

Cervical Smear Tests

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he can make concerning the percentage of women being offered cervical smears on a three-yearly basis or less in *(a)* Inverclyde, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 February 1995]:* All women throughout Scotland in the age range 20 to 60 years are offered cervical screening on

a three-yearly basis. The only ineligible women are those who have had a total hysterectomy.

Disabled Employees

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to introduce further legislation to encourage employers to recruit more disabled employees; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I have been asked to reply.

The Disability Discrimination Bill is currently being considered by Parliament and the Government have no plans to introduce further legislation relating to the employment of disabled people.

The Government encourage the recruitment of disabled employees through their long-standing programme aimed at educating and persuading employers to recognise the abilities of disabled employees and to adopt good employment practices. We will also continue to provide effective and practical help both to employers and to disabled individuals. More than 53,000 disabled people were helped to find work last year by Employment Service advisers and we are aiming to help more than 56,000 this year.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs. C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, (i) Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy (l) Good Relations, (m) Rowland Sallingbury Casey, (n) Lowe Bell, (o) Profile Corporate and Political Relations, and (p) Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. John M. Taylor: There have been no such meetings.

Expenditure, Wales

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the expenditure of his Department in Wales in the most recent available year.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Expenditure by the higher courts and central Government grants to local authorities in support of magistrates courts in Wales in 1993–94 was £39.7 million. This figure included preparatory work on the parking enforcement centre, which is attached to Cardiff county court and was completed in 1993–94.

In addition, £4.9 million of legal aid payments were made through the Crown court in Wales. Expenditure from the legal aid fund cannot be identified separately for Wales because the Legal Aid Board's area offices administer applications and bills from parts of both England and Wales.

Small Claims Limit

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will raise the £1,000 limit for claims within the small claims court; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what plans he has to make special arrangements for the recovery of costs by successful plaintiffs in small personal injury cases if the small claims limit is raised;

(2) what plans he has to raise the small claims limit; by what amount; and when he plans to introduce the rise.

Mr. John M. Taylor: This issue, among others, is within the scope of Lord Woolf's comprehensive review of civil justice. The Lord Chancellor is awaiting the first report of this review, and any decisions will be taken in that context.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible in 1994, giving in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The Department published no White or Green Papers during 1994, but two leaflets were published and are listed with their costs. There were also reports and consultation documents apparently outwith the scope of the question. Information regarding the equivalent costs of White and Green Papers and leaflets produced by the Department in 1980 is not held centrally.

An Introduction to the Lord Chancellor's Department £985.75

An Introduction to the Lord Chancellor's Department

(An Italian version for British Week in Milan) £5,543.00

The Lord Chancellor has responsibilities for three agencies, HM Land Registry, the Public Record Office and the Public Trust Office. As the question concerns a specific operational matter on which the chief executives of the agencies are best placed to provide an answer I have accordingly asked them to reply direct.

Letter from John Manthorpe to Mr. Roland Boyes, dated 1 March 1995:

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning the white papers, green papers and pamphlets issued by the Registry in 1994.

The Land Registry produces a wide range of explanatory literature containing advice for practitioners and the general public on various aspects of land registration practice and procedure and on the services that it provides. No white papers or green papers were issued in 1994.

There is no cost to the exchequer of production, publication or distribution as the Agency meets all of its costs from fees.

I do hope that this answers the points raised with the Parliamentary Secretary but please contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Roland Boyes, dated 1 March 1995:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply to your question about white papers, green papers and pamphlets issued by the Public Record Office.

The Public Record Office did not issue any white or green papers in 1994. It produced the following guidance:

Beyond the PRO: Public Records in Places of Deposit

Author:	S. Shaw
Printing costs:	None
Authorial costs:	None

In 1980 the Public Record Office did not issue any white or green papers or pamphlets.

Letter from Julia Lomas to Mr. Roland Boyes, dated 1 March 1995:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to you as part of the Lord Chancellor's Department's response to your parliamentary question, listed on 22 February 1995, regarding a list of the white papers, green papers and pamphlets issued and the cost of their production, publication and distribution.

The Public Trust Office did not issue any white or green papers in 1994.

The cost of producing and publishing pamphlets in 1994 (including Charter Statements explanatory booklets and leaflets sent to our customers) was £37,500. The cost of distribution will have formed part of the Public Trust Office's total postal budget and has not been separately costed.

The Public Trust Office is required to cover its running costs from fees levied on its clients and the cost of producing, publishing and distributing these pamphlets will, therefore, have been recovered from these fees.

No equivalent figures are available for 1980 as the relevant information is only retained for seven years.

Court Service

Mr. Boateng: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department which public relations company was hired by his Department to advise on the logo and other public relations matters for the launch of the new Court Service agency on 3 April; how long the contract with the company is set to last; and what the total cost to the Department of the company's service will be.

Mr. John M. Taylor: No public relations company has been engaged to advise on matters relating to the launch of the Court Service as an executive agency. Following a competitive tender exercise, the Epps Partnership has been retained to design a logo, guidelines for its use and the layout of the documents which will be published attendant on the launch of the agency and also in respect of the courts charter. The contract will come to an end in July 1995. The cost to the Department at 28 February 1995 is £32,741.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Electricity

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what considerations underlay the absence of competition in respect of the invitation for tenders for the supply of electricity to Northern Ireland, prior to the signing of heads of agreement between Scottish Power and Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Ancram: I understand that Northern Ireland Electricity initially approached a number of generating companies including National Power plc, PowerGen plc, Electricité de France and Scottish Hydro Electric plc in addition to Scottish Power plc before entering into detailed negotiations with the last named.

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Sir John Wheeler: No.

Cardiac and Orthopaedic Survey

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the waiting list for cardiac and orthopaedic surgery in each of the area health and social services boards for the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Moss: The information is not available in the form requested. The table shows the total number of patients in Northern Ireland waiting for treatment in the cardiac surgery and trauma and orthopaedic specialties at 31 December in each of the last three years.

	Cardiac surgery (Ordinary admissions)	*Trauma and Orthopaedic surgery (Ordinary Admissions)*	*(Day cases)*
1992	797	3,902	n/a
1993	701	3,190	n/a
1994	443	2,493	517

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number of cardiac operations purchased by Northern Ireland GP fundholders and area boards in the last three years for which figures are available in the Royal Victoria hospital, in Great Britain hospitals, in the private sector and the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Moss: The information is not available in the form requested. The table shows the total number of patients who have had cardiac operations at the Royal Victoria hospital in each of the last three years.

Year	*Number*
1991–92	726
1992–93	994
1993–94	1,140

Cardiac surgery is not undertaken in any of the private sector hospitals or clinics in Northern Ireland and information about operations performed outside Northern Ireland is not collected centrally.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number of orthopaedic operations purchased by GP fundholders and area boards for the last three years for which figures are available in Musgrave Park hospital, the Royal Victoria hospital and the private sector.

Mr. Moss: The information is not available in the form requested. The table shows the total number of patients who had operations within the specialty of trauma and orthopaedics at the Royal Victoria hospital and Musgrave Park hospital in each of the last three years.

Year	*Royal Victoria hospital*	*Musgrave Park hospital*
1991–92	1,160	4,386
1992–93	1,130	4,039
1993–94	1,351	5,452

Information about orthopaedic operations undertaken in private sector hospitals or clinics is not collected.

Single Programming Document

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the members of the working groups created to support the monitoring committee on the single programming document for Northern Ireland, their organisations and the planned dates of the meetings of the working groups; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: In addition to Government and European Commission officials, the working groups, or sub-programme working committees, also include outside members drawn from various key sectors. Meetings will normally be held twice a year. Details of the outside members and the planned dates for the inaugural meetings of the committees are set out.

Name	*Organisation*
Economic Development—Meeting 24 March	
Mr. B. Johnston	First Trust bank
Professor I. Allen	NI Neuropathology Service, Royal Victoria hospital
Mr. P. Gorecki	NI Economic Council
Mr. J. McKinney	Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
Tourism—Meeting 23 March	
Mr. D. Fallows	Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
Mr. D. Broderick	Tourism and Hospitality Training Council (NI)
Ms P. Morris	Glenavon House Hotel
Mr. A. Goan	Belleek Pottery Ltd.
Mr. I McQuiston	National Trust
Physical and Social Environment—Meeting 22 March	
Dr. D. Stephens	Irish Council of Churches
Mrs. A. McGinley	Fermanagh District Council
Ms M. McWilliams	University of Ulster
Mr. S. McAleavey	NI Council for Voluntary Action
Mr. J. Redpath	Community Leader
Investment in the Development of People—Meeting 23 March (provisional)	
Ms S. McKee	Cantrell and Cochrane Ltd.
Ms A. Kilmurray	NI Voluntary Trust
Mr. L. Hasson	Austin and Co. Ltd., Londonderry
Mr. N. McBride	Job Link Training Scheme, Coleraine
Transportation—Meeting 31 March	
Mrs. M. Bell	NI General Consumer Council
Mr. J. Irvine	NI Transport Holding Company
Energy—Meeting 3 March	
Mr. W. Napier	Tyrone Brick Ltd.
Mr. M. Smyth	University of Ulster
Ms M. McCloskey	Neighbourhood Energy Action
Agriculture—Meeting 13 March	
Representative to be confirmed	Ulster Farmers Union
Representative to be confirmed	NI Agricultural and Producers Association
Rural Development—Meeting 14 March	
Mr. J. Armstrong	Rural Development Council
Professor F. Gordon	Agricultural Research Institute for NI
Fisheries—Meeting 10 to 11 April	
Mr. G. Golligher	Industrial Development Board
Mr. P. McCardle	Local Enterprise Development Unit
Mr. F. Ledwidge	NI Seafoods
Environmental Services and Protection—Meeting 16 March	
Professor A. Long	Queen's University, Belfast
Dr. C. Carter	University of Ulster

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the members of the monitoring committee in respect of the single programming document for Northern Ireland, their organisations and the planned dates of the meetings of the committee; and if he will make a statement.

Sir John Wheeler: In addition to Government and European Commission officials, the Northern Ireland single programme monitoring committee also includes five outside members drawn from various key sectors. These are Mr. Sean Curran, industry sector; Professor Wallace Ewart, training sector; Ms Avila Kilmurray, voluntary sector; Mr. Desmond Mitchell, district councils; and Mr. Norman Shaw, agriculture sector. The monitoring committee's inaugural meeting was held on 1 December 1994 and the next meeting is provisionally scheduled for 18 May 1995. The committee will normally meet twice a year.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department, or agencies for

which it is responsible, in 1994 giving, in each case, the total cost to the exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Sir John Wheeler: No White Papers issued by the NI Departments and NIO during 1994.

The following Green Papers were issued:

1. Social Services (NI)—draft codes of practice on conduct and accountability for the health and personal social services in NI, costing £550.
2. A strategic analysis of the education service. Costing £17,569 for production and publication only.
3. Small schools policy statement, costing £2,710 for production and publication only.
4. Policing in the community, costing £6,300.

Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office issue a wide range of pamphlets, broadly covering the services and facilities provided and outlining statutory requirements. To list the pamphlets and associated costs for those issued in 1994 would incur disproportionate costs.

Total equivalent costs for 1980 are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Framework Document

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many copies of the framework document have been produced and distributed in Northern Ireland; and at what cost.

Mr. Ancram: Between 22 February and 1 March, almost 150,000 copies were printed, of which about 100,000 are already in circulation.

The total cost of printing and distribution over the same period is estimated at £216,000.

The importance of the document and the need to secure wide and informed public debate requires widespread distribution to the public. Printing will continue until the demand for copies is met.

Abortions

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the total number of abortions carried out on residents of Northern Ireland in England and Wales since 1968;

(2) what is the estimated number of abortions on women from Northern Ireland which are included in the notifications of abortions in England and Wales since 1968.

Mr. Moss: Official estimates are not made of the number of abortions on women from Northern Ireland carried out in England and Wales. Since 1970, a total of 33,255 abortions have been notified under the Abortion Act 1967 as having been carried out in England and Wales on residents in Northern Ireland. Information is not available on abortions by country prior to 1970.

Private Lee Clegg

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date the process began for the release on licence of Private Lee Clegg; and on what dates the meetings were held with *(a)* the trial judge, *(b)* the Lord Chief Justice and *(c)* the parole board.

Sir John Wheeler: The internal review of Private Clegg's case commenced on 20 January 1995, immediately following the dismissal of his appeal to the House of Lords. The purpose of this review is to determine when the case should be considered by the Northern Ireland life sentence review board; there is no parole board in Northern Ireland.

The power to release a Northern Ireland life sentence prisoner on licence rests with the Secretary of State who is advised on such matters by the life sentence review board. Consultation with the Lord Chief Justice for Northern Ireland and the trial judge, if available, has not yet taken place as it is the final step before Ministers decide on release.

Ulster Paper Products

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set out all the public money used to assist Ulster Paper Products, now known as Smurfit Paper Products, since September 1992 and any assistance known to be given by the International Fund for Ireland.

Mr. Ancram: Financial assistance from public funds to Smurfit Corrugated Cases (Lurgan) Ltd., formerly Ulster Paper Products Ltd., since September 1992 is as follows.

Between June 1993 and June 1994, Ulster Paper Products Ltd. received £14,838 from the Training and Employment Agency towards training costs.

In April 1994, the Industrial Development Board offered Smurfit Corrugated Cases (Lurgan) Ltd. assistance of £3 million towards a £16.08 million investment by the company of which £946,000 has been drawn down.

In June 1994, the Training and Employment Agency offered further assistance of £214,800 to the company under the company development programme.

With regard to the International Fund for Ireland, this is an international organisation which is administered by an independent board appointed jointly by the two Governments. All disbursements by the fund are a matter for that board and questions regarding disbursements should be directed to the fund's chairman, Mr. William T. McCarter, PO Box 2000, Belfast, BT4 3SA.

DEFENCE

Iraqi Soil Samples

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soil samples from Iraq have been studied by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment; and how many of these samples show evidence of the use of chemical or biological weapons.

Mr. Soames: This is a matter for the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, Porton Down under its

framework document. I have asked the chief executive, CBDE to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Graham Pearson to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 2 March 1995:

QUESTION 12, 22 FEBRUARY 1995

1. Your Parliamentary Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence of 22 February 1995 asking how many soil samples from Iraq have been studied by the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment and how many of these samples show evidence of the use of chemical and biological weapons has been passed to me to answer as Chief Executive of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment.

2. The role of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment is to ensure that the UK Armed Forces have effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons may be used against them.

3. The Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment has analysed a total of 31 soil samples from Iraq collected on three occasions. Details of the dates on which these samples were collected, of their analysis and the findings are set out as follows:

Site	*Date sample collected*	*Date analysed*	*No of samples*	*Finding*
Triangle area northern Iraq	November 1988	December 1988	3	All contained traces of CW agent, mustard and its decomposition products.
Various sites in northern Iraq	August 1992	September, October 1992	16	No traces of CW agent found.
Birjinni northern Iraq[1]	June 1992	February 1993	12	Six samples from two bomb craters contained mustard and its decomposition products. Six samples from the other two bomb craters contained nerve agent decomposition products and one contained traces of the nerve agent, Sarin.

[1] The bomb craters from which these samples were taken resulted from an attack in 1988; the samples were over four years old when CBDE carried out its analysis.

4. CBDE has also played a key role in assisting the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) on Iraq. Over 200 soil samples were analysed by CBDE staff in Iraq and a few at CBDE in support of inspections of the Muthanna site and of another site in Iraq. These analyses were not carried out to determine if chemical or biological weapons had been used.

Lethal Equipment

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what modifications or additions he has made to the definition of lethal equipment given in his answers of 2 May 1990, *Official Report*, column *602*, and 23 July 1990, *Official Report*, column *72*.

Mr. Freeman: None.

Export Sales Agreements

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what written guidelines exist to decide whether the advice of the Foreign Office or the Department of Trade and Industry should be obtained before approvals are given to defence export sales under Government–to–Government defence export agreements to which normal export licence procedures do not apply.

Mr. Freeman: All applications for defence exports under a Government–to–Government arrangement to which normal export licence procedures do not apply are circulated for advice to the FCO as laid down in an internal MOD manual. The DTI, in these cases, is not consulted because an export licence is not involved.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the defence export agreements memoranda of understanding contain a no-transfer without prior approval provision; and which do not.

Mr. Freeman: Details of Government–to–Government memoranda of understanding are confidential. However, it is normal practice to provide for a "no-transfer without prior approval" clause when they cover the sale of defence equipment.

Defence Contractors

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if staff seconded from defence contractors at the time mentioned in his answer to the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Byers) of 1 March 1994, *Official Report*, column *670*, are still in post; and what additional staff have been seconded from defence contractors.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 30 November to the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson), *Official Report*, column *778*.

Debt Collection Visits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *1167*, if the expenditure or transactions giving rise to the debt collection visits was incurred in the countries listed or in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Accounts Agency. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Michael Dymond to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 28 February 1995:

You asked the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his answer of 20 December 1994 (Official Report column 1167), the expenditure or transactions giving rise to the debt collection visits was incurred in the countries visited or in the United Kingdom. This

matter falls to me as Chief Executive of the Defence Accounts Agency for reply.

The debt collection visits were in respect of debts incurred both in the countries visited and in the UK.

It was necessary to visit the countries in order to facilitate efficient liaison with the individuals holding the authority to either pay or clear the debt situation.

International Military Services Ltd.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the testing facilities built to designs supplied by International Military Services Ltd., are still available for use in Iraq.

Mr. Freeman: International Military Services Ltd. supervised the construction of a reinforced testing and servicing facility in Iraq between 1981 and 1987. As my predecessor made clear to the hon. Member on 12 March 1992, *Official Report*, column *607*, we have no record of the precise location of this facility and so cannot say whether it is still available for use.

Military Attachés

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *87*, if he will list for each overseas post *(a)* the number of attachés, *(b)* the number of supporting staff and *(c)* the cost of residences for attachés and support staff.

Mr. Soames: A table showing the number, location, service and rank of service attachés, defence advisers and support staff is being placed in the Library of the House. The cost of residences for attachés and support staff is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *87*, if he will give the strategic purpose of each posting.

Mr. Soames: Service attachés are appointed by the Ministry of Defence, subject to the concurrence of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. They serve the Ministry of Defence by supporting the sale of British defence equipment and related services; aiding defence co-operation, including military assistance overseas, performing representational and liaison duties; and providing advice to the head of mission and diplomatic staff.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *87*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the Goddard study.

Mr. Soames: Due to the classification of the report, I am unable to place a copy in the Library of the House.

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs C. S. M. Parlianentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd, *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department, or agencies for which it is responsible, in 1994 giving, in each case, the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Freeman: No central record is kept of all the White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets produced, published and distributed by my Department. The central cost of printing such documents, among others, in 1994 was £12.56 million, but no record is held of the comparable figure for 1980. In addition to this, budget holders have considerable freedom and are able to pay for the cost of printing and distributing documents from their own budgets; these costs could not, however, be separately identified. In respect of those White Papers, Green Papers and other publications published by HMSO, all costs are borne by HMSO which aims to recover them from sales revenue.

Staff Cars

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply of 22 February, *Official Report*, columns *252-55*, regarding staff cars for officers in the armed services, what the annual mileage of their dedicated staff car was the for latest year for which the information is available for the posts numbered 11, 12, 31, 47, 76, 79 and 90.

Mr. Soames: The mileage of the cars in question during the latest 12-month period for which information is available is as follows:

	Miles
Serial 11, Commander British Forces Cyprus	16,318
Serial 12, Commander British Forces Falkland Islands	10,046
Serial 31, Commander British Forces Gibraltar	6,283
Serial 47, General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland	12,000
Serial 76, Commander British Forces Hong Kong	11,968
Serial 79, Governor of Gibraltar	2,175
Serial 90, Director General Saudi Armed Forces Project	13,500

In some cases, topographical and security reasons may necessitate additional vehicles or other methods of transport being used. The serial numbers will have changed in the pursuant question which I answered yesterday.

Sonobuoys

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether it is his policy to retain a manufacturing capacity for sonobuoys in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Freeman: All sonobuoy requirements are subject to competition where this is feasible, and foreign competitors are not excluded. Our policy is to obtain best value for money in defence procurement while satisfying the requirements of the armed forces.

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place the same restrictions on foreign companies bidding for United Kingdom defence contracts as would apply to British companies bidding for similar contracts in those countries; and what the present position is in this respect with regard to sonobuoys and bidders from France and the United States of America.

Mr. Freeman: The Government's policy when procuring defence equipment is to aim for best value for money, wherever possible through the use of international competition for defence contracts. We prefer not to impose restrictions on potential bidders, not least because, if we were to protect our own defence market, this would undoubtedly invite retaliation damaging to United Kingdom defence exporters. Therefore, there are no restrictions on French and United States companies bidding for UK sonobuoy contracts. We continue to strive, through bilateral and multilateral channels, for greater mutual access to defence markets and, where appropriate, seek proposals for UK industrial participation in work let to overseas companies. We take into account a refusal to expand reciprocal rights.

Phoenix Aircraft

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *885*, what are the alternative systems under consideration concerning the purchase of remote-controlled surveillance aircraft.

Mr. Freeman: I have nothing further to add to my reply of 17 February, *Official Report*, column *885*.

RAF St. Athan

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total cost of the damage done to Tornado aircraft at RAF St. Athan since 1990; and how many aircraft involved in a contract with Airwork Ltd., are no longer suitable for operational use.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the answers which I gave him on 12 December 1994, *Official Report*, column *460*, and 14 December 1994, column *668*.

Peacekeeping

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is his Department's policy to make a distinction between *(a)* peacekeeping operations and *(b)* peacemaking operations.

Mr. Soames: My Department recognises a spectrum of potential peace support operations ranging from preventative military deployments, through peacekeeping operations of varying degrees of complexity and intensity, to peace enforcement. The critical distinction is, however, whether such operations take place with the consent of all the parties involved, since this determines whether a peace support force is recognised by all sides to be impartial. In practice, decisions on whether to participate in particular operations are taken case by case in the light of the circumstances and other commitments.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy concerning joint international peacekeeping training; and if he will specify the dates, units involved and countries which have worked with British forces on joint international peacekeeping training.

Mr. Soames: The preparation of individuals and units for peacekeeping operations is a national responsibility and, particularly in view of the differing training requirements of the armed services of different states, should remain so. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Defence favours international cooperation over peacekeeping training where this can usefully be done, and we have supported and contributed to the United Nations' efforts to harmonise national training programmes in this area. To date, co-operation has included joint seminars and map exercises, participation by foreign personnel in British peacekeeping training courses and peacekeeping field exercises. Co-operation has involved a wide range of allied and friendly nations, including activities under the auspices of "Partnership for Peace". There is no central record of the countries and units involved, or the dates on which joint training took place.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has received from UNPROFOR in respect of military aircraft flights into west Tuzla air force base; what breaches of the arms embargo such reports have revealed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The activity of aircraft over Bosnia-Herzegovina is primarily a matter for the UN and NATO. We understand, however, that a transport aircraft may have been in the vicinity of Tuzla on the night of 10 February, but we have no knowledge of its intentions or whether the arms embargo was breached.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what obstacles have been placed in the way of UNPROFOR forces freedom of manoeuvre in *(a)* Vitez, *(b)* Tuzla, *(c)* Sarajevo, *(d)* Gornji Vakuf and *(e)* Gorazde in recent weeks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: Bosnian Government forces have established vehicle check points on routes into Sarajevo, Tuzla and Gornji Vakuf which are causing minor freedom of movement problems for UNPROFOR. At Gorazde, Bosnian Serb army forces continue to prevent UNPROFOR from using a direct route into the town. There are no reported problems at Vitez. Despite these localised restrictions, the freedom of movement both for UNPROFOR and the aid agencies has improved significantly throughout most of Bosnia since the cessation of hostilities agreement came into effect on 1 January.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to maintain Britain's contribution to UNPROFOR in Bosnia-Herzegovina if UN forces are withdrawn from Croatia in response to President Tudjman's request; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Soames: The Government remain concerned at President Tudjman's decision not to renew the UNPROFOR mandate in Croatia after 31 March 1995 and we hope that international pressure will persuade him to change his mind. We do not intend to withdraw our contingent from Bosnia but we continue to monitor the situation closely.

Expense Claims

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many investigations into the expense claims of service personnel have lasted more than six month, in each of the last eight years.

Mr. Soames: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

BA2000

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what future plans he has for the Scottish regiments in his project BA2000.

Mr. Soames: BA2000 is an internal and conceptual document addressing in general terms the requirements of the Army at the beginning of the next century; it will not be addressing the Army's regimental system. We have no intention of changing the number or organisation of British Army regiments.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Allason: to ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to require all local authorities to highlight or otherwise identify non-statutory expenditure when their budgets are published.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: None. It is for individual local authorities to decide what budgetary information to publish about their discretionary expenditure under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the standard spending assessments of each district council in England and Wales as a sum per head of population numbered in descending order.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The requested information for English non-metropolitan districts has been placed in the Library. The standard spending assessments for authorities in Wales are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Congdon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the outstanding non-housing capital debt and *(b)* outstanding housing capital debt for each *(a)* shire county, *(b)* metropolitan borough and *(c)* London borough.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The available information on total longer-term debt is as follows. It is not possible to separate housing and non-housing debt.

Long-term debt in shire counties, metropolitan districts and London boroughs as at 31 March 1994

Authority	*Total long-term borrowing at 31 March 1994 £000's*
Shire counties	
Avon	114,600
Bedfordshire	143,485
Berkshire	144,742
Buckinghamshire	148,150
Cambridgeshire	48,996
Cheshire	124,415
Cleveland	206,651
Cornwall	120,442
Cumbria	129,007
Derbyshire	239,643
Devon	183,017
Dorset	0
Durham	75,513
East Sussex	133,419
Essex	195,049
Gloucestershire	135,935
Hampshire	135,587
Hereford and Worcester	82,474
Hertfordshire	82,585
Humberside	180,347
Isle of Wight	39,689
Kent	394,074
Lancashire	370,188
Leicestershire	192,529
Lincolnshire	7,000
Norfolk	76,553
Northamptonshire	144,138
Northumberland	54,168
North Yorkshire	127,230
Nottinghamshire	163,241
Oxfordshire	73,454
Shropshire	113,325
Somerset	28,444
Staffordshire	245,818
Suffolk	0
Surrey	64,261
Warwickshire	115,454
West Sussex	0
Wiltshire	38,821
Isles of Scilly	2,654
Metropolitan districts	
Barnsley	174,356
Birmingham	1,178,683
Bolton	144,575
Bradford	402,724
Bury	59,095
Calderdale	120,925
Coventry	381,318
Doncaster	171,571
Dudley	259,391
Gateshead	248,009
Kirklees	233,504
Knowsley	167,678
Leeds	648,201
Liverpool	756,618
Manchester	1,227,649
Newcastle upon Tyne	425,449
North Tyneside	163,949
Oldham	241,554
Rochdale	201,452
Rotherham	227,188
Salford	376,104

Long-term debt in shire counties, metropolitan districts and London boroughs as at 31 March 1994

Authority	*Total long-term borrowing at 31 March 1994 £000's*
Sandwell	300,577
Sefton	147,769
Sheffield	749,612
Solihull	65,975
South Tyneside	385,728
St Helens	199,788
Stockport	102,675
Sunderland	258,385
Tameside	182,404
Trafford	82,409
Wakefield	324,042
Walsall	257,039
Wigan	236,142
Wirral	210,709
Wolverhampton	320,468
Inner London boroughs (including City)	
City of London	0
Camden	603,513
Greenwich	457,643
Hackney	707,097
Hammersmith and Fulham	311,559
Islington	889,837
Kensington and Chelsea	214,461
Lambeth	802,670
Lewisham	494,997
Southwark	855,585
Tower Hamlets	650,464
Wandsworth	220,296
Westminster	301,597
Outer London boroughs	
Barking and Dagenham	0
Barnet	122,400
Bexley	85,935
Brent	498,585
Bromley	8
Croydon	131,254
Ealing	273,314
Enfield	125,747
Haringey	559,779
Harrow	185,864
Havering	51,590
Hillingdon	142,372
Hounslow	215,685
Kingston upon Thames	88,630
Merton	225,095
Newham	514,688
Redbridge	65,881
Richmond upon Thames	85,465
Sutton	70,143
Waltham Forest	207,098

Gloucestershire County Council (Budget)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment under what provisions the budget set by Gloucestershire county council on 22 February is deemed illegal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The power to designate authorities in accordance with capping principles determined under section 54 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 can be exercised only after an authority has set its budget. The announcements on 1 December and 1 February made clear that the statements relating to capping principles were statements of Ministers' current intentions and that the criteria remain provisional. Authorities are not required to set a budget within the limits implied by the provisional criteria and they are not acting illegally if they do not do so. My right hon. Friend will take account of all the circumstances when he decides whether to designate any authority which fixes a budget above the level implied by the criteria which he in due course adopts. Designated authorities have 28 days within which to accept their cap or to make representations. If any right hon. Friend then requires an authority to reduce its budget he will place an order before the House.

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs. C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd., and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to the reply from my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science today.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible in 1994, giving in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Sir Paul Beresford: A list of White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by my Department in 1994 has been placed in the Library of the House. The entries for agencies are incomplete as some relevant infirmation is not readily available. With regard to cost, this information cannot be provided within the acceptable cost limits.

Energy Management Assistance Scheme

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement regarding the actual savings made under the energy management assistance scheme, and the original estimates provided by him in his answer of 24 May 1993, *Official Report*, column *617;* whether the savings identified from investments undertaken to date under this scheme have remained at the level reported to the House in his answer of 30 June 1993, *Official Report*, columns *522–23;* and what plans he has to expand the scheme.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: The energy management assistance scheme was launched in February 1992 and was to be reviewed after three years. It was designed to encourage small industrial and commercial enterprises to reduce their energy costs and so contribute to a reduction in the UK's emission of carbon dioxide. The number of

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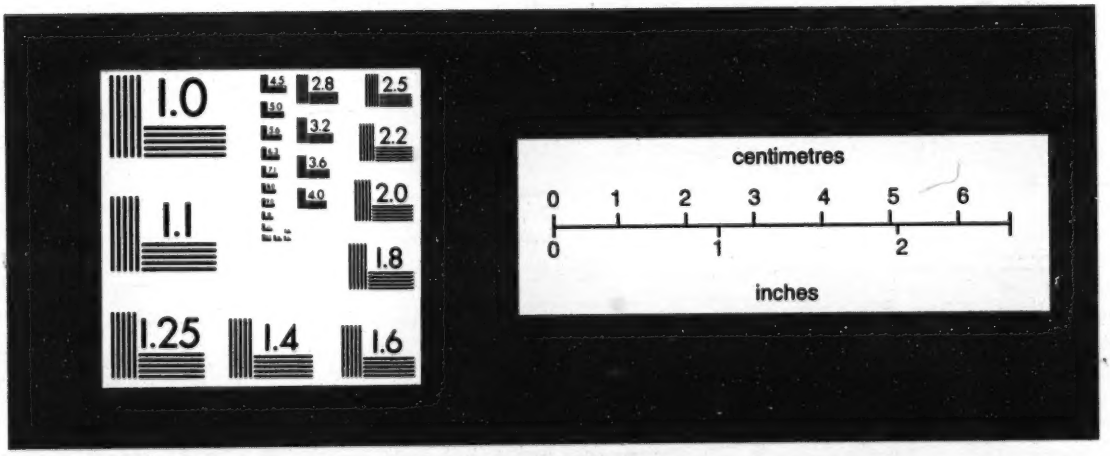

applications has been higher than expected, but generally from relatively small commercial enterprises, so the overall effect of the scheme now seems likely to be much less than the projection of £250 million savings by the year 2000 given in the answer of May 1993. Those enterprises which used the scheme achieved cost savings of between 10 and 40 per cent., thus maintaining the average reported in June 1993.

In reviewing the scheme, it was decided to take the opportunity to widen it to include other environmental matters. I announced plans to adapt EMAS in my recent answer to a question from the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on 15 February, *Official Report*, column *676*. The existing EMAS will be phased out during the next year and the small company environmental and energy management scheme will be introduced.

Vanadium and Nickel

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average annual concentration in nanogrammes per cubic metre at each of the Atomic Energy Authority monitoring sites for *(a)* vanadium *(b)* nickel.

Mr. Atkins: Airborne concentrations of trace elements are measured at five urban locations in the United Kingdom operated by AEA Technology. The most recent measurements available for nickel and vanadium are for the year 1992–93. The mean annual concentrations of nickel at the five sites were 14.3 ng m^{-3}—nanogrammes per cubic metre—at Motherwell, 11.3 ng m^{-3} at Glasgow, 18.4 ng m^{-3} at Leeds, 11.4 ng m^{-3} at Brent, and 5.2 ng m^{-3} at central London. The mean annual concentration for vanadium at the central London site, the only site where vanadium is measured, was 12 ng m^{-3}.

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the health risk level accepted by his Department for ground level concentrations of *(a)* vanadium and *(b)* nickel in nanogrammes per cubic metre.

Mr. Atkins: My Department has no air quality standards for these substances but the World Health Organisation guidelines are as follows:

vanadium—1 nanogramme per cubic metre, averaging time 24 hrs;

nickel—4 X 10^{-4} cancer risk estimate for lifetime exposure to a concentration of 1 nanogramme per cubic metre.

Crown Buildings, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had from NCM Credit Insurance concerning an extension of the lease on the floors it occupies at the Crown buildings, Cathays park; what consultations he has had concerning the corresponding extension on the waiver on the covenant debarring commercial activities in Cathays park; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Paul Beresford: I refer the hon. Member to my answer given to his earlier question on 28 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *475*.

NCM Credit Insurance has asked for, and been granted, a short-term extension of its lease at Cathays park until 31 March 1995, pending completion of its new accommodation within the Cardiff bay development area. A corresponding extension on the waiver has been obtained. NCM has now asked for a further extension and negotiations are in progress.

Northumberland National Park

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to remove the areas used for military training from the Northumberland national park.

Mr. Atkins: The Government have no plans to remove the areas used for military training from the park.

Local Government Reorganisation

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the latest position on the reorganisation of local government in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and County Durham.

Mr. Gummer: On Bedfordshire, I have concluded that the balance of evidence lies in favour of accepting the commission's recommendations for a unitary Luton, but rejecting the recommendations for unitary status elsewhere so that the remainder of the county will continue as two tier. I am satisfied that this solution best reflects the identities and interests of the local communities concerned and best secures effective and convenient local government.

Although there were unanimous support of an all unitary solution among the districts, I am not persuaded that this is the best solution for the county as a whole. There is a very strong case, which few would challenge, for a unitary Luton, given its size, population density and former county borough status. However, for the remainder of the county I consider that the balance of the evidence points to retaining the present two-tier structure. The districts of Mid and South Bedfordshire, which would be merge in the commission's proposals, have no particular focus or strong identity. On the issues of service delivery and viability, considerable doubts whether the relatively small authorities proposed in the commission's recommended structure could deliver effectively, entailing some risk to local taxpayers. An all unitary solution would also lead to higher transitional costs, as well as greater disruption.

I am accepting the commission's recommendations on other matters, namely police and fire services, land use planning, ceremonial matter and electoral arrangements, with minor modification to take account of the decision on structure.

With regard to Buckinghamshire, having weighed all the arguments I have accepted part of the commission's structural recommendations—a unitary authority for Milton Keynes—but rejected the rest so that the remainder of the county would remain two tier. Again, I am satisfied that this solution best reflects the identities and interests of the local communities concerned and best secures effective and convenient local government.

There is a strong case for a unitary Milton Keynes, which is now also accepted by the county council. The town has a strong and distinct community identity and is in many ways different from the rest of the county. Its

population is already large and we have little doubt that it would be able to provide all local authority services, particularly with further substantial growth expected.

However, it seems to us that the position in the rest of the county is much less clear. Popular opinion is finely balance and doubts have been expressed about the fragmentation of services. We are also conscious that it is likely that an all unitary solution would give rise to considerably higher transitional costs.

I am accepting the commission recommendations on police and fire services, land use planning, ceremonial matters and electoral arrangements, with minor modification to take account of the decision on structure. I am still considering the commission's recommendations for parishing Aylesbury and High Wycombe.

In the case of County Durham, I have decided to accept the commission's recommendation that there should be a unitary authority based on the present borough area of Darlington and that there should be no change to the existing two-tier arrangements in the rest of County Durham. I agree with the commission that this solution will best reflect the identities and interests of the local communities concerned and best secures effective and convenient local government.

The case for a unitary Darlington is strong. Darlington is based on a former county borough and has a population in excess of 100,000. The commission has identified a strong sense of community identity with the borough council area.

Its natural and communications links are with the unitary authorities which are to be established in Cleveland—it shares with Hartlepool, Middlesbrough and Stockton, a dependence on the infrastructure based on the Tees port, the A66—A1 road connection, the east coast main line railway and Teeside airport. Therefore I also propose to accept the commission's recommendation that Darlington should establish joint structure planning arrangements with the proposed unitary authorities of Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and east Cleveland and Stockton on Tees for the whole of their areas.

I also propose to accept the commission's recommendations for the police and fire services, and for electoral arrangements. I am still considering the commission's recommendations for ceremonial arrangements and for parishing in the county.

Birds (Illegal Imports)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, columns *89–90*, how many birds listed as *(a)* threatened and *(b)* subject to limited trade he estimates were imported illegally into Britain in each year since 1987.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

There is no reliable method of estimating the numbers of birds imported illegally if the figures are required to include birds which were smuggled in successful evasion of import controls. However, the numbers of CITES-listed birds detected by customs as being in breach of CITES controls and therefore seized as illegal are given in the table. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment explained on 20 February, *Official Report*, columns *89–90*, CITES appendix I equates with "threatened" and appendices II and III with "subject to limited trade":

Year	*Appendix I*	*Appendices II–III*
1989[1]	Nil	24
1990	4	72
1991	11	32
1992	3	102
1993	Nil	228
1994	1	45

[1] Data for earlier years are not available.

WALES

Cardiff Wales Airport

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out the statutory provisions which allow him to require the residuary authority to sell Cardiff Wales airport.

Mr. Redwood: I have decided that any shares in Cardiff Wales Airport Company which remain in the ownership of any of the three Glamorgan county councils immediately prior to 1 April 1996 should vest in the residuary body for Wales. This would be achieved automatically under paragraph 11(1) of schedule 13 to the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994.

I have the power in paragraph 12 of the same schedule to direct the residuary body in respect of the exercise of its functions. It would be open to me to issue a direction requiring it to dispose of certain property, rights or liabilities.

I was delighted to learn recently that the three Glamorgan county councils are now agreed that the disposal of their shares before local government reorganisation is the most appropriate course.

Learning Disabilities

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *125*, how much of the £61 million expenditure by health authorities on services for individuals with a learning disability was spent solely on hospital care.

Mr. Richards: The information is not available in the form requested.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what amount was held by each local authority and in total in each of the last five years, with respect to receipts from council house and property sales.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is given in the following table.

Usable cash backed accumulated receipts at 31 March[1]

£000

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Alyn and Deeside	1,774	768	24	0	967
Colwyn	1,177	802	627	452	924
Delyn	0	0	0	0	0
Glyndwr	1,261	1,083	1,023	350	283
Rhuddlan	711	510	485	634	334
Wrexham Maelor	3,244	3,123	62	110	981
Carmarthen	1,750	606	609	1,120	1,857
Ceredigion	1,873	479	137	371	2,069
Dinefwr	871	719	746	761	370
Llanelli	242	292	0	0	1,056
Preseli Pembrokeshire	3,183	1,745	1,365	1,910	2,725
South Pembrokeshire	1,476	1,791	1,591	1,741	1,641
Blaenau Gwent	1,718	766	1,129	1,406	2,876
Islwyn	2,548	46	0	648	359
Monmouth	794	329	872	2,248	4,905
Newport	10,375	9,349	7,742	5,250	8,125
Torfaen	3,758	14	0	1,634	3,271
Aberconwy	2,274	1,884	1,109	1,223	1,793
Arfon	2,533	357	346	141	207
Dwyfor	81	120	71	144	314
Meirionnydd	368	15	0	0	0
Ynys Mon	1,559	57	166	71	60
Cynon Valley	1,267	0	0	0	0
Merthyr Tydfil	604	298	170	781	1,072
Ogwr	1,978	1,377	2,712	3,453	3,326
Rhondda	405	0	0	0	1,570
Rhymney Valley	1,468	1,155	878	949	1,107
Taff Ely	1,673	177	469	91	3,003
Brecknock	1,850	1,046	892	996	1,769
Montgomeryshire	2,462	1,746	1,370	1,016	1,574
Radnorshire	1,029	761	402	125	450
Cardiff	10,523	1,357	749	2,601	20,363
Vale of Glamorgan	9,378	6,575	6,436	5,659	5,716
Port Talbot	616	1,176	1,209	1,794	550
Lliw Valley	1,508	1,054	1,406	1,778	2,211
Neath	1,251	102	758	77	481
Swansea	3,658	1,719	2,178	1,514	268
Clwyd	1,037	0	0	0	2,216
Dyfed	21	296	267	549	1,318
Gwent	7,337	6,792	7,080	5,877	7,205
Gwynedd	82	95	333	382	2,615
Mid Glamorgan	325	415	414	1,266	3,915
Powys	123	143	27	213	431
South Glamorgan	100	2,290	1,551	328	2,563
West Glamorgan	765	137	236	1,140	1,971
Dyfed Powys Joint Police Authority	138	0	0	0	0
North Wales Joint Police Authority	50	48	26	0	846
South Wales Joint Police Authority	0	0	99	0	437
Total Wales	93,216	53,614	47,766	50,803	102,094

Source:
Local authority returns
[1] Receipts from all sales of capital assets including repayments of grants and advances.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Temple-Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library copies of the April 1992 edition of his Department's urban development guidelines as issued to the Welsh Development Agency for the exercise of the urban development function.

Mr. Redwood: The 1992 urban development guidelines were superseded by a revised version issued in July 1994, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. I shall, however, arrange for a copy of the 1992 guidelines to be sent to my hon. Friend.

Lobbying Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs. C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G.J.W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., (f) G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* People Corporate and Political

Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Redwood: Neither I nor my Ministers have met representatives from these companies, to the best of our knowledge.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department, or agencies for which it is responsible in 1994 giving, in each case, the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Redwood: A list of all White Papers and consultation papers which my Department issued last year, together with a preliminary list of other documents issued last year, has been placed in the Library of the House. When the preliminary list is finalised and printed, later this year, it will be placed in the Library of the House.

In respect of White Papers, Green Papers and other publications published by HMSO, all costs are borne by HMSO, which aims to recover these from sales revenue. The costs of producing and distributing other documents is not held centrally.

Health Research Projects

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will announce his adjudication on the health research project applications submitted to his Department for 1995–96 funding; and if he will give the title of the successful application for funding and their total estimated cost *(a)* in 1995–96 and *(b)* in 1996–97;

(2) what guidance was given to applicants for funding on health research projects in 1995–96; on what date the invitation to apply for financial assistance was advertised and in what media and in what terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Professor Ian Russell, the director of research and development, wrote to a wide range of research interests in Wales in May 1994 seeking bids for health research funding. Guidance on the priority areas and the criteria against which bids would be assessed were provided at a series of meetings convened throughout Wales and details were circulated to all those who expressed an interest. I have agreed that the following projects should be funded from the R and D budget:

Project	*Location*	*Funding* 1995–96 £	1996–97 £
To assess the costs and benefits of a system which allows X-ray pictures to be transmitted electronically around a hospital.	Ysbyty Glan Clwyd	36,000	26,000
To understand why people with a high risk of developing a serious inherited disease either choose or refuse genetic tests.	University of Wales College of Medicine	15,000	15,000
To assess an education scheme designed to raise the take-up of cervical screening by women at high risk and to reduce anxiety among those at low risk.	University of Glamorgan and University of Wales, College of Medicine	45,000	45,000
To evaluate a new approach to preventing depression recurring in patients	University of Wales Bangor	46,000	46,000
To find out whether a rehabilitation programme for patients with chronic respiratory disease can reduce hospital admissions and improve quality of life.	University of Wales College of Medicine and Llandough NHS Trust.	22,000	23,000
To assess the benefits for residents and staff of a training scheme for people with learning disabilities living in supported housing.	University of Wales College of Medicine	34,000	26,000
To test a new approach to helping people stop smoking based on their readiness to change.	University of Glamorgan and University of Wales College of Medicine.	26,000	16,000
To assess an intensive schools-based programme to reduce smoking based on a successful American model.	University of Wales Cardiff	17,000	15,000
To evaluate the effectiveness of using patients' own blood for transfusion in routine surgical operations.	University of Wales Swansea, University Hospital of Wales and the Morriston NHS Trust.	46,000	42,000
To develop a reliable questionnaire for assessing levels of mental health in the community and for measuring the extent to which treatment for mental health problems works.	University of Wales, Bangor	38,000	37,000

Project	Location	Funding 1995–96 £	Funding 1996–97 £
To produce a reliable measure of how sensitive GPs are to patients' expectations, fears and concerns as a means of improving the effectiveness of primary care.	University of Wales, College of Medicine.	19,000	18,000
To develop guidance on which patients are most likely to benefit from being referred to a dermatology clinic by their GP.	Wrexham Maelor NHS Trust and University of Wales, College of Medicine	41,000	34,000
To evaluate improvements in the quality of information on cancer in Wales that could result from better reporting guidelines and the use of computer-based reports.	Llandough NHS trust and the NHS Cancer Registry.	33,000	25,000
To assess a new package of treatment for the most severely disordered children.	University of Wales, Bangor and Gwynedd Community NHS Trust.	53,000	47,000
To evaluate orthotic therapy for diabetic patients to reduce the risk of development of serious foot problems.	Cardiff Institute of Higher Education and Royal Gwent Hospital.	24,000	18,000
To review how patient care and nursing practice is affected by the way information on patient care is recorded by nurses.	University of Wales, Aberystwyth and Swansea.	33,000	—
To assess the benefits of screening patients at home for severe breathing problems during sleep, which can result in serious health problems.	University of Wales, Swansea and Prince Philip Hospital.	50,000	36,000
To evaluate the reliability of a method of identifying patients at risk of developing pressure sores.	University of Wales, Bangor and Wrexham Maelor Hospital.	2,000	—

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what notification his Department receives on stage payments on the urban investment grant paid to Grosvenor Waterside by Cardiff Bay development corporation for the purpose of the development of a headquarters building for NCM Credit Insurance; how many such stage payments have already been notified to his Department; what is their aggregate value; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: None. The staging of payments is an operational matter for the Cardiff Bay development corporation. The total grant offer is £2.5 million.

A48

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date he received representations from Cardiff city council concerning the availability of funding for the proposed dedicated flyover connecting the Eastern avenue A48 trunk road and the University hospital of Wales, Heath, Cardiff; and on what date he replied.

Mr. Redwood: A request was received from Cardiff city council on 20 January 1995 to meet my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State. Arrangements for the meeting are in hand.

Welsh Health Common Services Authority

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list each principal non-clinical function of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, stating the guidelines issued by his Department to the authority with respect to *(a)* market testing, *(b)* contractorisation, *(c)* management/employee buyout and *(d)* privatisation; and if he will list the dates on which such written guidance was issued formally to the authority.

Mr. Redwood: The principal non-clinical functions of the Welsh Health Common Services Authority are: procurement; information and information technology; building design; project management; and specialist engineering and surveying services provided to the NHS in Wales.

When the outcome of the review was announced to the authority, it was asked to start the process of market testing.

No guidance has been issued that is specific to the authority. However, information and guidance on this subject already exists and the process is being undertaken in accordance with established practice.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many NHS patients have been waiting *(a)* six months, *(b)* nine months, *(c)* one year, *(d)* 18 months and *(e)* two years or more for specialist treatment in Wales.

Mr. Redwood: The latest information available on the number of Welsh residents waiting for in-patient or day case treatment is given in the following table:

Waiting more than	Number of patients at 31 December 1994
one year	6,376
18 months	1,659
two years	1

Information on the number of NHS patients waiting more than six or nine months for in-patient or day case treatment is not collected centrally.

NHS Security

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent annually on security for national health service hospitals in Wales in each year from 1990 to 1994.

Mr. Redwood: These figures are not held centrally.

Valuation Tribunals

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for valuation tribunals in Wales in view of the reorganisation of local government on 1 April 1996.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: A consultation paper has been issued today by the Welsh Office seeking comments on proposals for changes to the organisation of valuation tribunals to match the boundaries of the new unitary authorities. Views are also sought on changes to the arrangements for the appointment of tribunal members and the number of tribunal offices. Comments are invited by 18 April 1995. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Library of the House and sent to Members of Parliament for Welsh constituencies.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fish-eating Birds

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria he intends to apply towards applications to control the number of cormorants threatening the viability of stillwater fisheries in England, pending the findings of the research on fish-eating birds which he is commissioning.

Mrs. Browning: Cormorants are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, although the Act does allow for the issuing of licences to permit the killing or taking of these birds in order to prevent serious damage to fisheries. Pending the findings of the research programme, MAFF, as a licensing authority, will continue to issue licences to shoot a limited number of birds as an aid to scaring where: there is evidence that serious damage is being or is likely to be caused to the fishery; other non-lethal anti-predation measures have been shown to be ineffective or impractical, and not just difficult to implement; and there are no other evident causes of the serious damage, and shooting will contribute to preventing any damage that might be being caused.

Sir Cranley Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the five sub-topics on which his Department, the Department of the Environment and the National Rivers Authority propose to commission research on fish-eating birds; what account will be taken in this research of information already publicly available in the United Kingdom and elsewhere; and for what reasons this project is expected to run for up to three years.

Mrs. Browning: A copy of the specifications for the five research projects currently being advertised has been placed in the Library of the House. These specifications make it clear that the results of previous research, both in this country and elsewhere, must be taken into account. The projects will run for between six months and three years, depending on the nature and complexity of the issues being researched.

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs. C. S. M., Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* People Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science today.

Fish Conservation

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much money was allocated to the United Kingdom Government by the EU under projects relating to fish conservation in each year since 1989; and how these moneys were allocated to the fishing industry.

Mr. Jack: The Community funds, or contributes to the funding of, a number of measures in the fisheries sector concerning, for example, decommissioning, enforcement and research projects which ultimately benefit fish conservation. However, no EU funds have been allocated to the United Kingdom Government specifically for projects relating to fish conservation.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report* column *71*, if any of the 6,314 cattle exported for immediate slaughter to Northern Ireland were over six months of age; and how many of them subsequently went from Northern Ireland to another EU state;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 12 January, *Official Report*, column *210*, and 23 January, *Official Report*, column *71*, if the 6,662 cattle exported for immediate slaughter were all under six months of age.

Mrs. Browning: Information on the age of the 6,314 cattle exported to Northern Ireland is available only at disproportionate cost. There is no recorded evidence of movement of these cattle to another member state.

Information entered into the ANIMO database is provisional and subject to amendment. As regards the remainder of the 6,662 cattle referred to, more detailed comparison of the ANIMO database with copies of the available export health certificates has revealed that the 83 cattle exported to France and originally recorded as being for immediate slaughter were, in fact, certified as calves of under 42 days of age, and thus most likely

destined for further production; the 233 animals exported to the Netherlands were certified as calves of less than six months of age; and the 32 cattle exported to the Republic of Ireland originated in the Netherlands, were being transhipped through Great Britain, and should therefore not have been entered into ANIMO as exported from Britain.

Mr. Olner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if provision was made for the individual feeding of calves during the shipment of calves from Brightlingsea to Nieuwpoort, Belgium on 10 February; how many of the crew were trained in the handling and/or feeding of animals; and if his Ministry vets treated the ship as a floating lairage.

Mrs. Browning: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) on 23 February, *Official Report*, column *311*. The veterinary officer accompanying the shipment confirms that there was an experienced animal attendant accompanying the calves who supervised their on-board feeding. The ship was a fitted livestock vessel with satisfactory arrangements for the penning of the calves so that all could like down and rest during the voyage.

Arctic Fox Farms

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 20 February, *Official Report*, column *54*, what is his estimate of the number of Arctic fox fur farms there have been in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Browning: As the keeping of arctic fox is not subject to control in Great Britain, the information requested is not available.

Ian Greer Associates

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what items of correspondence were received by the Ministers in his Department for Messrs. Ian Greer Associates in the last month.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 28 February 1995]:* None.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what basis in his answer of 3 November 1994 to the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms Gordon), *Official Report*, column *1369*, the estimate of the annual income support saving from the habitual residence test was arrived at;

(2) if the estimated cost of administering the habitual residence test from 1 August 1994 to 1 August 1995 mentioned in his answer to the hon. Member for Bow and Popular (Ms Gordon) of 3 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *1369*, included the £800,000 allocation referred to by the chief executive of the Benefits Agency in his answer of 12 December 1994 to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) *Official Report*, column *538*.

Mr. Roger Evans: The estimated income support savings were based on the assumption that at least 5,000 single claimants aged 25 and over receiving benefit for 13 weeks would not qualify because of the habitual residence test. This calculation leads to a saving of about £3 million rather than "excess of £7 million" incorrectly stated in the earlier answer, which represented the estimated full savings including housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Before the test was introduced, initial annual administrative costs for the period 1 August 1994 to 1 August 1995 were estimated to be £368,000. Management information has since identified a shortfall for the current financial year. This is because the numbers subject to the test were greater than initially projected. On 21 November 1994 a secondary allocation of £521,787 was made. The figure quoted in the *Official Report* of 12 December 1994, column *538*, was the rounded, estimated administrative costs of the Benefits Agency for 1994–95. The actual figure will be available shortly. On the current level of claims being processed, the eventual costs for 1994–95 are likely to be substantially higher than £800,000.

Income Support (Parents with Care)

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to reduce the amount of the reduced benefit direction for parents with care in receipt of income support from 20 per cent. of the income support personal allowance for 26 weeks and 10 per cent. for a further 52 weeks to an amount broadly in line with other deductions from benefit.

Mr. Burt: We have no plans to change the policy on the amount or duration of reduced benefit directions for parents with care.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time currently taken by the Child Support Agency from the issue of a maintenance inquiry form to the completion of a maintenance assessment.

Mr. Burt: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) by the chief executive of the Child Support Agency on 8 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *299–300*.

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs. C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, (k) Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* People Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Hague: No.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and

pamphlets issued by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible in 1994, giving in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Hague: The cost of production, publication and distribution of White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets produced by this Department in 1994 is as follows:

	£
Headquarters publications	
White Paper on pensions	17,349
White Paper summary	6,215
Pensions catalogue (PEC1)	7,476
"Measures to tackle discrimination against disabled people"	47,620
Summary of the above	17,936
"You and disability"	75,973.50
"Help with childcare charges"	9,308
"Incapacity Benefit"(IB200)	53,358.18
Incapacity Benefit: Medical Assessment consultation document	8,822.13
"Taking the Plunge": booklet to accompany DWA video	4,740
Departmental Annual Report	49,843.63
Benefits Agency	
Business Plan	37,595
Annual Report	28,271
Catalogue	32,240
Pensions information for women (pack)	3,829
Deduction from compensation	72,764
Evidence of identity	8,027
Tell us about it	54,437
BEL leaflet	5,510
Child Support Agency	
Annual Report	6,543
Charter inserts	7,229.78
Contributions Agency	
Business Plan	26,180
Framework Document	13,954
Annual Report	42,006
"Useful contracts" CA 46	89,540
NI News	855
War Pensions Agency	
Charter Standard Statement	18,171
Business Plan	11,318
Framework Document	7,294
Annual Report	5,904.04

Notes:

1. These figures do not include the costs of producing reprints and revised editions of existing leaflets, the costs of which cannot be apportioned to a particular calendar year.
2. Distribution costs are included where possible and appropriate. However, for many campaigns distribution covers a variety of material, including claim packs, and this cannot be broken down.

The Department does not hold information about total costs to the Exchequer other than the costs given in the table.

A total equivalent cost for 1980 cannot be provided because the Department of Social Security did not exist until 1988.

Income Support (Pensioners)

Ms Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the total number of *(a)* single women over retirement age, *(b)* single men over retirement age and *(c)* couples over retirement age in receipt of income support (i) in each region and (ii) nationally, at the latest date for which figures are available;

(2) what was the total number of *(a)* single women, *(b)* single men and *(c)* couples in receipt of income support in each region and nationally, at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Roger Evans: The information is in the tables.

Income Support Recipients

	Single men aged 65+	*Single women aged 60+*	*Couples over retirement age*
Great Britain	202,000	1,183,000	224,000
Scotland	19,000	119,000	20,000
Wales	10,000	69,000	12,000
England:	173,000	995,000	192,000
—South Western	15,000	91,000	18,000
—North Eastern	31,000	184,000	34,000
—Midlands	35,000	193,000	41,000
—North Western	32,000	173,000	29,000
—London North	31,000	183,000	40,000
—London South	29,000	171,000	30,000

	Single men	*Single women*	*Couples*
Great Britain	1,849,000	2,911,000	1,031,000
Scotland	188,000	289,000	81,000
Wales	96,000	163,000	57,000
England:	1,565,000	2,459,000	893,000
—South Western	128,000	206,000	77,000
—North Eastern	262,000	427,000	156,000
—Midlands	278,000	450,000	181,000
—North Western	263,000	421,000	127,000
—London North	333,000	504,000	194,000
—London South	302,000	452,000	158,000

Notes:

1. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest thousand. Due to rounding figures may not total.
2. Regions are DSS administrative regions are used by the Department prior to 1988.
3. Couples are cases where either the claimant and/or partner is over retirement age.
4. Source: Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry February 1994, 5 per cent. sample.

EMPLOYMENT

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs. C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G. J. W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, (i) Politics International, *(j)* Westminster Communications

Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* Profile Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible in 1994, giving in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department and its agencies produced one White Paper, one Green Paper and about 530 pamphlets between 1 April 1994 and mid-February 1995. The total cost of production and publication of these items was £2,600,000, rounded. Distribution costs are not identifiable by item.

The full information will be contained within a large list which I will send to the hon. Member and a copy of which I will place in the Library.

Figures are not available for the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Public Holidays

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many bank holidays there are in 1995 in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Wales and England; and what are the reasons for the difference.

Miss Widdecombe: There are eight permanent bank and public holidays in all parts of Great Britain. For 1995 only, the early May bank holiday in England, Wales and Northern Ireland has been moved from the first to the second Monday in May—from 1 to 8 May 1995—to link with commemorative events for the 50th anniversary of VE day.

In Scotland, 8 May will be a bank holiday in addition to 1 May 1995; unlike other parts of the United Kingdom, the first Monday in May in Scotland, which is specified as a bank holiday in schedule 1 to the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971, has a long tradition going back to 1871. In practice, however, bank holidays have less general significance in Scotland where various local and traditional holidays tend to be observed instead. It seems unlikely that most employers in Scotland will observe both the 1 May and the 8 May 1995 bank holidays.

The law does not give employees a right to a holiday on those days and all holiday entitlement is a matter for agreement between employers and employees.

Adjudication Officer

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many cases have been referred to the adjudication officer; and of these, what number had their benefit disallowed for each three-month period since the actively seeking work requirement was introduced.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its chief executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from M. E. G. Fogden to Mr. Stephen Byers, dated 2 March 1995:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question about the number of cases referred to the adjudication officer and of these how many had benefit disallowed, following the introduction of the requirement to actively seek work.

The actively seeking employment condition was introduced in the 1989 Social Security Act. Unfortunately we do not collect information on the number of cases referred to the adjudication officer or number of decisions to disallow income support claims. We do however record the number of decisions and disallowances issued to unemployment benefit claimants, including those in respect of the definition of actively seeking work. This is contained in the quarterly summary entitled "Analysis of Adjudication Officers' Decisions", copies of which are held in the Library of the House. This information covers the period from 1 October 1989, when the actively seeking work condition was introduced, to the quarter ending December 1994.

I hope this is helpful.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment to what period a jobseeker's allowance will be backdated in instances in which the claimant believes the jobseeker's agreement to be unreasonable; and what criteria apply in making this decision.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The independent adjudication officer will have power to direct when a jobseeker's agreement is to be treated as having effect, if such conditions as he considered appropriate are satisfied. Each case will be decided on its own merits, though regulations may prescribe matters which are to be taken into account by the adjudication officer when making such a direction.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, where there is right of appeal for claimants seeking entitlement to jobseeker's allowance, allowance or benefit will be paid at the full rate until the adjudicating officer gives a decision.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* Questions arising in connection with a claim to jobseeker's allowance will be submitted for decision by an adjudication officer. Claimants will have a right of appeal to a social security appeals tribunal against any adverse decision by the adjudication officer.

Payment of benefit will not be made clear or will be suspended pending a decision on one of the basic conditions of entitlement—whether the claimant is available for work or is actively seeking it, or whether the proposed terms of a jobseeker's agreement are satisfactory. Claimants in defined vulnerable groups will, however, be able to receive reduced rate income-based payments during the suspension, if they can show that they or a member of their household would otherwise suffer hardship. Other claimants will be able to claim on this basis after the first two weeks of the suspension.

Disputes during a claim over the terms of a variation of a jobseeker's agreement will generally also involve doubts about availability and actively seeking. Benefit will, in such circumstances, be suspended pending the decision of an adjudication officer. If, however, availability and actively seeking are not in doubt the

agreement remains in force, and in these circumstances benefit will continue to be paid in full unless or until the adjudication officer brings the agreement to an end when the claimant has failed to comply with a direction given by him.

Claimants who otherwise satisfy the conditions of entitlement will continue to receive benefit in full pending a decision on whether to impose a sanction under clause 15 of the Jobseekers Bill for instance, for leaving employment voluntarily without just cause or failing to carry out a jobseeker's direction.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in cases where the jobseeker's allowance appeal tribunal decides in the claimant's favour and an amended agreement is signed, if entitlement to jobseeker's allowance will be backdated; and if the tribunal decides against the claimant and he then signs the original agreement, if benefit will be backdated.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* In cases where the social security appeals tribunal decides in the jobseeker's favour, the jobseeker's agreement will be backdated and payments of jobseeker's allowance will be backdated, provided that the claimant satisfies the other conditions of receipt of JSA.

If the tribunal finds against the claimant, he will not receive payments of JSA until a satisfactory agreement has been signed by both parties.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guarantees will be provided to ensure that where a claimant for the jobseeker's allowance has not yet signed the agreement for the purposes of administration or adjudication, payment of benefit will be backdated to cover this delay.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* The employment officer and the jobseeker will seek to draw up a jobseeker's agreement. If they cannot reach an agreement, the proposed terms and conditions of the agreement will be referred to an adjudication officer. The jobseeker will not be entitled to jobseeker's allowance unless he is in a prescribed vulnerable group and can apply for JSA hardship payments. If there is no decision after two weeks, however, all jobseekers will be entitled to apply for hardship payments.

The adjudication officer will be able to make a direction about when the agreement is to be treated as having come into force. If he decides the agreement should be backdated, payments of JSA will be backdated, providing the jobseeker meets the other conditions of receipt of JSA.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guarantees in respect of time scales will be given to ensure that waiting times will not be detrimental to the financial well-being of the claimant while he or she is waiting for an outcome of the assessment undertaken for the purposes of entering into the jobseeker's agreement.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* If a reference on the terms and conditions of a jobseeker's agreement is made to an adjudication officer and no decision is made within two weeks, the jobseeker will be able to apply for hardship payments. Certain vulnerable groups will be able to claim hardship payments from the date of claim.

When the adjudication officer makes a determination on the agreement, he will also be able to direct when it is to be treated as having effect.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what procedures will apply when a claimant [illegible] that the jobseeker's agreement is unreasonable; what minimum standards will apply in respect of time scales for referral; and if benefit will continue to be paid during this or any subsequent period of appeal.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 6 February 1995]:* If the jobseeker and employment officer are not able to agree a jobseeker's agreement, either may refer it to an independent adjudication officer to determine whether it is reasonable to expect the jobseeker to comply with the terms and conditions, and if he does comply, whether he will satisfy the availability and actively seeking work conditions.

The proposed agreement will be referred for adjudication as quickly as possible. If no decision has been made within two weeks, the jobseeker will be able to apply for hardship payments. Certain groups of jobseekers will be able to claim from the date of their claim.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority has produced a third response to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report on the service provided by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Page: I have today placed in the Library of the House the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's third response to the report by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission which was published in May 1992.

I am pleased that the UKAEA has now implemented almost all of the MMC's 58 recommendations and that excellent progress is being made with the remainder.

Information Super-highways

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will set out the conclusions arising from the G7 conference on information super-highways.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I represented the Government at the G7 conference on the information society in Brussels from 24 to 26 February. Ministers discussed three broad topics—regulatory issues, infrastructure issues and the social and cultural impact of the information society—on the basis of a theme paper prepared by the European Commission.

The conference adopted a series of positive conclusion reflecting a variety of United Kingdom priorities.

These emphasise the importance of:

promoting dynamic competition,
encouraging private investment,
defining an adaptable regulatory framework,
providing open access to networks,
while ensuring universal provision of and access to services,
promoting equality of opportunity to the citizen,
promoting diversity of content, including cultural and linguistic diversity.

recognising the necessity of worldwide cooperation with particular attention to less-developed countries.

The G7 undertook to:

promote interconnectivity and interoperability,

develop global markets for networks, services and applications,

ensure privacy and data security,

protect intellectual property rights,

co-operate in research and development and in the development of new applications,

monitor the social and societal implications of the information society.

I am placing copies of the theme paper, the conclusions and my main intervention in the Library of the House.

The conference made a welcome commitment to the importance of reaching a successful conclusion to the World Trade Organisation negotiations on basic telecommunications by April 1996. I was also glad that United States Vice-President Gore announced to the conference the United States' intention to reform its legislation which currently restricts foreign investment in certain United States telecommunications services, which the Government have been pressing the United States to change for some time. I noted that the United States Government have indicated that they would expect reciprocity, but this is not likely to be a problem for United Kingdom industry.

The conference also agreed to launch 11 collaborative pilot projects to demonstrate the potential of the information society. The Government will be taking an active role in the implementation of these projects, as part of a process of demonstrating how the new technologies can benefit society as a whole.

The conference was preceded by a round table discussion by business leaders from the G7 countries, who strongly advocated one of the central themes of my speech to the conference—the importance of light and flexible regulation and liberalisation of telecommunications infrastructure as spurs to enable private sector investment to realise the benefits of the information society.

Indonesia

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about exports of armoured vehicles to Indonesia.

Mr. Heseltine: I have today authorised the issue of a licence to Alvis to export armoured vehicles to Indonesia. In reaching this decision, I have taken advice from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Secretary of State for Defence. The decision has been made in the light of the established and internationally agreed criteria for military exports. It has included a thorough assessment of the likelihood of these vehicles being used for internal repression in Indonesia or East Timor. This assessment has concluded that it is not likely that these vehicles would be so used. The Indonesian Government have given assurances that the vehicles will not be deployed in East Timor or used in any form of repression of civilians anywhere in Indonesia.

Premium Trust Deeds

Mr. Waterson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will make a statement about the request from Lloyd's of London for his approval for variations and amendments to the premium trust deeds.

Mr. Heseltine: On 8 February the council of Lloyd's sought my approval for certain variations and amendments to the premiums trust deeds, as announced to members of Lloyd's in the chairman's letter of 3 February. It first notified me of the draft proposals last October, and the proposals were subsequently refined.

I have considered this request carefully in accordance with my responsibilities for policyholder protection under the Insurance Companies Act 1982, and in particular section 83(2).

I have concluded that the variations and amendments proposed, and thus the deeds in their amended form, maintain and enhance the protection offered to policyholders. They therefore continue to meet the requirements for my approval under section 83(2), and thus for the continued exemption of members of Lloyd's from regulation under part II of the Act.

The council of Lloyd's has consulted the members of Lloyd's about the proposals, and considered the results of that consultation prior to seeking approval, as announced in the chairman's letter of 3 February.

I am aware that arguments have been raised as to whether clause 22 of the premiums trust deeds empowers the council of Lloyd's to make the proposed variations and amendments. It is not part of my function to adjudicate between the council and members of Lloyd's on that issue, which is governed by private law. In that connection, I note the provision in the proposals put to me to test the validity of the proposed variations and amendments in the courts, and to hold any moneys affected in a suitably secure form to ensure that affected members of Lloyd's will not have their rights prejudiced, pending the outcome of the proceedings. Were the court to find any or all of the variations and amendments invalid, my approval extends to the remainder of them, or the premiums trust deeds in their current form, as appropriate.

I have also considered whether any arguments based on EC law, of the kind raised in the Clementson case, could be directed at these amendments. My legal advice is that the EC arguments raised in that case are unlikely to succeed. Nevertheless, I have received an undertaking from Lloyd's which will have the effect that, pending a determination of those arguments by the courts, recoveries which are attracted by the amendments will not be called into the central fund without my consent.

On this basis, I have therefore notified the council of Lloyd's of my approval of the variations and amendments proposed.

Cable Franchises

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is his policy towards the Office of Telecommunications being required to obtain figures for houses cabled by old franchises in the same way as is the practice of the Independent Television Commission for new franchises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Oftel is responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance with the build obligations contained in the Telecommunications Act 1984 licences for those cable franchises awarded under the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984. The ITC has enforcement responsibility for the build timetables of local delivery franchises awarded under the Broadcasting Act 1990.

Conditional Access

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards conditional access at European level.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Government aim to secure early agreement at European level to the necessary technical standards for the development and introduction of digital television. A common position on a directive on standards for the transmission of television signals, reached at the November Telecommunications Council, includes provisions for digital conditional access systems for pay television services, and is now being considered by the European Parliament.

The Government are also following industry discussions on commercial arrangements to underpin the introduction of digital television, including digital conditional access systems. In 1994, discussions in the European digital video broadcasting group led to limited agreement on a voluntary code of conduct to govern access to conditional access systems by broadcasters. Not all broadcasters support the code. Further discussions are taking place. The Government consider that the principal means of regulation for the emerging digital conditional access television market lies in the proper application of the relevant competition law rules at both European and National level.

Lobby Organisations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if Ministers in his Department have on any occasion in the last seven days met representatives of *(a)* Messrs C. S. M. Parliamentary Consultants Ltd., *(b)* Dewe Rogerson Ltd., *(c)* Decision Makers Ltd., *(d)* G.J.W. Government Relations Ltd., *(e)* G.P.C., *(f)* G.J.W., *(g)* Ian Greer Associates Ltd., *(h)* Market Access Group, *(i)* Politics International *(j)* Westminster Communications Group, *(k)* Westminster Strategy, *(l)* Good Relations, *(m)* Rowland Sallingbury Casy, *(n)* Lowe Bell, *(o)* People Corporate and Political Relations and *(p)* Shandwick Consultants Ltd. and discussed issues relating to the clients of these companies.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service and Science today.

United Nations Special Commission

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what inquiries have been made at Davy Morris Cranes or Amersham International arising out of information from the United Nations special commission; and what was the result.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The names of many companies have been brought to notice by UNSCOM, many of which were engaged in legitimate trade with Iraq before the imposition of UN sanctions. All cases have been thoroughly investigated. It is, however, the policy of this and previous Administrations not to comment on individual cases unless public interest outweighs the need for confidentiality.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many investigations of wrongdoing have been carried out by the UN special investigators commission; and what subsequent action has been taken arising out of the provision of technology to Iraq discovered by UNSCOM.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The UN special commission and the International Atomic Energy Authority were tasked by the Security Council in 1991 to destroy, remove or render harmless all chemical, biological and nuclear weapons in Iraq, and all ballistic missiles with a range of more than 150 km. Over 110 missions have been carried out in Iraq covering hundreds of sites, at some of which British-made equipment has been found. But it is not our practice to comment in detail on information given to us by UNSCOM and the IAEA on companies which have traded with Iraq; particularly since many of them would have done so quite legitimately before the introduction of sanctions. Any evidence of wrongdoing will be investigated and, if substantiated, will be a matter for the courts.

Business Links

Ms Eagle: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial assistance his Department or its agencies has given to the Business Link Wirral since its inception.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The Department has offered £932,500 to the Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral training and enterprise council to assist Business Link Wirral, Chester and Ellesmere Port over their first three years. In addition, the Department is also providing funding totalling £604,250 to the TEC for a number of business support services delivered through the business links. No separate offers of assistance have been made to Business Link Wirral alone.

Single European Market

Mr. Keith Hill: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is planning towards the further development of a single European market.

Mr. Needham: I am continuing to take every opportunity to ensure even and effective enforcement of the single market. This includes the work of the single market compliance unit in my Department, which defends the interests of British business where single market rules are believed to have been broken, as well as support for European Community efforts to step up contacts between enforcement officials and to promote mutual recognition of national arrangements. I am pressing for further progress towards securing a full single market in telecommunications and energy.

Mr. Tipping: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals he has for the 1996 intergovernmental conference for the further development of a single European market.

Mr. Needham: The Government will continue to take every opportunity to ensure even and effective enforcement of the single market.

ROM Data

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what inquiries his Department undertook into the background of the directors of ROM Data computer firm in Cornwall before making it a grant.

Mr. Page: A range of inquiries were undertaken by the Department and others into the background of ROM Data, including checks on the directors of the company through the Companies House and insolvency service databases.

Mr. Jamieson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action he intends to take against the directors of ROM Data computer firm in Cornwall; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Page: We are currently awaiting the liquidators' report and are keeping under review the action which may be appropriate.

Sizewell B

Mr. Morgan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he list will list all subventions from the nuclear levy towards the capital cost of Sizewell B nuclear power station.

Mr. Page: Nuclear Electric's income from the fossil fuel levy is not hypothecated to any particular activities.

Coal Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the Coal Authority's budget for dealing with pollution from mine workings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Page: The Coal Authority's financial provision for 1994–95 takes full account of current work to prevent or control water pollution from mine workings, including the cost of pumping operation transferred from British Coal. The provision for 1995–96 is under discussion.

Nuclear Accidents

Mr. Llew Smith : To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce legislation to provide for the environmental clean up of commonly owned land and water resources following an accident at a nuclear power plant involving radioactivity contamination.

Mr. Atkins: I have been asked to reply.

There are no such plans. The introduction of further legislation to provide for environmental clean-up in the unlikely event of an accident at a nuclear power plant is unnecessary.

European Works Councils

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of Board of Trade if he will list the United Kingdom-based companies whose size and operations in Europe will render them liable to set up European works councils when the European works council directive comes into force.

Mr. Oppenheim: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no information other than published research, for example, by the university of Warwick, about which United Kingdom-based companies have employees above the threshold levels in the states to which the European works councils directive applies.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 3 March 1995

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sita Kamara

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he took to ensure the care and welfare of Sita Kamara while she was in the custody of the immigration service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: The immigration service monitors closely the performance and standards of service provided under contract by Group 4 Total Security Ltd for the care of detainees at Campsfield house. The steps taken to ensure Miss Kamara's well-being while at Campsfield house were fully in accordance with the requirements of the contract.

Bridgewater Four

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent consideration has been given to the case of the Bridgewater Four; and when he expects to be able to announce a decision on reference to the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: Inquiries by the Merseyside police in relation to the most recent representations about this case are nearing completion. When the police report has been received, and it has been considered along with all other relevant information and any further inquiries, my right hon. and learned Friend will make known his conclusions about the case.

Fire Service College

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the terms of reference and the timetable of the review of options for the future of the Fire Service College; if he will name the consultants carrying out the review; and if they were appointed after a tender process.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: On his appointment in May 1994, the newly appointed chief executive of the Fire Service College was asked to carry out a fundamental review of the college's corporate and business strategy which would include an examination of options for the future basis of the college's operations. There were no formal terms of reference. The chief executive will be presenting his finding to the Department shortly. In the course of the review, the chief executive has drawn on advice from the college's solicitors, Veale Wasbrough of Bristol. They were appointed in July 1994 after competitive tender. Following a competitive tender exercise run by Veale Wasbrough but overseen and approved by the college, the consultants Coopers and Lybrand were asked to provide advice on certain aspects of the review.

Suresh Kumar

Mr. Austin-Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the initial date of arrival in the United Kingdom of Suresh Kumar, currently held in Campsfield house detention centre: and if he will make a statement on the intervening circumstances.

Mr. Nicholas Baker: It is not our normal practice to give detailed information on individual cases. I shall write to the hon. Member.

HEALTH

General Practitioners

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals she has for supporting general practitioners in their administrative commitments.

Mr. Malone: A total of £552.4 million was directly reimbursed to general practitioners in 1993–94 to assist them towards the cost of computing and staff they employ, including those who carry out administrative tasks. We are also carrying out an efficiency scrutiny of bureaucracy in general practice and a report will be delivered to the Department in April.

Statistics (Ethnic Information)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is the policy of her Department to break down statistics by ethnic origin.

Mr. Sackville: Yes, where the necessary source information is available and subject to confidentiality of information about individuals.

In Vitro Fertilisation and Surrogacy

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are currently taken by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to monitor and initiate research into *(a)* handicaps in babies conceived by in vitro fertilisation, *(b)* the number of abortions, miscarriages and stillbirths in pregnancies conceived by in vitro fertilisation, *(c)* the long-term psychological effects on babies conceived by in vitro fertilisation, *(d)* the long-term psychological effects on surrogate mothers of their surrogacy arrangements; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority monitors the incidence of miscarriage and stillbirth in pregnancies conceived by in vitro fertilisation, and abnormalities in babies born as a result of IVF, through its register of licensed treatments. Details are published in the authority's annual reports, copies of which are available in the Library.

Long-term research is being undertaken by Professor Susan Golombok at City university into the psycho-social development of children born as a result of assisted conception.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps are taken by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to ensure that mothers agreeing to participate in surrogate pregnancies are made aware of their right not to hand over the baby following its birth;

(2) what steps are taken by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to ensure that mothers agreeing to participate in surrogate pregnancies are offered psychological counselling both during the pregnancy and on a long-term basis following the birth;

(3) how many babies have so far been born to surrogate mothers; in how many of the cases the mother was actually given psychological counselling both during the pregnancy and on a long-term basis following the birth; and in how many of those cases the natural mother exercised her right not to hand over her baby after birth;

(4) what steps are taken by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to ensure that babies *(a)* conceived by in vitro fertilisation and *(b)* born through surrogacy arrangements receive specialist psychological counselling throughout their childhood; and for how many and what percentage of all children in each category such counselling has been made available to date;

(5) what steps are taken by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to ensure that the siblings of *(a)* babies conceived by in vitro fertilisation or *(b)* born through surrogacy arrangements receive specialist psychological counselling throughout their childhood; and in how many and what percentage of children in each category such counselling to date has been made available.

Mr. Sackville: It is a requirement of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 that people seeking licensed treatment or consenting to the use or storage of embryos, or to the donation or storage of gametes, must be given a

"suitable opportunity to receive proper counselling about the implications of taking the proposed steps"

before they consent. Comprehensive guidance on this matter is included in the code of practice for centres issued by the authority. This includes information on the additional factors to be considered where it is the intention that the child will not be brought up by the carrying mother. These provisions apply only where the surrogacy arrangements involve a centre licensed under the 1990 Act.

Information about the number of births to surrogate mothers or about counselling arrangements is not available.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what ways the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is currently assisting *(a)* Dr. Valerie Beral or *(b)* other qualified individuals with research projects into the high perinatal mortality rate associated with in vitro fertilisation babies.

Mr. Sackville: The authority has received no such requests for assistance. The authority is monitoring the incidence of perinatal mortality where licensed treatment has been given.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans she has to discuss with the chairman of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority that authority's answerability to Parliament.

Mr. Sackville: Ministers hold regular meetings with the authority's chairman. There are no plans at this time to discuss accountability.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will list the current members of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, with the remuneration that each receives in connection with that membership.

Mr. Sackville: Members of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority are:

Ruth Deech - Chairman
Lady Diana Brittan - Deputy Chairman
Professor R.J. Berry
Professor Ian Cooke
Jane Denton
Liz Forgan
Joan Harbison
Professor Stephen Hillier
The Most Reverend Richard Holloway
Professor Martin Johnson
Richard Jones
Penelope Keith
Dr. Brian Lieberman
Dr. Caroline Lindsey
Angela Mays
Dr. Anne McLaren
Dr. Jeanette Naish
Rabbi Julia Neuberger
David Shilson
Lady Julia Tugendhat
John Williams

The chairman is paid £8,210 per year. The deputy chairman receives payment of £136 for each day of attendance and preparation in respect of the work of the authority. Other members receive £128 a day on the same basis.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individuals are currently paid on either *(a)* a full time-time or *(b)* a part-time basis by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority; and if she will identify the numbers of individuals in each category who also derive income in any way from clinics licensed by that authority.

Mr. Sackville: Twenty-one of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority executive are paid full-time. One official and legal adviser are paid part-time. No person in either category derives income from clinics licensed by the authority.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total running costs of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in each of the years since it was established; and what percentage of those costs were generated by fees for licences in each of those years.

Mr. Sackville: The information is as follows:

Year	*Total gross expenditure £000s*	*Income from licence fees as a percentage of total gross expenditure*
1990–91	109	[1](no licence fees)
1991–92	811	8.7
1992–93	1,027	66.8
1993–94	1,146	66.1

[1] The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority did not assume its full responsibility until 1 August 1991.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specific action she has now taken in pursuance of the oral statement of the Parliamentary Under- Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) of 14 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *910*, undertaking further to examine possible conflicts of interests on the part of those remunerated by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

Mr. Sackville: A member of the authority who is in any way directly or indirectly interested in a licence granted or proposed must declare such an interest. In such cases, the nature of the interest would be recorded by the authority and the member would be prohibited from participating in any deliberation or decision of the authority or of any licence committee with respect to the licence. In the case of their inspectors, the authority has issued guidance which clearly sets out a requirement for inspectors to inform the authority if they feel that it would be inappropriate for any reason to attend an inspection.

Pay Beds

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of NHS hospital and trust beds were operated as paybeds to the private sector in the last year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Sackville: This information is not available. Bed numbers are considered to be an inadequate measure of private patient activity. Private patient activity is measured by information based on income from the annual accounts of national health service trusts and directly managed units.

Community Care Charter

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from what organisations and individuals her Department sought advice when compiling the community care charter.

Mr. Bowis: The consultation document for the framework for local community care charters was sent to all local social services departments, health authorities, national health service trusts and housing authorities, as well as community health councils and a large number of voluntary organisations and provider representatives. All comments were carefully considered when the final document was drawn up.

Patients Charter

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from what organisations and individuals her Department sought advice when compiling the patients charter.

Mr. Malone: I refer the hon. and learned Member to the reply that I gave to the right hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) on 16 February 1995 at columns *814–15*.

Management Courses

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total annual NHS expenditure on management courses; and if she will list the amount spent per course in the latest available year.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally.

Mental Illness

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if she will make a statement on the role of voluntary bodies in providing assistance to the mentally ill and their relationship to statutory bodies.

Mr. Bowis: Voluntary organisations make a very important contribution to the support of people with mental illness and we encourage local health and social services to work closely with them.

Mr. Alex Carlilie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is her Department's estimate of the total annual financial assistance to the mentally ill by voluntary bodies in London.

Mr. Bowis: This is a matter for the large number of such organisations.

Dental Services

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate she has made of the number of people in England and Wales who did not consult a dentist in 1994; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Malone: We have no such estimates. Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Patient Discharge

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with whom in a NHS hospital or trust the final decision rests concerning the discharge of a patient after surgery.

Mr. Sackville: Hospital consultants must decide when their patients are clinically fit to be discharged following surgery.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were discharged from Guy's and St. Thomas' Trust on 23 December 1994; and what measures were taken to ensure that sufficient care was provided for them over the Christmas period.

Mr. Malone: This information is not available centrally. The hon. and learned Member may wish to contact Lord Hayhoe, the chairman of the trust, for details.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration has been given to including the aid programme to Indonesia financial support to the trade union movement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Within the resources available for supporting good government in Indonesia, we have judged the highest priorities to be assistance to the Indonesia national police and support for the Indonesian Government in financial decentralisation.

Mrs Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of

8 February, *Official Report*, columns *289–95*, if any Indonesian police officers who have received scholarship awards involving training paid for by his Department have subsequently served in East Timor.

Mr. Baldry: According to the Indonesian national police, none of the police officers has subsequently served in East Timor.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, columns *289–95*, how many Indonesian police officers have received scholarships awards in each year since 1990 involving training of less than one month, in each case specifying the recipient's rank and the cost of the scholarship.

Mr. Baldry: The information is as follows:

Year	*Name and Bank*	*Cost/Study/Tour/Year* £
1990–91	Mr. C.H.M. Waskito, Colonel	3,100
	Mr. F. Sumampow, Lt. Colonel	3,100
	Mr. H. Rasyid, Colonel	3,100
	Mr. Soebariliyono, Lt. Colonel	3,100
	Mr. Suryaningprang, Lt. Colonel	3,100
	Mr. Y. Y. Laoli, Lt. Colonel	3,100
	Mr. D. Rustadi, Lt. Colonel	3,100
	Mr. M. Thoyib, Captain	3,100
	Mr. N. Eko, Captain	3,100
	Mr. Lihawa, Bridgadier General	3,100
1991–92	Mr. G. Sumampow, Lt. Colonel	3,000
	Mr. H. Rasyid, Colonel	3,000
	Mr. Soebarliyono, Lt. Colonel	3,000
	Mr. M. Suryaningprang, Lt. Colonel	3,000
	Mr. Y. Y. Laoli, Lt, Colonel	3,000
	Mr. D. Rustadi, Lt. Colonel	3,000
	Mr. M. Thoyib, Captain	3,000
	Mr. N. Eko, Captain	3,000
	Mr. Soekamid, Major	3,000
	Mr. Y Ermiady, Captain	3,000
1992–93	Mr. C. H. M. Waskito, Colonel	2,865
	Mr. F. Sumampow, Lt Colonel	2,865
	Mr. H. Rasyid, Colonel	2,865
	Mr. Soebarliyono, Lt. Colonel	2,865
	Mr. M. Suryaningprang, Lt. Colonel	2,865
	Mr. Y. Y. Laoli, Lt Colonel	2,865
	Mr. D. Rustadi, Lt. Colonel	2,865
	Ms Hemawati, Major	2,865
	Ms M. Simanjuntak, Major	2,865
	Ms R.P. Gaut, Major	2,865
	Mr. M. Thoyib, Captain	2,865
	Mr. N. Eko, Captain	2,865
	Mr. M. B. Hutagalung, Major General	2,865
	Mr. R. Lihawa, Brigadier General	2,865
	Mr. Karyoso, Brigadier General	2,865
1993–94	None	0

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the projected cost of consultancy visits to Indonesia by British specialists working with the Indonesian police force in 1994–95.

Mr. Baldry: On present plans we expect to spend some £80,000 on consultancy visits in 1994–95.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answers of 8 February, *Official Report*, columns *289–95*, what impact his Department's spending on scholarships and consultancy visits to benefit the Indonesian national police force is having in terms of reducing human rights abuses; and what his future spending plans are with regard to these programmes.

Mr. Baldry: The project aims to improve the quality of service of the Indonesia national police. It does this through the establishment of a consultancy unit within the INP's headquarters which advises senior management on strategic change and solving management and organisation problems. Improving the quality of service is an important means of encouraging correct policing procedures and the observance of human rights.

The present project is due to end in March 1996. We shall be considering over the coming months whether there is a need for further support for the INP after that date.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, columns *289–95*, which companies were used to make the consultancy arrangements, and in each case to which British police forces consultants were connected.

Mr. Baldry: Johnston and Ladd International was used. Before his retirement, one consultant used to be at Bramshill staff college and before that, the Kent constabulary. Another served with the Surrey constabulary.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the projected cost of scholarship awards in Britain for Indonesian police officers in 1994–95.

Mr. Baldry: On present plans we expect to spend some £37,000 on scholarship awards in 1994–95.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *293*, what were the costs in terms of administration and Crown servant time spent in supporting work with the Indonesian police force in each year since 1990, and whether these costs were included in the totals given in his answer.

Mr. Baldry: Project management costs, which were included in my answer of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *293* were:

Year	*Costs* £
1990–91	26,950
1991–92	16,375
1992–93	16,735
1993–94	20,620

The Crown servant costs are not available.

Aid

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to which projects and programmes he has allocated the funding no longer allocated to the Pergau dam in the current year.

Mr. Baldry: In the current financial year, we are using the reallocated amounts for additional emergency aid, primarily in Bosnia, Rwanda and Chechnya; for additional contributions to multilateral organisations in the field of health and population; and for additional country programme expenditure including mine clearance in Cambodia.

Mr. Denham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to allocate the funding no longer allocated to the Pergau dam in 1995–96 to low-income countries in Africa and South Asia.

Mr. Baldry: The poorest countries of Africa and South Asia will remain a priority for aid programme funds in 1995–96. In 1993–94, nine of the 10 largest recipients of our bilateral country programme funds were low-income countries in Africa and Asia.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Leon Patterson

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 27 February 1995, *Official Report,* column *686,* (1) if he will publish the reply that he received from the Director of the Crown Prosecution Service concerning the case of Leon Patterson;

(2) if he will publish the report sent to him by the Director of Public Prosecutions into the circumstances surrounding the death of Leon Patterson;

(3) on what date he expects the new inquest into the death of Leon Patterson to take place.

The Attorney-General: The report by the Director of Public Prosecutions referred to in my answer of 27 February 1995, *Official Report,* column *686* was prepared and submitted as briefing to enable the hon. Member's question to be answered. Such briefing, like the report to the director for the purpose of the decision whether or not to prosecute, is confidential.

The conduct of inquests is a matter for the coroner concerned. The further inquest to which the hon. Member refers is to be held pursuant to an order of the divisional court. The date is for the coroner to determine in his judicial capacity.

Racist Propaganda

Mr. Madden: To ask the Attorney-General what directions he has issued following the passing of papers to him by the Metropolitan police serious and organised crime branch concerning the printing and distribution of race hate material; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I understand that the hon. Member's question relates to the investigation by the Metropolitan police into the activities of Combat 18. That inquiry is on-going. The Crown Prosecution Service expects to receive a report once the police inquiries have been concluded. I shall be kept informed. If the Crown Prosecution Service considers that proceedings may be appropriate for an offence which is subject to a statutory requirement that my consent be obtained, the papers will be referred to me.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Palestinian Elections

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards Palestinian elections and towards the redeployment of Israeli defence forces.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We understand that the elections negotiations in Cairo are making steady progress. The talks on redeployment have made no significant progress.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Goodlad: Information on applications for career breaks is not collated centrally. The numbers of officers beginning unpaid career breaks in each of the last five years are:

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Male	12	11	11	5	10
Female	44	68	65	65	59

In the same period the numbers of officers who have had their employment terminated on disciplinary and poor performance grounds are:

	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Male	3	5	3	1	4
Female	—	2	3	2	1

Staff whose applications for career breaks are not accepted do not have their employment terminated.

Turkey

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government will take to encourage the Government of Turkey to ensure the preservation of the Suryani community in south-eastern Turkey.

Mr. David Davis: Our ambassador in Ankara has discussed the concerns of the Suryani community with the Turkish authorities and stressed that it is their duty to investigate and stamp out cases of harassment and kidnapping. We shall continue to take a close interest in the Christian communities in Turkey.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Her Majesty's Government are doing to encourage the Turkish authorities to allow the Syrian Orthodox Church in Turkey to have its own theological seminary and to teach the Syriac language in schools.

Mr. David Davis: We take a close interest in the Christian communities in Turkey in the context of our wider concerns on human rights. Our ambassador and other members of the embassy take advantage of their

visits outside the capital to meet with community leaders and to discuss their concerns with the local Turkish authorities.

National Minorities

Sir Donald Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when he expects to ratify the Council of Europe framework convention for the protection of national minorities; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement about the preparation of a draft protocol to the European convention of human rights concerning the protection of the rights of minorities in the cultural field.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Council of Europe summit in October 1993 called for the drawing up of a framework convention for the protection of national minorities, together with a draft additional protocol

"complementing the European Convention on Human Rights in the cultural field by provisions guaranteeing individual rights, in particular for persons belonging to national minorities".

The summit gave work on the framework convention the higher priority. The convention was drawn up during 1994 and opened for signature on 1 February 1995, when 21 states including the United Kingdom signed. We intend to ratify the convention in due course.

The United Kingdom was fully involved in the drawing up of the convention, and is similarly engaged in the work which is in progress on the proposed additional protocol.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Chessington Computer Centre

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1) how he will ensure the same confidentiality and security of highly sensitive data in the event of the work handled by the Chessington computer centre being transferred to the private sector.

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure continued accountability and to guarantee commitment to correct and punctual payment of employees in the event of the Chessington computer centre being privatised.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: If work handled by Chessington computer centre is transferred to the private sector, the confidentiality and security of data, and accountability and commitment to correct and punctual payments, would be matters on which I should need to be satisfied that adequate safeguards are in place. The detail would be for the new operator and its customers to agree on a contractual basis.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to protect the ownership and copyright of software written in-house in the event of the Chessington computer centre being privatised.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: The treatment of software developed in-house in the event of the privatisation of Chessington computer centre is one of the issues on which I shall be advised by the review that I announced on 17 November 1994.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, if the review of the Chessington computer centre included an impartial and thorough analysis of all the options; and on what grounds the terms of reference did not contain an analysis of Chessington's record as a Government agency.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: When Chessington computer centre was launched as an agency in 1993, the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster announced that it was a definite candidate for privatisation but that it was not being privatised immediately due to a lack of a commercial track record and of direct competition. The current review is addressing those issues. Chessington's performance as an agency is being considered as a part of the review of its commercial track record.

TRANSPORT

Bus and Airport Privatisation

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to encourage the privatisation of local authority owned airports and bus companies.

Dr. Mawhinney: Three public airport companies have been privatised in recent years, and discussions are at various stages in relation to some of those still in the public sector. Similarly, 28 bus companies, including the eight largest, have moved successfully into the private sector.

We welcome these developments, and we are continuing to encourage other airport and bus company owners to consider seriously the options for privatisation. We have therefore decided that, for a two-year period beginning on 1 April, the set-aside rate for receipts by local authorities from sales of shares in public airport companies will be reduced from 50 per cent. to 25 per cent. We have also decided that the set-aside rate for receipts from sales of bus companies should be reduced to 25 per cent. for a one-year period from 1 April. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales will be making amending regulations later this month.

Fort William Rail Services

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what the cost per passenger carried on the London-Fort William sleeper/Motorail train would be, based only on the net costs saved by Railtrack and BR together, within the first year of its withdrawal;

(2) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 20 February, *Official Report*, column *1*, if he will set out the net costs, taking account of revenue losses, redundancy and relocation costs, expected to be saved in 1995–96 and 1996–97 by the withdrawal of the sleeper and Motorail service between London and Fort William to *(a)* British Rail and its subsidiaries and *(b)* Railtrack.

Mr. Watts: British Rail expect to save about £7 million from the proposed reduction in London to Scotland sleeper and Motorail services. The saving from withdrawing the Fort William service alone is estimated at £2.6 million. These figures do not include redundancy and relocation costs, which are non-recurring costs

estimated at less than £300,000 for the withdrawal of the Fort William service. There are unlikely to be any savings to Railtrack.

On the basis of passengers carried in 1993–94 the cost net of revenue excluding infrastructure changes is £180 per passenger. The figures are based on British Rail's best estimate, using the 1994–95 price base.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evaluation he has made of the conclusions of the Director of Rail Passenger Franchising in respect of the economy and efficiency of the London to Fort William sleeper.

Mr. Watts: No final conclusions have been reached by the franchising director, who has indicated his preliminary view of which services he is minded to include in the ScotRail PSR on which consultation will take place later this year.

Marine Rescue

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when the vehicles currently allocated to the auxiliary coastguard stations and marine rescue sub-centres are due to be replaced;

(2) how many incidents were dealt with by the Marine Rescue Sub-centre at Swansea and at Liverpool in each year since 1988 which would formerly have been dealt with by the Hartland and Ramsay Centres.

(3) how many individuals have been assisted by the marine rescue sub-centres at *(a)* Swansea and *(b)* Liverpool in each year since 1988; and how many fatalities occurred in each year in the sectors covered by (i) Swansea and (ii) Liverpool;

(4) if he will list the type of vehicle stationed at Swansea, Milford Haven, Holyhead and Liverpool auxiliary stations and marine rescue sub-centres and when those vehicles were first registered;

(5) how many auxiliary coastguard stations there are around the United Kingdom coast; and how many are equipped with one or more vehicles of their own;

(6) at what rate sector officers are paid when required to cover staff shortages on marine rescue sub-centres;

(7) how many *(a)* fatalities occurred and *(b)* individuals were assisted in the sectors covered by the Milford Haven and Liverpool coastguard stations in each year from 1988 to 1994;

(8) how many times serious incidents have occurred when marine rescue sub-centres were understaffed at Swansea, Milford Haven, Holyhead and Liverpool; and what action was taken to overcome the shortage of staff;

(9) how many times sector officers have been withdrawn from their offices to provide cover in marine rescue sub-centres at *(a)* Swansea, *(b)* Milford Haven, *(c)* Holyhead and *(d)* Liverpool since 1988;

(10) when actual staffing levels have fallen below the guideline staffing levels at Swansea and Liverpool marine rescue sub-centres since 1988; and by how much on each occasion in staff hours;

(11) what were the staffing levels at a *(a)* the Swansea marine rescue sub-centre and *(b)* Liverpool marine rescue sub-centre in each year from 1985 to 1994.

Mr. Norris: These are operational matters for the Coastguard Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Harris to Mr. Nick Ainger, dated 3 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions as these questions deal with operational matters, for which I have responsibility as Chief Executive.

PO 1017/94/95 Casualty information prior to 1 January 1990 is not available in the format requested. Since then the number of occasions when the following rescue centres were understaffed during a serious incident are listed below:

Centre	*Incidents*
MRCC Swansea	Nil
MRSC Milford Haven	Nil
MRSC Holyhead	Nil
MRSC Liverpool	Nil

Contingency plans exist to reinforce Operations Room manning in the event of a serious incident, firstly by the management and subsequently with off duty watch officers.

PQ 1018/94/95. Casualty information prior to 1 January 1990 is not available in the format requested.

	Milford Haven	*Liverpool*
(a) Fatalities		
1990	8	9
1991	6	11
1992	10	6
1993	3	15
1994	6	14
(b) Assisted/Rescued		
1990	693	469
1991	422	491
1992	638	1,014
1993	614	620
1994	509	581

PQ 1019/94/95. There is no change to a Sector Officer's rate of pay when on watchkeeping duties.

PQ 1020/94/95. There are 396 coastal response teams, 277 of which are equipped with one or more vehicles of their own.

PQ 1021/94/95. The information requested in this PQ is detailed below:

Swansea District Vehicle Data

Station	*Vehicle type*	*When registered*
Penarth	4 wheel drive (4WD)	1981
	Replaced by 4WD	1995
Hartland	4WD	1983
	Replaced by 4WD	1995
Llantwit Major	4WD	1984
Croyde	4WD	1985
Westward HO	4WD	1986
Chepstow	4WD	1990
Mumbles	4WD	1990
Burnham on Sea	4WD	1990
Rhossili	4WD	1990
Countisbury	4WD	1990
Portishead	4WD	1991
Pembrey	4WD	1991
Weston super Mare	4WD	1992
Ilfracombe	4WD	1992
Porthcawl	4WD	1992
Porlock	4WD	1993
Barry Island	Saloon	1993
Oxwich	Saloon	1993
Minehead	Saloon	1993
Morthoe	Saloon	1993

Swansea District Vehicle Data

Station	*Vehicle type*	*When registered*
Instow	Saloon	1993
Port Talbot	Saloon	1993
Clevedon	Estate	1994
Watchet	4WD	1994

Milford Haven District Vehicle Data

Station	*Vehicle Type*	*When registered*
Gwbert	4WD	1984
Aberystwyth	4WD	1985
St. Davids	4WD	1986
	Replaced by 4WD	1995
Tenby	4WD	1986
Broadhaven	4WD	1986
Aberdovey	4WD	1990
St. Govans	4WD	1990
Dale	4WD	1991
Fishguard	4WD	1993
Manobier	Saloon	1993
Moylegrove	Saloon	1993
Borth	Saloon	1993
New Quay	4WD	1994
Wooltack Point	Saloon	1994
Milford Haven MRSC	Saloon	1994

Holyhead District Vehicle Data

Station	*Vehicle type*	*When registered*
Criccieth	4WD	1983
	Replaced by 4WD	1995
Barmouth	4WD	1984
Abersoch	4WD	1985
Rhosneiger	4WD	1986
Porthdinllaen	4WD	1986
	Saloon	1993
Rhyl	4WD	1990
Bangor	Van	1990
	Replaced by Estate	1995
Penmon	4WD	1991
	Saloon	1993
Holyhead	4WD	1992
Llandwrog	Van	1992
Llandudno	4WD	1993
Moelfre	4WD	1994
Holyhead Mrsc	Saloon	1994

Liverpool District Vehicle Data

Station	*Vehicle type*	*When registered*
Knott End	4WD	1984
	Replaced by 4WD	1995
Bootle	Van	1985
Portling	4WD	1986
Fleetwood	4WD	1990
	Saloon	1993
Whitehaven	4WD	1990
Arnside	4WD	1990
Maryport	Van	1990
Kirkcudbright	4WD	1991
	Saloon	1993
Burgh by Sands	4WD	1991
Hoylake	4WD	1991
Liverpool MRSC	Saloon	1991
Isle of Whithorn	4WD	1992
Millom	4WD	1992
Lytham St. Annes	4WD	1992
Walney	Saloon	1993
Workington	Saloon	1993
Formby	4WD	1994

PO 1026/94/95. Casualty information prior to 1 January 1990 is not available in the format requested.

	Assisted/Rescued	*Fatalities*
(a) MRCC Swansea		
1990	641	26
1991	1,043	19
1992	762	7
1993	966	10
1994	1,686	5
(b) MRSC Liverpool		
1990	469	9
1991	491	11
1992	1,014	6
1993	620	15
1994	581	14

PO 1027/94/95 casualty information prior to 1 January 1990 is not available in the format requested.

Incidents in the former Hartland District dealt with by MRCC Swansea

Year	*Number*
1990	117
1991	163
1992	144
1993	187
1994	232

Incidents in the former Ramsay District dealt with by MRSC Liverpool

Year	*Number*
1990	36
1991	53
1992	60
1993	53
1994	78

PO 1028/94/95 The vehicle replacement programme is flexible and decided annually depending on the condition and expected future repair costs.

PO 1054/94/95 Basic Watch Levels were introduced on 14 February 1994. Since then the Basic Watch Levels at Swansea and Liverpool rescue centres were:

	Number	*Number*
MRCC Swansea	1 Senior Watch Officer	3 Watch Officers
MRSC Liverpool	1 Senior Watch Officer	2 Watch Officers

To fulfil this level of watchkeeping there are currently 4 SWOs and 13 WOs at MRCC Swansea, 4 SWOs and 10 WOs at MRSC Liverpool.

PQ 1055/94/95. Information on watch rosters is only available from 1 January 1993.

MRCC Swansea

1993: 5 occasions of 12 hours each

1994: 217 occasions of 12 hours each

MRSC Liverpool

1993: 194 occasions of 12 hours each

1994: 153 occasions of 12 hours each

On the occasions above where availability of regular staff fell below the Basic Watch Level the shortfall was made up by the use of operations rooms assistants in compliance with extant Coastguard instructions.

PQ 1056/94/95. Such details are unavailable. As part of their normal duties Sector Officers are required to undertake watchkeeping duties in a rescue centre, to retain competency in these duties and to provide a cross-fertilisation of local knowledge to regular operations room staff.

Railways (Debt)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the amount of indebtedness of Railtrack; and what plans he has to write it off.

Mr. Watts: As at 1 January 1995 the outstanding principal owed by Railtrack to the national loans fund was £1.53 billion, excluding temporary borrowing.

I have no plans at present to write off this debt.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the cost to British Rail of servicing its accumulated debts at today's prices in each of the past 20 years.

Mr. Watts: This information is available in cash prices in British Rail's annual report and accounts.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the writing off of Railtrack's debts.

Mr. Watts: None

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what basis debt was apportioned at the time of Railtrack's separation from the British Railways Board on 1 April 1994.

Mr. Watts: Decisions on debt apportionment between British Rail and Railtrack were made bearing in mind the future financial plans of the two organisations.

Office of Passenger Rail Franchising

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many staff the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising is expected to employ at 1 April, taking account of those currently employed and posts which have been advertised.

Mr. Watts: Seventy.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those premises occupied or due to be occupied by the office of Passenger Rail Franchising, stating the principal terms of ownership or lease.

Mr. Watts: The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising currently occupies 26–28 Old Queen street, London SW1, in its entirety and occupies a floor at 29–35 Old Queen street. Both properties are leased. The terms of the leases are commercial and confidential.

Track Access Charges

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has relating to track access charges in *(a)* each European Union country, *(b)* the United States of America and *(c)* Japan.

Mr. Watts: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 10 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *633*. Actual track access charges in these countries are not readily identifiable or comparable with those made by Railtrack.

British Rail Finance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the level *(a)* of rebate paid by British Rail to the Treasury for each year it has been paid since 1965, and *(b)* of British Rail capital investments for each of those years; and what are the estimated figures for *(a)* and *(b)* for next year.

Mr. Watts: Between 1976 and March 1994 British Rail had an annual external finance requirement met by subsidy from the Government in the form of grant and borrowing, mostly from the national loans fund. Since April 1994 the railway industry has continued to receive Government support in the form of grants, but has a different financial structure in which British Rail and Railtrack have negative external finance requirements or external finance contributions, which are used to repay debt to the national loans fund.

The outturn external finance requirements from 1979–80 to 1993–94, external finance limits and contributions for 1994–95 and 1995–96 and figures for capital investment in the railways from 1965, in current prices, are as follows:

Year	*Investment £ million 1994–95 prices*
1965	1.396
1966	1.200
1967	976
1968	890
1969	608
1970	702
1971	746
1972	775
1973	777
1974	839
1975	969
1976	946
1977	937
1978	941
1979	967
1980	951
1981	810
1982	695
1983	767
1984–85[1]	786
1985–86	855
1986–87	819
1987–88	993
1988–89	977
1989–90	1.119
1990–91	1.216
1991–92	1.442
1992–93	1.552
1993–94	1.188
1994–95	1.000

[1] 15-month year due to an accounting change from calendar years to financial years.
[2] Forecast outturn.

External Finance Requirements

	BR/RT EFR £ million 1994–95 prices	*UR/EPS EFR £ million 1994–95 prices*	*Industry EFR £ million 1994–95 prices*
1979–80	1791	—	1.791
1980–81	1672	—	1.672
1981–82	1853	—	1.853
1982–83	1528	—	1.528
1983–84	1396	—	1.396
1984–85	1713	—	1.713

External Finance Requirements

	BR/RT EFR £ million 1994–95 prices	*UR/EPS EFR £ million 1994–95 prices*	*Industry EFR £ million 1994–95 prices*
1985–86	1414	—	1.414
1986–87	1172	—	1.172
1987–88	781	—	781
1988–89	505	—	505
1989–90	811	82	892
1990–91	1065	186	1.251
1991–92	1241	360	1.600
1992–93	1688	481	2.170
1993–94	1054	437	1.490

External Finance limits and contributions

	BR/RT EFC	*UR/EPS EFL*	*Grant*[1]	*Industry EFL*
1994–95	–645	217	1,924	[2]1,496
1995–96	–945	120	1,800	[3]975

Notes:

[1] Estimated grant support to passenger services from 1994–95 includes Franchising Director grant and metropolitan railway grant for PTE services.

[2] Industry external finance limit for 1994–95 may increase by a further £64 million to £1,560 million.

[3] 1995–96 industry external finance limit does not include privatisation effects and includes an estimated £70 million of grant paid by Scottish Office via PTEs to BR.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds he has made available to British Rail as part of the public service obligation in 1990–91, 1991–92, 1992–93, 1993–94, and 1994–95; and what funds he expects to make available to British Rail or any other rail operator to subsidise socially necessary services in 1995–96, 1996–97, and 1997–98.

Mr. Watts: The information is as follows:

Public service obligation grant

	Cash £ million	*1994–95 prices £ million*
1990–91	602	699
1991–92	892	975
1992–93	1.155	1,214
1993–94	930	949
1994–95[1]	1,700	1.700

[1] Estimate of support to passenger services, which from 1994–95 is paid by the Franchising Director. It excludes metropolitan railway grant, estimated to be £224 million, paid by the Department of Transport to passenger transport authorities.

In 1995–96 estimated total grant to support passenger services is £1,800 million. Of the £1,800 million, an estimated £1,610 million will be paid by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising to British Rail and franchisees, and £190 million will be paid by the Department of Transport to passenger transport authorities.

Estimates of the level of grant support for 1996–97 and 1997–98 are not yet available.

Rail Privatisation

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds his Department has spent, or is estimated to spend on preparations for rail privatisation, excluding funds made available to *(a)* British Rail, *(b)* Railtrack plc, *(c)* the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and *(d)* the Office of the Rail Regulator, in (i) 1992–93, (ii) 1993–94, (iii) 1994–95, (iv) 1995–96 and (v) 1996–97.

Mr. Watts: The information is as follows:

	Year	*£ million*
(i)	1992–93	6.7
(ii)	1993–94	13.5
(iii)	1994–95	14.2
(iv)	1995–96	24.6
(v)	1996–97	5.3

Figures for 1994–95 onwards are current estimates and exclude main sale costs for the flotation of Railtrack, yet to be determined.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates were given to him by British Rail for costs arising from the restructuring of British Rail for rail privatisation in *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* the forthcoming financial year; what funds he has made available to British Rail for reorganisation in preparation for privatisation; what funds he has made available to Railtrack to implement privatisation in 1994–95, and what is his estimate for 1995–96.

Mr. Watts: British Rail expects to spend some £78 million on reorganisation and privatisation in 1994–95. Railtrack has so far spent less than £0.5 million in 1994–95 on activities solely concerned with privatisation. A precise figure cannot be given because it is impossible to differentiate between such activities and those concerned with developing and establishing Railtrack as a separate business from British Rail. Planned expenditure in 1995–96 is a matter for BR and Railtrack.

Ferry Safety

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cases his Department has recorded in the last five years of passenger ferries which use *(a)* the English Channel and *(b)* the North sea routes from United Kingdom ports violating international regulations in respect of the minimum distance between bow doors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norris: This is an operational matter for the Marine Safety Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr Martin Redmond, dated 3 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Transport has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of passenger ferries, using the North Sea and Channel, that have been found violating international regulations in respect of the distance between bow doors.

In the past five years five ferries operating in the Channel, and two operating in the North Sea, have been found, by the Marine Safety Agency, not to comply with the provisions of international regulations regarding the position of the collision bulkhead and the extension above the car deck. All have now been modified to comply.

Passenger Information Systems

Mr. James Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to implement the TRUST programme—currently being introduced in Birmingham—to other bus routes in and around London.

Mr. Norris: London Transport's "Countdown" system, currently on trial on 25 bus routes in London, provides passenger information at bus stops in a similar way to TRUST.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in what circumstances legal aid is available to criminals already serving a sentence.

Mr. John M. Taylor: The legal aid scheme provides legal advice, assistance and representation to those who might otherwise be unable to obtain it on account of their means, regardless of whether they are currently serving a prison sentence.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make it his policy that a person serving a prison sentence who has not fully disclosed the whereabouts of the proceeds of the crime of which they were convicted should not be allowed legal aid.

Mr. John M. Taylor: In assessing an individual's entitlement to legal aid, all the assets to which the individual can reasonably be expected to have access are taken into account.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what legal aid is available to prisoners wishing to appeal against sentence; and what restrictions there are on the number of appeals a prisoner may launch.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Criminal legal aid may be granted to a convicted person for proceedings in respect of a sentence, provided that it is desirable in the interests of justice and that his or her financial resources are such that he or she requires help in meeting his or her costs.

A person convicted by a magistrates court has the right to appeal against sentence to the Crown court. Where an appeal is dismissed by the Crown court, a person may apply to the High Court for judicial review of that decision.

A person wishing to appeal against a sentence imposed in the Crown court must initially seek leave to appeal from a single judge in the Court of Appeal, criminal division.

If leave to appeal is granted, the matter will then be heard by the full court. If leave is refused, the application may be renewed to the full court. If the full court determines that leave to appeal should not be granted, a case can be referred back to the Court of Appeal by the Home Office, in exceptional circumstances.

Myra Hindley

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if Myra Hindley is in receipt of a civil legal aid certificate.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I am not aware of any civil legal aid certificate currently in effect in respect of Ms Hindley.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what forms of publicly funded assistance Myra Hindley receives to enable her to retain a solicitor or counsel.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I am not aware of any publicly funded legal assistance currently being received by Ms Hindley, though it is possible that she may be receiving legal advice under the "green form" scheme.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if Myra Hindley is in receipt of a criminal legal aid certificate.

Mr. John M. Taylor: I am not aware of any criminal legal aid order currently in effect in respect of Ms Hindley.

TREASURY

Knight Williams

Mr. Robert Wareing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received in respect of the financial advisers, Knight Williams; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nelson: A number of representations have been received recently from hon. Members. The Government's role under the Financial Services Act has been to establish the framework within which the regulators work. A statement on an individual firm is a matter for the regulators. The Securities and Investments Board has made two public statements on this firm.

VAT on Food

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the effect on the level of eating out in hotels, restaurants and pubs, of the difference of 17.5 per cent. between the applicable rate of VAT on food consumed in these locations and at home.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If the standard rate of VAT were removed from eating out in hotels, restaurants and pubs, demand for this service would increase by an estimated 15 per cent.

Interest and Exchange Rates

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what economic role he assigns to *(a)* the rate of interest and *(b)* the rate of exchange in the conduct of economic policy.

Mr. Nelson: It is the role of monetary policy to deliver low inflation. Since monetary policy influences inflation with a lag, interest rate decisions are based on an assessment of the prospects for underlying inflation in one to two years' time. This assessment is based on a wide range of information including movements in the exchange rate.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the effect of the rise in the rate of exchange against the Deutschmark between February 1993 and January 1994 on the standard of living of manual workers in manufacturing industry relative to those of white-collar workers in the private sector.

Mr. Nelson: It is not possible to isolate the effects of nominal exchange rate changes on standards of living.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the effect of the Government's exchange rate policies on the distribution of incomes since 1979.

Mr. Nelson: The distribution of income depends on a number of different factors. It is not possible to identify the effect of any single factor.

Hotels (VAT)

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the rates of VAT applicable to *(a)* budget and *(b)* luxury hotel accommodation in each of the member states of the European Union.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The VAT rates applied in EU member states to budget and luxury hotel accommodation are shown in the table:

VAT rates on hotel accommodation in the EU

Country	*Rate: budget accommodation Per cent.*	*Rate: luxury accommodation Per cent.*
Austria	10	10
Belgium	6	6
Denmark	25	25
Finland	22	22
France[1]	5.5	5.5
Germany	15	15
Greece	8	8
Ireland	12.5	12.5
Italy	9	19
Luxembourg	15	15
Netherlands	6	6
Portugal[2]	5 (4)	5 (4)
Spain	6	6
Sweden	12	12
UK[3]	17.5 (5)	17.5 (5)

Notes:

[1] The following rates apply generally in Corsica: 0.9 per cent., 2.1 per cent., 8 per cent. and 13 per cent.

[2] The rates in brackets apply in Madeira and the Azores Archipelagoes.

[3] The five per cent. shown in the UK list applies to hotel accommodation in Isle of Man as from 1 October 1994.

Sources:

VAT in Europe (International Bureau of Fiscal Documentation), EU member states' embassies in London.

Monetary Policy (Employment Goal)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to set an employment goal rather than a prices target for monetary policy.

Mr. Nelson: The role of monetary policy is to deliver low inflation. Keeping inflation low creates the right conditions for sustainable growth and a continuing rise in secure jobs.

Goods and Services (Prices)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the years since 1975 in which the percentage increase in the retail price of goods has exceeded the increase in the price of services.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information requested is not available at present as there are no unique definitions of goods or services in the retail prices index. However, the central statistical office is currently working on a goods and services breakdown of the RPI and hope to be able to publish such a breakdown dating back to 1987 in the February 1995 RPI business monitor, MM23.

Council or Ministers

Mr. Matthew Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the most recent Council meeting of the Economic and Finance Ministers of the European Union.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I represented the UK at the Economic and Finance Council of the European Union in Brussels on 20 February.

The President of the Commission presented the Commission's work programme for 1995. He suggested that the main tasks facing the Ecofin Council were: contributing to stable and sustained growth, employment and preparations for economic and monetary union. He stressed that structural reform efforts to combat unemployment should not be slackened as a result of the economic recovery. He also summarised the Commission's activities and plans on competitiveness, the internal market and preparation for central and eastern European enlargement and stressed the importance attached by the Commission to the fight against fraud.

I said that the work programme should be judged by its effects on jobs and investment. The key to this was to ensure competitiveness. On EMU, I repeated the policy the Government have followed since Maastricht and recently reaffirmed by the Cabinet.

Commissioner Gradin presented the Commission's programme of anti-fraud activity for 1995. She said that fraud against the Community's financial interests had to be seen in a broad political context. European citizens were concerned that the Community's resources were spent properly and Community institutions and member states could demonstrate that the problem of fraud was being tackled effectively.

The Council discussed preparations for the meeting with Finance Ministers of the associated countries of central and eastern Europe, scheduled to take place in accordance with the conclusions of the Essen European Council. The Council took note of the Commission's paper on preparing the dialogue and agreed that further work was needed. The Council agreed to postpone the meeting until May.

The Council agreed to hold a meeting with the EFTA countries during the Spanish presidency.

Sir Leon Brittan gave a report on progress in the GATS financial services negotiations.

No formal votes were taken at the Council meeting.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department, or agencies for which it is responsible, in 1994 giving, in each case, the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Nelson *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* The Treasury and the agencies responsible to the Chancellor issued four White Papers, one Green Paper and 28 pamphlets in 1994. In respect of those white papers, green papers and other publications published by the HMSO all costs were borne by the HMSO, who aim to recover these from sales revenue. Production, printing and distribution costs of pamphlets printed externally are set out below. Production and distribution of pamphlets produced in-house or pamphlets printed externally are handled by staff as part of their normal work, and therefore disaggregated costs are not available. Information on costs in 1980 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

White papers

CSO annual report 1993–94 (HCP 521)

Departmental report of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Departments (Cm 2517)

RPI Advisory Committee. Housing costs (Cm 2717)

RPI Advisory Committee. New and used car prices (CM 2716)

Green papers

Better accounting for taxpayer's money (Cm 2626)

Pamphlets[1]

Pamphlets produced externally	Cost (£)
Brief guide to sources (CSO)	19,731.00
Budget in brief (HMT)	21,004.00
Civil service statistics (HMSO for HMT)	0.00
CSO Databank (CSO)	10,181.00
Economic briefing (HMT)	66,911.00
Government procurement: progress report (HMSO) for HMT	0.00
Government statistical service annual report (CSO)	14,800.00
Key figures on civil service staffing (HMT)	715.00
Paymaster newsletter (PGO)	24,435.42
Producer prices—how they work (CSO)	5,320.00
Statistics for students (CSO)	6,472.00
Summer economic forecast 1994 (HMSO for HMT)	0.00
United Kingdom coinage review (Royal Mint)	4,917.37
United Kingdom coinage review (braille) Royal Mint)	2,641.00
UK in figures (CSO)	10,058.00

Pamphlets produced in-house

Civil service staffing 1979–1994 (HMT)

Code of best practice for board members of public bodies (HMT)

Crest: the legal issues (HMT)

Government economic forecasts 1969–1993 (HMT)

Help with fuel bills (HMT)

Implementation of the deposit guarantee directive (HMT)

Implementation of the investment services directive and capital adequacy directive (HMT)

Minutes of the monthly monetary meeting (HMT)

Open government: how to obtain information from the Treasury (HMT)

Public offer of securities regulations (HMT)

Review of Building Societies Act 1986 (HMT)

Review of Building Societies Act 1986: background papers (HMT)

Revised implementation of the EC prospectus directive (HMT)

Winding up directive (HMT)

[1] Pamphlets are defined for the purposes of this answer as booklets of more than one sheet originated and distributed generally to the public for the first time in 1994 or made available to the public for purposes of discussion for the first time in 1994 and do not include reprints of earlier published material.

EMPLOYMENT

European Works Councils

Mr. Macshane: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the voluntary creation of European works councils by leading British firms as a contribution to harmonious employee relations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Oppenheim: It is too early to make any such assessment. We are in favour of greater worker consultation and involvement. This may take many forms, which are best left to the judgment of individual companies. But we are against the prescriptive, inflexible, top-down approach to greater worker consultation and, on that basis, I do not believe that European works councils will make any significant contribution to genuine employee involvement.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if unemployed people receiving the job seeker's allowance will be able to participate in *(a)* postgraduate courses, *(b)* degree courses, *(c)* courses in preparation for a degree, *(d)* diploma of higher education courses, *(e)* higher national diploma courses, *(f)* A-level courses, *(g)* GCSE courses, *(h)* teaching qualification courses and *(i)* other courses of a similar nature; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: People on full-time courses will not be able to claim jobseeker's allowance.

People claiming JSA will be able to take part-time courses provided that they remain available for and actively seek employment. In the case of courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council, part-time courses will be defined as courses of up to 16 guided learned hours a week. This definition will not extend to higher education and other sectors, where we expect the definition of a part-time course to remain essentially unchanged. Similar arrangements will apply in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if unemployed people claiming the job seeker's allowance will be able to study part-time higher education courses for up to 21 hours a week; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: People on full-time courses will not be able to claim jobseeker's allowance.

People claiming JSA will be able to take part-time courses provided that they remain available for and actively seek employment. That will include part-time higher education courses, where we expect the definition of a part-time course to remain essentially unchanged.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what circumstances when the jobseeker's allowance is introduced the Employment Service client advisers will accept that participation in a part-time education or training course is a positive outcome and an active step in looking for work; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: A course of up to two weeks' duration will be accepted as an active step in seeking employment if it will help improve the jobseeker's chances of getting work. Longer courses, whether part-time or full-time, will not be accepted as an active step in substitution for job search activity.

Starting a course of education or training which takes the jobseeker out of unemployment is treated as a positive outcome of an Employment Service advisory interview and we propose to continue this.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the maximum number of hours that unemployed people claiming the jobseeker's allowance will be allowed to participate in courses run by voluntary organisations and local authorities which are partly funded by the European social fund; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: People on full-time courses will not be able to claim jobseeker's allowance.

People claiming JSA will be able to take part-time courses provided that they remain available for and actively seek employment. In the case of courses funded by the Further Education Funding Council, part-time courses will be defined as courses of up to 16 guided learning hours a week. This definition will not extend to higher education and other sectors, where we expect the definition of a part-time course to remain essentially unchanged. Similar arrangements will apply in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

These rules will apply to all courses, including those funded by the European social fund.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Miss Widdecombe: Forty men and 1,020 women started a career break in the five years up to 1 January 1995. None have had their employment terminated.

Advertising

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total expenditure on all forms of advertising by his Department and its agencies for each year since 1979 in 1994 prices.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 13 February 1995]:* The information requested is shown in the following table:

Cost of advertising since 1979 on all forms of advertising in 1994 prices (£)

Year	£
1979–80	[1][2]175,296
1980–81	[2]6,867,309
1981–82	[2]4,395,776
1982–83	[2]6,186,195
1983–84	[2]4,754,533
1984–85	[2]3,254,828
1985–86	20,621,583
1986–87	53,241,911
1987–88	40,706,040
1988–89	30,229,606
1989–90	21,797,896
1990–91	12,293,720
1991–92	14,039,415
1992–93	5,584,560
1993–94	8,441,609

Notes:
[1] The 1979–80 total does not include expenditure by the former Manpower Services Commission as the figure is not available.
[2] The 1979–80, 1980–81, 1981–82, 1982–83, 1983–84 and 1984–85 totals do not include expenditure by the Health and Safety Executive as figures are not available.

The total advertising budget for the Department in 1994–95 is £11,250,000 and for HSE £1,200,000.

During the period from 1985 to 1990, the Department launched a number of major campaigns, including the promotion of youth training, employment training, restart and enterprise allowance by the Manpower Services Commission; and action for jobs by the Department.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prevention of Terrorism Acts

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of people arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Acts In Northern Ireland in the past five years were subsequently released without charge.

Sir John Wheeler: The information requested is as follows:

Year	No. of persons detained	No. released without charge	Percentage without charge
1990	1,549	1,177	76
1991	1,680	1,294	77
1992	1,795	1,335	74
1993	1,641	1,259	77
1994[1]	1,328	1,009	76

[1] January-September inclusive only. Figures are not yet available for the final quarter of 1994.

Pay Increases (Cost)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate the cost to his Department's budget, and to local authorities' self-financed expenditure in 1995–96 of implementing in full the recommendations of *(a)* the School Teachers Review Body; *(b)* the Review Body on Doctors and Dentists Remuneration; and *(c)* the Review Body on Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine, assuming no changes in staff numbers.

Mr. Moss: The remit of the School Teachers Review Body does not extend to Northern Ireland, where the pay and conditions of service of school teachers are dealt with in local negotiating machinery.

Estimated costs of implementing the recommendations of the other review bodies are as follows:

	Main pay increase Per cent.	*Estimated pay bill cost[1] £ million*
DDRB (doctors and dentists)[2]	2.5–3.0	4.4
NPRB (nurse and midwives)	1.5–3.0[3]	3.9–7.9
(PAM's)	1.5–3.0[3]	0.5–0.9

[1] Pay bill costings include employers' national insurance and superannuation payments.
[2] Plus up to 2.5 per cent. on average salaries for consultants under transitional local pay arrangements.
[3] Comprising 1 per cent. on national pay scales and the NPRB estimate of additional amounts likely to result from local pay negotiations.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fire Safety

Mr. Beith: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial costs and benefits and other effects on business concerns in the United Kingdom are expected as a result of the transfer of the role of the fire authorities in determining fire safety standards in new and altered or extended buildings to the building control authorities, as recommended in the interdepartmental review of fire safety legislation and enforcement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) on 24 February 1995, *Official Report*, column *369*.

EU Structural Funds

Mr. Garrett: To ask the President of the Board of Trade, what criteria are used in appointing members to objective 5b monitoring committees; and if he will list those appointments already made and the interests they represent.

Mr. Eggar: The structural funds regulations require monitoring committees to be set up within partnerships established between the member state, the competent authorities and bodies designed by the member state at national, regional, local or other level, and the European Commission. So far four of the 11 objective 5b United Kingdom monitoring committees have met.

In addition to representatives of central Government, training and enterprise councils or local enterprise companies, and local authorities, the Government have designated or will designate to each committee other organisations following local consultation. They could be from, for example, the private sector, tourism and development organisations, further and higher education, rural bodies and the voluntary sector.

The following is a full list of organisations represented on the committee for the East Anglia objective 5b area, the one closest to the hon. Member's constituency:

Chairman
The regional director of the Government office.

Members
One representative each from:
- Department of the Environment
- Employment Department
- Department of Trade and Industry
- Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
- Norfolk and Waveney TEC
- Standing Conference of East Anglian Local Authorities
- Rural Development Commission
- Further Education Funding Council
- English Nature
- East Anglian Cooperative Development Association
- Two private sector bodies.

Civil Servants

Mrs. Maddock: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of those accepted for fast-stream entry for which his Department is responsible *(a)* in 1991, *(b)* 1992, *(c)* in 1993 and *(d)* in 1994 were women.

Mr. Heseltine: For the years 1991 and 1992, I refer the hon. Member to the annual report of the Civil Service Commissioners for those years, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. Successful candidates for the fast-stream entry competitions assigned to the Department of Trade and Industry in 1993 and 1994 were as follows:

	Total assigned	*Women*	*Per cent. women*
1993 Administration trainee/higher executive officer (development)	11	3	27
1994 AT/HEO(D)	9	2	22
1993 Science management trainee/higher scientific officer (development)	3	1	33
1994 SMT/HSO(D)	2	1	50
1993 Economic assistants	7	3	43
1994 Economic assistants	7	2	29
1993 Assistant statisticians and trainee statisticians	6	2	33
1994 Assistant statisticians and trainee statisticians	4	0	0

Foreign Takeovers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is Her Majesty's Government's

policy in respect of the takeover of United Kingdom industry by foreign firms with particular reference to those from the east Asian region.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: In examining acquisitions of UK firms under the Fair Trading Act 1973, we do not discriminate between UK and foreign acquirers, including those from the east Asian region.

Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what communications he has received from the European Commission in respect of the activities of Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd; how many communications have been in respect of the firm's application for exemption from EU regulations under article 85 of the treaty of Rome; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jonathan Evans: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade has not received any communication from the European Commission in respect of the activities of Inntrepreneur Estates Ltd. However, he has been kept fully informed of the Commission's concerns with regard to the discounts offered by the major brewers, and the Commission's decision to allow the Director General of Fair Trading to investigate the issue before coming to a decision regarding the Inntrepreneur application for individual exemption of its standard lease.

Floating Platform Systems

Mr. Wilson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps he is taking to help ensure that floating platform systems built in UK yards are in a position to compete effectively for orders in UK sector waters.

Mr. Eggar: My Department established a working group on floating production systems last year and the group has now made positive proposals which when implemented will strengthen the competitiveness of UK yards and other suppliers in this sector. The group's report has now been published and its recommendations are being pursued with the industry.

Publications

Mr. Boyes: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if he will list all White Papers, Green Papers and pamphlets issued by his Department or agencies for which it is responsible in 1994, giving in each case the total cost to the Exchequer of their production, publication and distribution; and what was the total equivalent cost in 1980.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* In 1994, my Department, with the exception of its agencies, produced 361 external publications. As there is no generally accepted definition of the term "pamphlet", I have placed a list of all these publications in the Library of the House, along with the estimated cost—£2.2 million—for the nine months to December for which data is available. The list includes White Papers and a Green Paper published for my Department by HMSO. Equivalent information for 1980 is not available.

In respect of White Papers, Green Papers and other publications published by HMSO, HMSO aims to recover their costs from sales revenue.

As regards DTI agencies, the production of publications is an operational matter for the chief executives.

DEFENCE

Staff Cars

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many two-star officers and above are entitled to a dedicated staff car and driver; where the officers are based; what make of car is provided; and what is the total annual cost in salaries, maintenance and car replacement.

Mr. Soames [pursuant to his answer, 22 February 1995, *Official Report*, c. *252–55*]: At two-star rank and above, there are currently 109 posts in the armed forces and my Department, including civilians, who are entitled to a dedicated staff car and driver. These are:

Number	*Post*	*Location*
POSTS OPEN TO MORE THAN ONE SERVICE		
5 posts*		
1	Chief of the Defence Staff	London
2	Chair of the Military Committee	Brussels
4 posts*		
3	Vice Chief of Defence Staff	London
3 posts*		
4	United Kingdom Military Representative	Brussels
5	Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Commitments)	London
6	Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Personnel and Programmes)	London
7	Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Systems)	London
8	Chief of Defence Intelligence	London
9	Surgeon General	London
10	Commandant Royal College of Defence Studies	London
2 posts*		
11	Commander of British Forces Cyprus	Episkopi
12	Head of British Defence Liaison Staff	Washington
13	Assistant Chief of Staff (Policy)	Mons
ROYAL NAVY		
4 posts*		
14	Chief of the Naval Staff	London
15	Chief Naval Home Command/2nd Sea Lord	Portsmouth
16	Commander in Chief Fleet	Northwood
3 posts*		
17	Controller of the Navy	London
18	Chief of Fleet Support	Bath
19	Deputy Commander in Chief Fleet	Northwood
20	Flag Officer Plymouth	Plymouth
21	Flag Officer Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland	Pitreavie
22	Flag Officer Surface Flotilla	Portsmouth
23	Commandant General Royal Marines	Portsmouth
24	Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic	Virginia
25	Chief of Staff NAVSOUTH	Naples

Number	Post	Location
2 posts*		
26	Director General Naval Personnel Strategy and Plans	Portsmouth
27	Flag Officer Submarines	Northwood
28	Flag Officer Portsmouth	Portsmouth
29	Flag Officer Training and Recruiting	Portsmouth
30	Commander British Forces	Gibraltar
31	Flag Officer Sea Training	Portland
32	Flag Officer Naval Aviation	Yeovilton
33	Naval Secretary	Portsmouth
34	Commander United Kingdom Task Group	Portsmouth
35	Medical Director General (Naval)	Gosport
ARMY		
4 posts*		
36	Chief of General Staff	London
37	Adjutant General	Upavon
38	Commander in Chief United Kingdom Land Forces	Wilton
39	Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe	Mons
40	Master General of the Ordnance	London
3 posts*		
41	Quartermaster General	Andover
42	Inspector General Doctrine and Training	Upavon
43	Deputy Commander in Chief United Kingdom Land Forces/Inspector General Territorial Army	Wilton
44	General Officer Commanding Southern District	Aldershot
45	General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland	Lisburn
46	Commander ACE Rapid Reaction Corps	Rheindahlen
2 posts*		
47	Director General Military Survey	Feltham
48	Engineer in Chief (Army)	Minley
49	Director General Land Warfare	Upavon
50	Director General Army Training	Upavon
51	Commandant Staff College	Camberley
52	Commandant Royal Military College of Science	Shrivenham
53	Commandant Royal Military Academy Sandhurst	Camberley
54	Director Royal Armoured Corps	Bovington
55	Director Royal Artillery	Larkhill
56	Director of Infantry	Warminster
57	Director Army Air Aviation	M. Wallop
58	Military Secretary	London
59	Chief of Staff HQ Adjutant General Corps	Upavon
60	Director General Logistics Support (Army)	Andover
61	Director General Equipment Support (Army)	Andover
62	Director General Army Medical Service	Mychett
63	General Officer Commanding Eastern District	York
64	General Officer Commanding London District	London
65	General Officer Commanding Wales and Western District	Shrewsbury
66	General Officer Commanding Scotland	Edinburgh
67	Commander 3rd (UK) Division	Bulford
68	Commander United Kingdom Support Command Germany	Rheindahlen
69	Commander 1st Division (UK) Armoured Division	Herford
70	Chief of Staff HQ ACE Rapid Reaction Corps	Rheindahlen
71	Chief Combat Support ACE Rapid Reaction Corps	Rheindahlen
72	Director Support Land Centre	Heidelberg
73	Commander British Forces	Hong Kong
74	Commander Land Forces Northern Ireland	Lisburn
75	Chief of Staff HQ Quartermaster General	Andover
ROYAL AIR FORCE		
4 posts*		
76	Chief of the Air Staff	London
77	Air Officer Commanding in Chief HQ Personnel and Training Command	Innsworth
78	Air Officer Commanding in Chief HQ Logistic Command	Brampton
79	Air Officer Commanding in Chief HQ Strike Command	High Wycombe
80	Deputy Commander in Chief Central Europe	Brunssum
81	Controller Aircraft	London
82	Commander HQ Allied Air Forces North West Europe	High Wycombe
3 posts*		
83	Chief of Staff HQ Strike Command	High Wycombe
84	Chief of Staff HQ Logistic Command	Brampton
85	Director General Saudi Armed Forces Project	Riyadh
86	Air Officer Commanding 18 Group	Northwood
2 posts*		
87	Air Secretary	Innsworth
88	Chief of Staff HQ Personnel and Training Command	Innsworth
89	Deputy Commander Messtetten	Messtetten
90	Air Officer Commanding Information Systems and Signals Unit	Brampton
91	Air Officer Engineering and Supply	High Wycombe
92	Air Officer Commanding 1 Group	Benson
93	Air Officer Commanding 2 Group	Rheindahlen

Number	Post	Location
94	Air Officer Commanding 11 Group	B. Priory
95	Air Officer Commanding 38 Group	High Wycombe
96	Air Officer Training	Innsworth
97	Air Officer Maintenance and Air Officer Commanding Maintenance Units	Brampton
98	Commandant RAF Staff College Bracknell	Bracknell
99	Commandant RAF College Cranwell	Cranwell
100	Director General Medical Services (RAF)	Innsworth
101	Director General Policy and Plans	London
102	Air Officer Administration and Air Officer Commanding Directly Administered Units	High Wycombe
103	Director General Support Management (RAF)	Brampton
MoD CIVILIANS		
104	Permanent Under Secretary of State	London
105	Chief Scientific Adviser	London
106	2nd Permanent Under Secretary of State	London
107	Chief of Defence Procurement	London
108	Deputy Chief Scientific Adviser	London
109	Head of Defence Export Services	London

The total estimated cost of the driver posts for the financial year 1993–94 is approximately £2.2 million. Entitled officers normally have the use of a Rover 800 car, although particular local circumstances, security requirements, command roles and topography might necessitate additional vehicles being used. The total costs of car maintenance are not separately identifiable, however the available data suggests that the likely annual cost is in the region of £300 per vehicle per annum. The total annual cost of car replacement for the last three years is as follows:

1992–93: 131 vehicles bought costing £1.7 million

1993–94: Seven vehicles bought costing £100,000

1994–95: no vehicles bought.

Malaysia (Bases)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department or companies and organisations controlled by his Department began discussions with the Malaysian Government on advice, support, contracts or consultancy relating to the construction of naval or air bases in that country; and if the construction of such bases has commenced.

Mr. Freeman: Discussions conducted on a Government-to-Government basis are confidential.

Defence Sales Agents

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries in which, either by legal requirement or convention, defence export sales are generally conducted through agents or consultants.

Mr. Freeman: The British Government do not employ business agents in the negotiation of Government-to-Government defence export contracts. I cannot comment on other countries' requirements or conventions on the use of agents or consultants in defence export sales.

Hong Kong

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what United Kingdom military forces or personnel are based in Hong Kong; and if all such units or personnel will return to the UK after 1997.

Mr. Soames: At present the Hong Kong garrison comprises 2,087 United Kingdom military personnel and 788 locally engaged military personnel supported by 101 UK based civilians and 631 locally engaged civilians. All locally engaged military personnel and civilians will be discharged from Crown service by 30 June 1997. All UK-based military personnel and civilians will return to the UK.

Construction Services

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the recommendations of the Latham report for works services contracts placed by his Department.

Mr. Freeman: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) by my colleague the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on 30 November 1994, *Official Report*, column *775*. He said that as a major customer of the construction industry the Ministry of Defence is keen to pursue any initiatives which may improve the efficiency of the industry and deliver better value for money. My Department constantly aims to be a best practice client and we therefore welcomed Sir Michael's report. Officials in my Department are actively involved in the follow-up work to the Latham report which is being co-ordinated by the Department of the Environment, and also the efficiency scrutiny into construction procurement announced by the Prime Minister on 13 September last year, which inform the Government response to Sir Michael's recommendations.

Low Flying

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the minimum population of towns over which RAF pilots are advised to avoid while low flying.

Mr. Soames: Towns listed for low-level avoidance are generally those with 10,000 or more inhabitants. All other populated areas are to be avoided wherever possible.

Starstreak

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the next tranche of orders for Starstreak.

Mr. Freeman: A decision on the need for more Starstreak will be taken as soon as possible after the successful introduction into service of the current tranche of equipment.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Freeman: Since 1 March 1990, 13 men and 788 women in my Department have applied for and been granted a career break. Of the men, six are still on their break, five have been reinstated and two terminated after the career break. Of the women, 603 are still on their break, 147 have been reinstated and 38 terminated after the career break.

Nigeria

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the date of the memorandum of understanding with Nigeria.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer on 9 February 1995]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave her on 1 March 1995, *Official Report*, column *509*.

Chechnya

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further discussions he has had with his NATO counterparts about Chechnya.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Defence discussed Chechnya with a number of his NATO counterparts, most recently at the Wehrkunde conference in Germany on 4 to 5 February.

ENVIRONMENT

Protected Birds (Sale)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information his Department requires from a potential seller in considering whether or not to grant an exemption certificate to sell a bird listed in appendix I of the convention on international trade in endangered species;

(2) what methods his Department uses to monitor the sale of the species of birds listed in appendix I of CITES and annex C1 of EC regulation 3626/82; and if his Department regularly monitors the bird trade journals.

Sir Paul Beresford: When considering an application for an individual exemption my Department normally seeks the following key information:

- details of the vendor, including where appropriate any convictions under wildlife legislation;
- details of the specimen to be sold, including any identifying marks or rings;
- details about the origin and date of acquisition of the specimen, including any information relating to captive breeding;

The applicant must also sign a declaration to state that the information provided is correct and complete to the best of the applicant's knowledge and belief.

The police are primarily responsible for enforcing controls on the sale of wildlife within Great Britain. They monitor relevant trade and local publications selectively to identify potential offences. My Department checks advertisements in several national journals and passes details of any potential offences to the police. The Department's wildlife inspectorate also looks out for any evidence of sales offences.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many exemption certificates have been issued for the sale of Livingstone's Turacos—Tauraco livingstonii—in each of the last four years, including 1995 to date; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many Livingstone's Turacos—Tauraco livingstonii—have been imported into the United Kingdom in each of the last four years including 1995; and if he will indicate the origins of such birds.

Sir Paul Beresford: The Department's records show that in the last four years we did not issue any sales exemptions for this species and that we did not grant any permits to import specimens to Great Britain from countries outside the European Community. We understand that some confusion may exist about the rules concerning several species in the genus Tauraco, and we shall be issuing advice to traders shortly.

Environmentally Adjusted Accounts

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps have been taken in the United Kingdom under the EU's fifth environmental action programme to develop pilot systems of environmentally adjusted national accounts.

Sir Paul Beresford: My Department is to participate in a project led by the Central Statistical Office to develop a pilot system of satellite accounts linked to the input/output framework of national accounts. This work is broadly consistent with the proposals in the fifth environmental action programme but is not being carried out specifically in response to it. The programme is not itself a legislative instrument and therefore does not automatically create binding legal obligations on member states.

Railway Noise

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, what consideration he has given to the report of the Mitchell committee on noise.

Mr. Watts: I have been asked to reply.

My predecessor responded to the committee's main recommendations on 28 November 1991, *Official Report* column *577*, accepting that the proposed noise insulation regulations for new railway lines should include separate daytime and night time standards derived from the single standard already provided in the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975, as amended in the case of new roads. Other issues identified by the committee were further examined with the assistance of Dr. Mitchell and other experts and draft noise insulation regulations for new railways were issued for consultation in October 1993. Draft regulations will be laid before Parliament as soon as decisions have been taken on the response.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the essential differences between the habitual residence test and the residence qualification rejected by the Government in 1986.

Mr. Roger Evans: The 1986 proposal would have prevented the payment of income-related benefits until the claimant had been resident for 12 months. This would have discriminated in favour of British citizens who did not leave the United Kingdom, would have excluded citizens of the Irish Republic and would probably have been in breach of our international obligations.

The habitual residence test does not impose an absolute ban on the payment of benefit for a fixed period, does not discriminate on grounds of nationality and does not breach our international obligations. It is based on individual circumstances which take into account the following factors: the claimant's intentions; the claimant's reasons for coming to the United Kingdom; the claimant's employment record; the length and continuity of residence in another country and the claimant's centre of interest.

Mr. Timms: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 7 February, *Official Report* column *213–14*, if he will list for each of the three Benefits Agency offices within the Newham Benefits Agency district *(a)* the number of people to whom the habitual residence test has been applied and *(b)* the number of people who have been refused income support as a result of the habitual residence test in each month since its introduction, broken down to show the number of British nationals, EU nationals, and others refused.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr Stephen Timms, dated 2 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking for the number of people who have been refused Income Support as a result of the habitual residency test in the three offices of the Benefits Agency's Newham District.

The information provided in the Official Report Vol 254 col 213–4 has since been updated and I have therefore provided data at Annex A for the period up to 31 January 1995. Information has been given in respect of the three offices located at Stratford, Canning Town and Plaistow in the Newham District.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Annex A: Newham district by branch office habitual residence test August 1994–January 1995

Month	Number of customers subject to the HRT	Number of Customers Refused IS		
		British Nationals	EU Nationals	Others
Stratford				
August 1994	6	0	5	0
September 1994	21	0	20	0
October 1994	20	0	20	0
November 1994	42	0	29	0
December 1994	54	15	10	3
January 1995	33	4	6	3
Plaistow				
August 1994	0	0	0	0
September 1994	18	3	12	0
October 1994	28	10	10	0
November 1994	43	9	12	2
December 1994	20	4	3	1
January 1995	26	3	3	0
Canning Town				
August 1994	13	1	5	0
September 1994	13	5	2	0
October 1994	24	8	2	2
November 1994	13	3	2	1
December 1994	15	7	3	0
January 1995	12	1	0	0

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in his Department or its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Hague: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Those staff on career breaks remain employed by the Department during their absence and would only have their employment terminated in exceptional circumstances, for example, on grounds of misconduct.

Social Fund

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the criteria for receiving assistance from the social fund and the community care grant system.

Mr. Roger Evans: Social fund payments are awarded under sections 138 to 140 of the Social Security

Contributions and Benefits Act 1992. Regulated payments are made for maternity expenses, funeral expenses and heating in cold weather. Discretionary payments can be made in other cases, which comprise community care grants, budgeting loans and crisis loans.

The precise criteria for determining regulated payments are contained in the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses (General) Regulations 1987 and the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Regulations 1988.

The Secretary of State gives directions to social fund officers listing the criteria for determining discretionary payments, and guidance on how these directions should be applied. The directions and guidance are published in the social fund guide. Copies of this legislation and publications are in the Library.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if voluntary bodies are included among the potential sources to which people should apply before they become eligible for social fund assistance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roger Evans: Under section 140(1) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, a social fund officer determining a discretionary payment should have regard to: the nature, extent and urgency of the need; the existence of resources from which the need may be met; and the possibility that some other person or body may wholly or partly meet it. It is for a social fund officer to decide how these questions apply in each individual application to the social fund.

In deciding whether a crisis loan should be awarded, social fund officers are advised in the Secretary of State's guidance in the social fund guide to take into account any help which might be available from any other source to meet or partly meet the need, if there is a realistic expectation that help would be available in time. Possible sources of help might be charities and benevolent funds which are known to be likely to provide the required assistance. Copies of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 and the social fund guide are in the Library.

National Insurance Credits

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes had been made in the system of national insurance credits by 1965; what changes have been made since that date; and if he will estimate the impact of these changes on the number of people who have lost national insurance cover.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Between its inception in 1948 and the advent of RNI in 1975, the scope and operation of the credits system remained broadly unchanged.

The National Insurance (Contributions) Amendment Regulations 1960 provided for unemployed persons to have a part-time job compatible with their availability for full-time employment and continue to receive unemployment credits.

No other significant changes were made prior to 1965 or between 1965 and 1975.

The Social Security (Credits) Regulations 1975 made adaptations to the credits systems to accommodate the revised national insurance scheme. The revised system was based on tax years and reliance on credits was considerably diminished since the earnings-related contributions payable by employed earners meant that many people could achieve a qualifying year for future benefit purposes in a comparatively short period.

Apart from credits awarded for long-term benefit purposes only—class 3—all credits previously awarded at a class appropriate to the contributor's employment status became class 1 credits.

Other specific changes were as follows:

Special short-term benefit credits awarded to recent entrants into the national insurance scheme were extended to provide future cover for maternity allowance in addition to unemployment benefit and sickness benefit.

Credits in respect of education, training and unpaid apprenticeship up to age 18 were extended to cover all young people for the tax years containing their 16th, 17th and 18th birthdays.

The conditions for eligibility for credits in respect of approved training were eased by removing the qualification that the trainee would otherwise have become or remained unemployed and reducing the amount of contributions which needed to have been paid before the course commenced.

The special provision whereby class 3 contributions paid by a mature student during his course could be converted to class 1 or 2 for short-term benefit purposes only was removed.

Special credits available to a young person for short-term benefit purposes on termination of a period of small income exception were not replaced by a similar provision in respect of small earnings exception because of the anomalies that this would create.

Class 3 credits previously awarded to widows for specified weeks were extended to cover the whole of the tax year. Credits were also made available for the year of widowhood and in some circumstances the following year regardless of whether widows benefit was in payment.

The credits provisions of the Social Security (Credits) Regulations 1975 and the Social Security (Benefit) (Married Women and Widows Special Provisions) Regulations 1974 together with information about subsequent significant changes are as follows:

Class 3 starting credits

Introduced 1948. Count for basic retirement pension and widows' benefits. Awarded for the years in which the individual reaches the ages of 16, 17 and 18. Still current.

Class 1 starting credits

Introduced 1953. Counted for unemployment benefit, sickness benefit and maternity allowance. Awarded for the year in which the age of 17 was reached or any previous year. Abolished from 2 October 1988 to coincide with the tightening of the contribution conditions for sickness and unemployment benefits.

Starting credits for maternity grant purposes

Introduced 1948. Abolished from 6 April 1988 when maternity grant was abolished.

Approved training credits

Introduced 1948. Count for all benefit purposes. Available to those over 18 in full time training. Still current. From 4 September 1988, the requirement to have one qualifying year for benefit purposes in the three years preceding the course was abolished.

Termination of full time education, training and apprenticeship credits

Introduced 1953. Count for unemployment and sickness benefit. Available to those over 18 providing the course did not start after the individual reached the age of 21 and the course has actually finished. Changes from 2 October 1988 were as follows:

(a) Credits for maternity allowance purposes were abolished.

(b) Credits were no longer available to the individual for the tax year before he was 18.

(c) Credits were made available for one of the two relevant tax years for benefit purposes providing that the other year was a qualifying year. Change coincided with the tightening of the contribution conditions for sickness and unemployment benefits.

Credits for unemployment and incapacity

Introduced in 1948. Count for all benefit purposes. Available for each week of unemployment or sickness. In the case of unemployment credits, a small amount of work can be disregarded. Changes since 1975 are as follows:

(a) From 29 May 1977, provisions were put in place to prevent the use of severe disablement allowance credits to gain entitlement to higher rate contributory incapacity benefits.

(b) From 8 March 1982, the scope of disregarded work for unemployment credit purposes was extended to include work done for a charity.

(c) From 10 May 1987, the scope of incapacity credits was extended to include periods when the individual was working as a councillor.

(d) From 6 April 1988, the scope of incapacity credits was extended to include days in receipt of statutory sick pay.

(e) From 6 April 1992, the scope of unemployment credits was extended to include periods covered by a PILON—payment in lieu of notice.

Special credits on termination of marriage

Introduced 1948. Abolished 18 May 1989. For women whose marriage has terminated by reason of the death of their husband or otherwise to assist them in satisfying the contribution conditions for unemployment and sickness benefits and maternity allowance. Award for any relevant week in which the marriage subsisted provided that certain contributions have been paid since the marriage ended.

Widow's "running start" credits

Introduced January 1957. For the purposes of entitlement to sickness benefit, unemployment benefit or maternity allowance, where entitlement to WMA or WA ends other than by remarriage or cohabitation. Still current.

ICA credits

Introduced 12 April 1976. Count for all benefit purposes. Still current. Available for periods when invalid care allowance is payable.

Autocredits

Introduced 6 April 1983. Count for all benefit purposes. Still current. Awarded automatically to men for the tax years in which they reach the ages of 60 to 64 inclusive provided they are not liable to pay contributions.

SMP credits

Introduced 6 April 1987. Count for all benefit purposes. Still current. Awarded for periods when statutory maternity pay is available.

Jury service credits

Introduced 6 April 1988. Count for all benefit purposes. Still current. Awarded for periods of jury service.

DWA credits

Introduced 6 April 1992. Count for all benefit purposes. Still current. Available for periods when disability working allowance is payable.

Widows benefit credits

Introduced 1948. Counted for retirement pension purposes only. Awarded for each week for which widow's benefit was payable or a claim was pending. Abolished 1978.

It is not possible to estimate the impact of these changes on the number of people who have lost national insurance cover. Since the majority of changes have been favourable, there will be more gainers than losers in benefit terms.

EU Nationals

Mr. Spellar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what checks are made by his Department on the validity of EU documents before benefit is paid to EU nationals.

Mr. Roger Evans: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. John Spellar, dated 2 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking what checks are made on the validity of EU documents before benefit is paid to EU nationals.

If there are grounds to doubt the authenticity or validity of documentation such as EU national ID cards, for example if there are signs of alteration or the information is inconsistent with the customer's benefit claim details, staff will consider all the evidence presented and may refuse to accept the documentation.

Staff have access to guidance on how to deal with suspect documentation provided in support of a benefit claim, in particular when attempting to establish a customer's identity. They are also able to seek advice from the Document Examination Unit of the Benefits Agency's (BA) Overseas Benefits Directorate.

I should add that in the case of a claim to a contributory benefit from a person from abroad, any EU documentation tendered would only initiate a claim; entitlement would need to be established by the BA's Overseas Benefits Directorate. The steps taken in processing such a claim would require corroborative documentation from sources other than the customer.

In addition, customers who have entered the UK within the last five years have, since 1 August 1994, had to show the adjudicating authorities that they are habitually resident in the UK to qualify for Income Support, Housing or Council Tax Benefits.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

War Pensions

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the average time now taken to deal

with appeals against disability assessment for war pension purposes; and what was the average time 12 and 24 months earlier;

(2) how many appeals against disability assessment for war pension purposes are currently waiting to be dealt with, and what were the figures 12 and 24 months earlier;

(3) how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time staff are employed in handling appeals against disability assessment for war pension purposes; and what were the numbers 12 and 24 months earlier.

Mr. Hague: These are matters for Mr. Peter Mathison, the chief executive of the War Pensions Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Robin Corbett, dated 2 March 1995:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about appeals against the assessment of claims to War Pension.

At 31 January 1995 the War Pensions Agency (WPA) had 8,337 assessment appeals on hand. The equivalent figures for 31 January 1994 and 1993 were 7,325 and 2,511 respectively.

The average time taken to clear an assessment appeal is currently 220 days compared with 183 days and 247 days 12 and 24 months earlier.

The work of WPA is organised so that staff deal with all aspects of a claim be it the initial claim, any review or deterioration or an ensuing appeal. As such it is no possible to be specific about the number of staff employed on dealing with assessment appeals.

The majority of resources have been used to clear the high number of claims that have been received and this is demonstrated by a clearance of nearly 240,000 first claims in the last two years compared to 98,000 in the previous two year period. The balance of first claims has been reduced from a peak of 88,000 at April 1993 to 25,000 at January 1995.

This activity on claims has led to a consequent increase in the number of appeals received and hence an increase in the total on hand. However the Agency has responded with a very large increase in output as can be demonstrated by the fact that in 1994 a total of 9,589 assessment appeals were cleared compared to 5,075 in 1993 and 3,194 in 1992.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

Burnley Benefit Office

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if it is his policy that the Burnley Benefits Agency office is to continue to operate as an independent office;

(2) when he expects to announce the name of the new district manager of the Burnley Benefits Agency office.

Mr. Roger Evans: The appointments of district managers and the operations of district offices are both matters for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available.

Letter from Michael Bichard to Mr. Peter Pike, dated 2 March 1995:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the appointment of a new District Manager to, and the continued independent operation of, the Burnley Benefits Agency office.

We will shortly be advertising the post of District Manager at Burnley with a view to announcing the name of the successful applicant as soon as possible.

There are no plans to change the way the Burnley office operates.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many parents with care have made eligible applications to have maintenance assessed; and if he will express this figure as a percentage of parents with care.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 3 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about eligible applications for child maintenance.

For the period April 1994 to January 1995 the number of parents with care who have made eligible applications and had maintenance assessed was 194,291. This figure represents 38.64% of the maintenance application forms received to date in 1994/95 by the Agency from parents with care.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many reduced benefit directions have been issued by the Child Support Agency in each month from April 1993 to the latest available date.

Mr. Burt: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the chief executive. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Ann Chant to Mr. Donald Dewar, dated 3 March 1995:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number of reduced benefit directions (RBDs) issued by the Child Support Agency.

April 1993 to March 1994	*RBDs issued*
April	0
May	0
June	1
July	0
August	8
September	13
October	20
November	39
December	79
January	162
February	42
March	263

April 1994 to January 1995	*RBDs issued*
April	205
May	258
June	892
July	1,143
August	1,726
September	2,846
October	3,791
November	2,969
December	1,285
January	973

WALES

Prescription Pricing Service

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what inquiries he has had from *(a)* the Philippines,

(b) Mauritius, *(c)* other non EU and *(d)* other EU countries expressing interest in the market testing exercise for administering the prescription pricing service currently provided by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* Of 38 organisations which have so far asked for a copy of the authority's market testing information pack, 37 are companies with a UK address and one is a company based elsewhere in the European Community. This would not preclude any links with the Philippines or Mauritius. However, the closing date for the submission of outline proposals is not until 24 March 1995, and invitations to tender will be issued on 28 April 1995. All information relating to companies tendering will be treated in confidence.

Flyover, Cardiff

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had concerning the funding of the proposed dedicated flyover connecting the Eastern avenue A48 trunk road and the University Hospital of Wales, Health, Cardiff, if he will set out the rules relating to the funding by *(a)* health authorities *(b)* highway authorities or *(c)* the private sector of such dedicated highway structures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* I have received a number of representations. A contribution by the NHS towards the overall cost of off-site road works may in certain cases be appropriate, provided that the hospital involved is the main beneficiary of the proposals. The A48 Eastern avenue is not a trunk road and is the responsibility of South Glamorgan county council. It is for the council to determine what, if any, priority it attaches to such a structure. Any proposals from the private sector must offer value for money and a transfer of risk from the public sector.

Ministerial Accommodation, Cardiff

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the annual cost of providing accommodation in Cardiff for Welsh Office Ministers with particular reference to the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Redwood: Because the accommodation for Welsh Office Ministers and officials in Cardiff is an integral part of the main headquarters office complex at Cathays Park, costs are not collected separately. There is not separate accommodation for the Secretary of State.

Pay Awards (Cost)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the cost to his Department's budget and to local authorities' self-financed expenditure in 1995–96 of implementing in full the recommendations of *(a)* the School Teachers Review Body, *(b)* the Review Body on Doctors and Dentists Remuneration and *(c)* the Review Body on Nursing Staff, Midwives, Health Visitors and Professions Allied to Medicine, assuming no changes in staff numbers.

Mr. Richards: On the recommendation of the School Teachers Review Body, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on 23 February 1995, *Official Report*, columns *300–01*. The estimated costs to the NHS in Wales in 1995–96 of implementing the review bodies' pay awards are:

	Main pay increases Per cent.	*Pay bill costs £ million*[3]
DDRB (doctors and dentists)[1]	2.5–3.0	7.1
NPRB (nurses and allied professions)[2]	1.5–3.0	8.0–16.0

Notes:

[1] Includes hospital medical and dental (2.5 per cent. award), local pay for consultants (average 2.5 per cent. awards) and GPs (3 per cent. award).

[2] The award for NPRB groups was of a 1 per cent. increase in national salary rates to be supplemented by local negotiations on pay and, where appropriate, leads and allowances and/or conditions. The review body has said that it expects that, in the majority of cases, the outcome of local negotiations would provide improvements for the staff concerned totalling between 1.5 and 3 per cent., including the 1 per cent. increase in national rates.

[3] Includes employers' national insurance and superannuation.

The costs of pay awards are to be met from existing budgets.

Local Research Ethics Committees

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what proposals he has for ensuring the appropriate training and qualification for *(a)* membership and *(b)* chairmanship and vice-chairmanship of local research ethics committees;

(2) if he will list the names of the chairmen, vice-chairmen and members of local research ethics committees and the date on which they were appointed;

(3) what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority concerning the application of his Department's circular (91) 75 in relation to the independence of the local research ethics committee;

(4) what recent representations he has received in relation to the chairmanship of the South Glamorgan local research ethics committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The only representations I have received in relation to the local research ethics committee in South Glamorgan were from its two vice-chairmen. I have not had consultations on the role of the ethics committee with the chairmen of the health authority.

Guidance on the establishment, operation and guiding principles of local research ethics committees was issued by the Department in a Welsh health circular in 1991. Chairmen of all ethics committees received detailed guidance on standards and operating procedures in October 1994. Members of committees in Wales attended a series of training workshops organised by the Department of Health late in 1994.

Information on the membership of each local research ethics committee in Wales is not held centrally, but can be obtained from the health authorities concerned.

Village Halls

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what has been the total amount of funding from the Welsh

Office towards the improvement of village halls in Wales in each of the last five years, including the current financial year; and what is the financial allocation for this purpose for 1995–96.

Mr. Richards: Improvements to village halls are funded under the voluntary youth services, village halls and community centres programme, and under the strategic development scheme (prior to 1994–95, the urban programme and the rural initiative).

Expenditure under the voluntary youth services, village halls and community centres programme is as follows:

		£
1990–91	Outturn	528,000
1991–92	Outturn	724,000
1992–93	Outturn	551,000
1993–94	Outturn	399,000
1994–95	Estimated outturn	493,000
1995–96	Plans	472,000

Approvals under the strategic development scheme, and previously the urban programme and the rural initiative, are as follows:

		Urban programme £	*Rural initiative* £
1990–91	Approvals	225,225	—
1991–92	Approvals	400,500	154,500
1992–93	Approvals	1,518,432	185,000
1993–94	Approvals	1,293,529	343,344

Strategic development scheme

		£
1994–95	Approvals to date	2,648,808
1995–96	Planned approvals	1,174,000

Figures are for approved capital projects only for each year. Projects funded include improvements to community centres, welfare halls and village halls.

Cardiff Bay (Birds)

Mr. Sweeney: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, what action is being taken by the Cardiff Bay development corporation to implement its plans for mitigation measures for birds that will be displaced from Cardiff bay on completion of barrage construction in 1988.

Mr. Redwood: The corporation, acting on the advice of the Countryside Council for Wales, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Land Authority for Wales, is reviewing the options for suitable site locations along the south Wales coastline between the Burry inlet and the Gwent levels. I hope to make an announcement about site acquisition within the next two to three months.

SCOTLAND

Payment of Invoices

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the average time lapse between receipt and payment of invoices in his Department in each year since 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 10 May 1994 which provides information about payment performance in the financial year 1991–92, 1992–93 and 1993–94. Information for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Provisional figures for the current financial year indicate a further improvement whereby 93 per cent. of payments were made on or before the due date. This is normally 30 days from receipt of goods/services or receipt of invoice, whichever is the later.

A formal statement of payment performance for 1994–95, giving final figures, will be included in my Department's annual report to be published in March.

Public Bodies

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what advice he issues to the chairpersons and members of quangos, trusts, agencies and other bodies appointed by him as to the need for political independence in the public execution of their duties; what advice he issues to the chief executives of such bodies relating to political independence and the need to ensure rectitude in the exercise of their functions; when this advice was last given to the chairman, board members and chief executive of Scottish Homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: There are long-standing rules on participation in political activities which members of public bodies are expected to observe and which are drawn to their attention on appointment. Additionally, a code of best practice for board members of public bodies was issued to executive non-departmental public bodies in Scotland, including Scottish Homes, in September 1994. Separate codes of conduct and accountability were issued to NHS bodies in Scotland, including NHS trusts, in April 1994. Nationalised industries and certain non-governmental trading bodies will normally apply the Cadbury code.

I do not issue specific advice to chief executives of non-departmental public bodies, most of whom are not appointed by me but by the board of the body concerned. However, those chief executives—including the chief executive of Scottish Homes—who are appointed accounting officers for their NDPBs receive a formal letter of designation from the departmental accounting officer setting out the responsibilities of an NDPB accounting officer. In some cases the contract of employment of a chief executive may cover political activities and the management statement of the body will cover the conduct of staff generally.

These arrangements do not apply to next steps agencies which operate within a different framework of accountability and control. Agency chief executives are

civil servants whose conduct is covered by the civil service pay and conditions code.

Local Government Finance

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how the additional borrowing consent allocated by him to *(a)* Renfrew district council and *(b)* Strathclyde regional council following the floods of December 1994 impact on their budgets for 1994–95; how will consent for general services borrowing impact on future years' revenue expenditure on loan debt charges; how additional housing borrowing consent for Renfrew district council will impact on future years' housing revenue account expenditure on loan debt charges; how the additional loan charges will be taken into account in allocations of aggregate external finance to each authority in future years; how this formula is likely to impact on (i) the council tax and (ii) the annual rent levels of chargepayers and tenants; how it will impact on successor unitary authorities; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will define the concept of top-slicing as it is applied to the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue budgets of Scottish local authorities, in relation to the general services, specific services and housing services grants awarded to regional and district councils; how this concept will apply to the proposed unitary authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kynoch: Any additional borrowing required to fund the extra flood-related housing capital expenditure by Renfrew district council approved by my right hon. Friend will result in loan charges which will require to be met from income generated through the housing revenue account, primarily from rents. The precise impact will depend on the decisions taken by Renfrew district council in managing its housing debt which at 1 April 1994 totalled some £134.4 million. In accordance with the formula agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, expenditure on loan charges arising from housing investment is taken into account as relevant expenditure when determining the amount and distribution of housing support grant. However, given that Renfrew district council's debt per house is well below the Scottish average and that the council has generated a healthy surplus on its housing revenue account in each of the last four years while holding rents below the Scottish average, it is unlikely that the council or its successor authority will qualify for housing support grant.

The impact of any additional borrowing to fund the extra flood related non-housing capital expenditure by Strathclyde regional council approved by my right hon. Friend will in the period up to 31 March 1996 be a matter for the council itself to determine. From 1 April 1996, the loan charges arising from any additional borrowing by the regional council will be taken into account in calculating the loan and leasing charges of its successor councils which are supported by aggregate external finance. The provision to support loan charges on borrowing to fund non-housing capital expenditure is effectively top-sliced from the AEF total.

Partnership Areas

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will consider the Glenburn area of Paisley, or any part of it, as a priority partnership area under his progress in partnership policy; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will consider *(a)* the Johnstone/Elderslie area, *(b)* the Foxbar area of Paisley, *(c)* the south end of Paisley or *(d)* the Hunterhill/Lochfield Dykebar area of Paisley, or any part of those areas, as a priority partnership area under his progress in partnership policy; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Following the publication on 26 January 1995 of the Scottish urban regeneration policy statement, "Programme for Partnership", the Scottish Office plans further consultation on the implementation of the new proposals. A consultation paper on implementation arrangements will be circulated shortly to the bodies concerned and this will set out proposals on the way in which priority partnership areas will be selected. There will be a key role for local authorities and their regeneration partners in this process. As the consultation paper will focus on processes rather than the identification of areas, it is too early to say which areas will be designated as priority partnership areas. It is likely that the first such areas will be designated later this year.

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider the *(a)* existing Renfrew district and/or *(b)* proposed Renfrewshire unitary authority for a city/district-wide initiative under his programme for partnership policy; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Following the publication on 26 January 1995, of the Scottish urban regeneration policy statement, "Programme for Partnership", The Scottish Office plans further consultation on the implementation of the new proposals. A consultation paper on implementation arrangements will be circulated shortly to the key bodies concerned and this will set out proposals on those areas which might be served by the city/district—wide partnerships proposed in the policy statement. Decisions on the areas in which the Scottish Office will encourage the formation of such partnerships will be taken in the light of the responses to this consultation paper and so it is too early to say where these will be. It is, however, open in any event to local authorities and other bodies to establish partnerships of this kind on their own initiative.

Burns Bicentenary

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans his Department has to commemorate the bicentenary of the death of Robert Burns in 1996; how he intends to involve Burns clubs throughout the world in marking the year, and if he will make a statement.

Sir Hector Monro: My right hon. Friend has already campaigned successfully with others for the issue by the Royal Mail of a set of Burns commemorative postage stamps, and a number of bodies sponsored by the Scottish Office, such as the National library, museums and gallery and the Scottish tourist board, will play prominent roles in the staging and promotion of commemorative events in Scotland.

A registered charity, Burns Festival Ltd. has been set up to co-ordinate a year-long Burns international festival focused on the south-west of Scotland and a comprehensive programme of activities is in the final stages of preparation. The world-wide network of Burns

clubs will make their own arrangements for marking their special anniversary, as will groups such as the Burns Federation, which among other events is planning a week of celebrations in Dumfries in July 1996.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if Highlands and Islands Enterprise operates discretionary training budgets in addition to its youth training and training for work programmes;

(2) what has been the level of spending by Highlands and Islands Enterprise on discretionary training outwith its youth training and training for work programmes in 1992–93, 1993–94 and 1994–95 to date.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 March 1995]:* Apart from youth training and training for work, Highlands and Islands Enterprise operates a number of training schemes in pursuance of its obligation under the Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Act 1990 to assist persons to enhance skills which are relevant to employment in the Highlands and Islands.

Outturn expenditure by Highlands and Islands Enterprise on training-related programmes other than youth training, training for work and its predecessor employment training, in each year since 1992–93 is set out in the table:

£ million

Programme	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95 (to end January 1995)*
Enterprise training	0.833	2.095	1.118
Training and Education support	0.116	0.166	0.082
Business advisory services and skills training	5.130	6.113	3.736
Total	6.079	8.374	4.936

EDUCATION

Nursery Education

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education (1) what letters she sent to selected hon. Members concerning the priority to be accorded to the Government's policy of expanding nursery education; what was the purpose of these letters; and what assessments she has made of the consequences from any request made therein;

(2) what advice she has sent by letter to members of local education authorities concerning their priorities in educational expenditure for the year 1995–96; and what priority Her Majesty's Government now give to the expansion of nursery education.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend has not written to hon. Members or to local education authorities about the Government's policies for nursery education. She has however, written to her hon. Friends about local authority spending priorities in 1995–96. The letter invited Members to examine the priorities set by individual LEAs, in particular those which complain of pressures on budgets for the compulsory period of education. This must be their first priority, though in general there is no reason why councils should be cutting discretionary nursery education. The Government remain committed to providing, over time, a pre-school place for all four-year-olds whose parents wish to take it up, making a start within the lifetime of this Parliament.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list those proposals for nursery classes in maintained or grant-maintained schools of which her Department has been informed since September 1991, showing in each case *(a)* whether they are for determination by her and *(b)* whether the proposals have been determined, approved and funded by her Department or implemented.

Mr. Forth: I will write to the hon. Member.

Sir Irvine Patnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list for the core cities of Birmingham, Liverpool, Newcastle, Sheffield, Manchester and Leeds the percentage of under-fives in maintained nursery and primary schools; if she will list the equivalent figure for 1978; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: Information on pupils under five being taught in maintained nursery schools and primary schools in Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Sheffield local education authority areas is shown in the table.

Percentage of children under 5[1] in maintained nursery and primary schools in 1978 and 1994.

Local education authority	*Position in January each year*	
	1978	*1994*
Birmingham	38	66
Leeds	20	75
Liverpool	33	87
Manchester	37	73
Newcastle	61	72
Sheffield	26	63

[1] Numbers of pupils under five years of age expressed as a percentage of the estimated population aged three and four at 31 December in the previous year.

Croxteth Country Park Estate

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education when she expects to make a decision on the proposal to provide a Christian primary school on the Croxteth country park estate in Liverpool; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Robin Squire: My right hon. Friend hopes to make a decision on these proposals shortly.

Liverpool Community College

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what representations she has received about the future of Liverpool Community college; if she will institute an inquiry in to its management; and if she will make a statement.

Mr. Boswell: Ministers have received six letters from three hon. Members this year about the future of Liverpool Community college. The hon. Member's letters covered representations from 21 students and/or college staff. In addition three letters from two other hon. Members and six letters from members of the public have been received about the proposed closure of the college's

higher national diploma course in theatre wardrobe. The Secretary of State sees no need for an inquiry into the management of the college.

Difficult Children

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how long on average is taken to produce special educational assessments for children who are disruptive at school; and what plans she has to accelerate the process.

Mr. Forth: Since September 1994 local education authorities have been required to complete special educational assessments within 10 weeks of giving notice to a child's parents of their decision to carry out an assessment. The Government have no present plans to change this requirement.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will provide training and funds for schools to deal with children considered to be difficult; and what assessment she has made of the extent to which doing so would offset costs faced by other departments looking after these children.

Mr. Forth: Under the truancy and disaffected pupils programme of the grants for education support and training scheme, the Department is already making funds available both for the in-service training of teachers, and to establish and train LEA teams to support schools in their management of difficult and disruptive pupils. In 1994–95 the programme is supporting expenditure of £14 million on more than 80 locally devised projects in LEAs in England; in 1995–96 expenditure of £15.6 million on 90 projects will be supported.

The programme is being independently evaluated, and the lessons to be learnt will be made available to LEAs, schools and other interested parties.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to liaise with her ministerial and local authority colleagues, to ensure a tighter framework to help troubled children; and what plans she has to use this framework to support the families of these children.

Mr. Forth: Regular contact is maintained with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Joint guidance by my Department and the Department of Health on the education of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties was issued in May last year as part of the "Pupils with Problems" pack.

The guidance highlighted the need for collaborative working between education, health and social services and the crucial need for establishing a partnership between parents and the schools.

A copy of the pack is in the Library.

School Funding

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education on what date in each year since 1988 announcements were made for the subsequent financial year on *(a)* the level of each special purpose grant, *(b)* the determination of capital bids, *(c)* the invitation to submit capital bids, *(d)* the level of formula capital allocation, *(e)* the local management of schools add-on figure appropriate for each local education authority and *(f)* any other annual announcements relating to grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Robin Squire: This is now a matter for the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the chairman of the Funding Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Swimming

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what plans she has to monitor the implementation of school swimming in respect of the national curriculum requirements relating to key stage 2.

Mr. Forth: The regular cycle of four yearly Ofsted inspections will look, among other things, at each school's effectiveness in implementing the national curriculum, including the national curriculum for physical education, of which swimming is a part.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education who is directly responsible for ensuring that schools meet the basic requirements of the national curriculum in respect of swimming.

Mr. Forth: Head teachers are directly responsible for implementing the national curriculum in schools. This includes the requirements related to swimming.

Education Assets Board

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many cases the Education Assets Board has dealt with since its inception; and if she will give in each case the two sides, indicating (i) the complainant, (ii) the disputed land and its value and (iii) the decision made and the successful side.

Mr. Robin Squire: I regret that the information is not available in the form requested. Since it began work in 1988, the Education Assets Board has completed the transfer of property, rights and liabilities from local authorities to 65 higher education corporations, 163 further education corporations and 489 grant maintained schools. The board is currently considering such transfers at 13 higher education corporations, 317 further education corporations and 568 grant-maintained schools.

Career Breaks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women applied for career breaks in her Department and its agencies; and how many have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Mr. Boswell: The Department has no comprehensive record of the numbers of staff who have applied for career breaks in the last five years. The numbers of career breaks granted have been:

	Men	*Women*	*Total*
1990–1991	4	17	21
1991–1992	6	17	23
1992–1993	8	34	42
1993–1994	5	39	44
1994–1995	11	41	52

Nine staff have had their employment terminated in the last five years.

Child Care Costs

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will list the number of *(a)* applications, and *(b)* successful claims for (i) family credit and (ii) each of the other income-related benefits for each month since October 1994 in respect of parents claiming up to £40 child care cost which can be offset against earnings when claiming family credit and other income related benefits; if she will detail by each £10 the size of the child care costs offset; and if these data could be divided between two and one parent families.

Mr. Roger Evans *[holding answer 23 February 1995]:* I have been asked to reply.

Available information on family credit for the four-month period to 31 January 1995, the latest date for which figures are available, is set out in the tables. It does not include claims made by 31 January but decided after that date. Figures for individual months are not reliable at this level of disaggregation. Information is not available for disability working allowance, housing benefit or council tax benefit.

Family credit: Help with child care charges: number of families

	Lone parents	Couples	Total
Families receiving higher family credit awards as a result of the help with childcare charges	10,200	300	10,500
Families not eligible because they did not satisfy the qualifying conditions	[1]—	[1]—	6,780
Families not receiving help with childcare charges because they were already receiving the maximum family credit[1]	[1]—	[1]—	2,380

[1]*Notes:*
These families may receive help through housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Family credit: amount of child care charges offset against earnings

Amount of child care charges offset	Number of families[1]
Up to £10	1,620
£10.01—£20.00	1,820
£20.10—£30.00	2,000
£30.01—£40.00	5,060[2]
All cases	10,500

Notes:
[1] Information broken down by lone parents and couples is not reliable at this level of desegregation.
[2] Includes 3,300 families where child care charges were in excess of the £40 maximum offset.
Source:
Five per cent. sample of family credit awards made between 1 October 1994 and 31 January 1995.

It will take some time before the new help with child care charges takes full effect as existing family credit recipients can claim only the child care help when their current 26-week award expires, while many potential beneficiaries need to find work of 16 hours or more and to make appropriate child care arrangements.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

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Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instruments etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker's rulings and statements'.

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Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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